

DETECTIVE SERGEANT GRAY

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Sergeant Stuart Gray and Mr Bob Brenac, at Sydney Water Police Station, Pyrmont, on Friday, the 16th of June, 2000. Also present seated to my right is Senior Constable David Upston from New South Wales Water Police. The time by my watch is 8.15pm. Just for the record, Bob, could you please state your full name?

A Robert William Brenac.

Q2 Your date of birth?

A 13th of January, 1941.

Q3 Your current address?

A Number 4 Cottenham Avenue, Kensington.

Q4 And your occupation?

A Self-employed, yacht race administrator.

Q5 O.K. As I previously explained to you before the interview, Senior Constable Upston and myself are making inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, and you agree that we spoke to you some time ago in relation to VI.

A Correct.

Q6 I believe it was, which was in 1998 known as the Naiad?

A Correct.

Q7 O.K, the reason we wish to speak to you today is about your experience as a sailing administrator and also being involved in previous Sydney to Hobarts in

the area of administration, do you understand that?

A Yes.

Q8 Could you please start by just giving me your sailing experience?

A Yes, well, I competed in 14 Sydney Hobart races, I've worked at the CYC as a volunteer for many years, between 1970 and 1988, and then in 1988 I was employed there full-time as the sailing secretary, which is pretty much similar, the same job as they now title it sailing manager.

Q9 Yