#### **New South Wales Police**

STATEMENT in the matter of:

Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Investigation

Place:

Tasmania Police

Marine & Rescue Services,

Hobart.

**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> November 1999

Name:

Rodney James STACEY

Address:

Police Marine and Rescue Services.

Tel. No.: (03) 62302477

Hobart

Occupation: Police Officer

#### STATES:-

- 1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence which I would be prepared, if necessary, to give in court as a witness. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable for prosecution if I wilfully state in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.
- 2. I am 29 years of age.
- 3. My full name is Rodney James STACEY and I am a Constable in the Tasmania Police Service, currently attached to Police Marine and Rescue Services Division, Hobart.
- 4. On Sunday 19th September 1999, in the company of Constable P. ALLAN, Constable J. PRATT, Constable D. BIDGOOD, Constable G. PEARCE, and Constable L. STANLEY, I attended the Australian Maritime College at Newnham, Launceston, Tasmania. Our duties were to assist Detective Senior Constable S. GRAY and Senior Constable D. UPSTON, both of the New South Wales Police Service, with their enquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race coronial investigation. These duties included acting as safety divers and assisting with, and taking part in, trialing exercises of various life rafts, safety harnesses, safety lines and lanyards that may be used by yachting crew members.

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- 5. The first exercise consisted of fifteen persons, all whom had earlier received training in the use of life rafts, participating in several life raft drills. Each person was required to swim fifty metres of the pool, whilst wearing full wet weather gear and a life jacket, and then climb aboard a ten man life raft. Once aboard the life raft, each participant was given the scenario of being in charge of a 'man overboard' situation, with a male person floating unconscious approximately ten metres away from the life raft, requiring assistance. Inside the life raft, to give some assistance, was a second role player, simulating an exhausted survivor, untrained in the use of life rafts and marine rescue. During the exercise Constable PRATT, Constable PEARCE and I played alternating roles of both the unconscious person and life raft survivor. As survivor, assistance was only given upon request and limited to the role of an exhausted and untrained person.
- 6. Inside the life raft was a 'throw line' which could be used to assist in the recovery of the unconscious person. Most, but certainly not all, persons used the throw line to assist in their recoveries. Some tried to swim the victim back without it, whilst others sent the exhausted survivor to retrieve the victim. Once getting the victim to the life raft, several methods were adopted by each of the fifteen trained persons to get him inside. Most stayed in the water and pushed the victim, proving effective and safe entry into the life raft for the victim, an extremely difficult exercise at times.
- 7. Once successfully completing this task, each trained person was then required to individually enter a six man life raft and secure its entry, as they would in a real life situation. With the trained individual inside, and light inside the pool darkened, the life raft was then inverted, and the individual tasked to exit the raft. Upon exiting, the individual was then tasked to right the six man life raft.
- 8. After successfully completing this task, the individual was required to swim to an upturned ten metre life raft located nearby and right it. Whilst most of the fifteen trained persons attempted to right the life raft correctly, some found completing this task difficult due to the raft's size.
- 9. The fifteen trained individuals were then required to swim to a helicopter sling, hanging just above the water surface, and after placing the sling on themself, give the appropriate signal to be winched from the water. Most persons, whilst attempting to correctly secure themself to the sling, did have difficulty in placing the sling over their heads, due to the bulky nature of the life jackets they were wearing.

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- 10. The second exercise took place in the afternoon of Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> September 1999 whereby all facets of the first exercise were repeated, only in this case with fifteen untrained persons carrying out each task. Again I played alternating roles of exhausted person and unconscious victim.
- 11. During this exercise, many of the untrained persons found entering the ten man life raft difficult, incorrectly using the aids on the raft. The untrained participants also generally showed more uncertainty in their decision making, with individuals, in most cases, requiring more time to assess the situation and make use of available resources. Very few individuals made use of the throw line or effective use of the exhausted person available to assist with the rescue. In some cases, either the individual themselves, or the exhausted person, was requested to swim to the victim without the throw line or any other attachment to the life raft. Some of the untrained persons also attempted their recoveries by paddling the life raft to the victim using paddles in the life raft, or in some cases, just their hands.
- 12. Almost all fifteen untrained persons found getting the victim into the life raft an extremely difficult, and for some, impossible task. Most stayed in the water and pushed the victim, again in many cases, using strength rather than technique to complete their aim. Whilst role playing the unconscious victim, I had to move position several times to avoid risk of neck or back injury, injuries that may have resulted in several of the retrievals had they been real-life situations.
- 13. Many untrained persons also had difficulties in safely completing the task of exiting the inverted six man life raft. Many individuals became entangled in the cords used to secure the entrance and required assistance from safety divers nearby. Those that exited head first, in particular, may well have drowned without such assistance.
- 14. During the righting of both life rafts, several persons in the untrained group used incorrect technique and therefore found these tasks extremely difficult and exhausting. Several persons in this group also risked serious injury to themselves by incorrectly righting the ten man life raft with the inflation bottle on the opposite side to them -resulting in the bottle falling toward them as the raft was righted.
- 15. Further difficulties were encountered by most untrained persons when placing on the helicopter sling in the incorrect manner. Several individuals in this group would have suffered serious injury had the winch operation been continued further.

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- 16.On Monday 20<sup>th</sup> September 1999, an exercise was carried out testing levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in an inverted six man life raft. Constable PRATT, Constable ALLAN, Constable STANLEY, Mr. T. BOYLE and myself entered the inverted life raft, with Constable BIDGOOD and Constable PEARCE acting as safety divers. By using a sensor meter, carbon dioxide levels inside the life raft were measured and in less than four minutes the sensor indicated a dangerous level of carbon dioxide, forcing all persons inside to exit immediately. The same test was repeated three more times with the sensor again, indicating dangerous levels of carbon dioxide within approximately four minutes upon entering the life raft.
- 17. The next exercise to follow, again on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1999, involved inverting one round and one square, six man life raft. Each test began with one person being inside the life raft as it was inverted, with this number increasing by one until five people were in the raft during an inversion. As one of the persons inside each raft during each inversion, I found the experience more difficult as more persons were added, particularly in the case of four or five persons. Despite having the benefit of being prepared for each inversion, when more than three persons were inside it became extremely uncomfortable and disorientating, with bodies becoming entangled during the inversion causing a real risk of injury occurring. Upon being righted, it was not uncommon for 40cm of water to cover the floor of the life raft and for a person's head to be pinned down beneath the water for a period of time. It was also evident that when there were three persons in the life raft, it was actually more difficult to right than with four or five inside. This may have been due to the extra persons preventing the life raft twisting out of shape.
- 18. Following this exercise, Constable D. BIDGOOD and myself began the testing of release mechanisms for various safety harnesses and lines. During these tests I was wearing full wet weather clothing. The degree of difficulty in using the equipment for each test was given a rating from zero to five, zero being "impossible to achieve" with five being "easy to achieve".
- 19. The first equipment tested was a Stormy Seas lanyard no. 1739 (0126) AS2227, and Stormy Seas Harness Yoke. The PFD I was wearing was a Stormy Seas Yoke 0100. To conduct the test, I free dived to approximately two metres and clipped onto a static line anchored to the bottom of the pool. The first task involved inflating the PFD to create strain on the line and lanyard connection. The self release of the lanyard at the chest connection was completed one handed, after using my other hand to pull the line and provide slack. I rated the level of difficulty as an easy to achieve 'four'.

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- 20. The next task was self-release from a block connection at the bottom of the pool, some 4.2 metres deep. This was given a 'three' rating, self-releasing the lanyard using the same method previously.
- 21. The next tasks conducted were several drag tests whilst wearing the same equipment, and involved being dragged the length of the pool whilst I attempted to disconnect from the line. The first test was self release of the lanyard with an uninflated PFD, and was rated at 'one' for difficulty, taking ten seconds and 20.5 metres to release. Despite being of simple design, under drag force conditions the difficulty in self-release increased dramatically, relying on strength to provide slack on the lanyard connection. The second drag test was whilst wearing a normal 'coastal' PFD, and was rated at 'one' for difficulty of self-release, released after ten seconds and 23.5 metres. The Stormy Seas PFD Yoke 0100, used was given 'two to three' for rating its degree of difficulty in activating its inflation and, a rating of 'five' for degree of comfort.
- 22. The next test was again conducted wearing a Stormy Seas PFD Yoke 0100, with a Burke B3 harness (circle ring) and a Burke lanyard model BL-8 (spring loaded). The self-release from the chest connection was rated at 'five', again, easily released one-handed once slack on the line was achieved by the other hand. The self-release test of the lanyard at the block connection was also rated as 'five'.
- 23. The first drag test for this equipment, conducted the following morning on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> September 1999, with the PFD uninflated, was rated as 'four', taking five seconds to release over a distance of nine metres. The second drag test, this time wearing a 'coastal' PFD and being dragged sideways off the pool's edge, rated 'two', taking eleven seconds and twenty three metres to self-release. Again, whilst the operation of this lanyard was of simple design, under reasonable strain, self-release proved difficult and potentially dangerous.
- 24.On the afternoon of Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> September 1999, I took part in sea trials using both the square and round six man life rafts. These tests were conducted from the police vessel 'Van Diemen', in Bass Strait outside the entrance to the Tamar River near Low Head. During these exercises, I was wearing a full wet suit, wet weather overalls and jacket, as well as a 'coastal' buoyancy vest.
- 25. The first test involved five persons, including myself, boarding the square life raft. I found this task moderately difficult however for a cold, fatigued, and possibly untrained person, the task would be substantially more difficult, particularly in rougher sea conditions.

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- 26. The next task was to enter and exit the life raft whilst being inverted. The door on this life raft was a long sleeve with thin cord attached, used to gather up and close the sleeve's opening. Again, I found entering the life raft only moderately difficult however on occasions, during exit, the cords did catch on my buoyancy vest. This potential problem was overcome by other members in the group gathering up and holding the sleeve and cords during entry and exit. I filmed this procedure using a waterproof cased video camera.
- 27. The following task involved righting the inverted life raft, starting with one person inside and then adding a person until five were in the raft during inversion. As with previous tests, when only one or two persons were inside the raft, the inversion did not cause any great discomfort or risk of safety. However with three or more persons inside the raft, conditions during inversion did prove uncontrollable with little or no ability for occupants to stay in position or maintain orientation. This was highlighted after one inversion where the legs of occupants inside, including myself, became entangled, requiring the assistance of a safety diver. Inversions also inevitably resulted in one or more occupants being pinned under the water on the floor of the raft for various lengths of time. Again, I video recorded several inversions, highlighting the potential serious dangers and the confinement of three or more persons inside a life raft during inversion, particularly if fatigued or injured.
- 28. The life raft was then again inverted after which, myself and four others entered. A cut, simulating the length cut by crew of the vessel 'Winston Churchill', was cut into the floor of the life raft. Again the raft was righted and pressure placed on its floor until it began to tear. Initially the floor ripped evenly along the cut, from one side to the other until, after very little time, it almost entirely separated from the life raft tubing. The life raft was then inverted onto its roof and stood on for a short time, before also separating from the raft tubing completely.
- 29.A round six-man life raft was then place into the water and the same tests conducted as the square raft. Entering and exiting the life raft was again, only moderately difficult, made easier than the square raft by a larger door-way opening, with large flaps and seemingly less cords obstructing the door-way. Again, inversion tests with one or two persons inside proved easy to maintain position and relatively comfortable. As was the case with the square life raft however, inversions with three or more persons inside proved extremely uncomfortable and at times, dangerous, with heads being pinned under water on the life raft floor.

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- 30. The wider door on the round life raft also made it difficult for persons near the door-way not to fall out during inversion, obviously not a concern when the door had been securely closed.
- 31. The round life raft was then inverted and a cut made in its floor. After righting the raft, the floor was stood on until it ripped apart. I observed it took more time and effort to make the floor tear from the initial cut however once it began to tear, the floor eventually ripped completely away from the round tubing. The life raft's roof was then stood on until it too ripped completely away from the tubing. This took longer to occur than with the square life raft's roofing.
- 32. The final test conducted with each life raft, of which I video recorded, was to simulate the use of each raft's tubing in rougher sea conditions. The 'Van Diemen' was used to create waves of approximately 1 to 11/2 metres in height and effectively highlighted the difficulties in sitting or even hanging on to, each raft when in this state. The tubing from both life rafts proved slippery and with little grip, hanging on to and balancing on the rafts was near impossible, particularly when being hit by the Van Diemen's wake. The square raft proved extremely difficult to sit or hang on to as without its floor or roof, the raft was unable to hold its shape. This exercise strongly reinforced for me, the extreme difficulties that may be endured by a survivor who may be injured, fatigued and/or under stress, possibly in far worse sea conditions.
- 33.I was also present with Constable BIDGOOD when he performed three towed harness tests behind the Van Diemen, later in the afternoon of 21st September 1999.

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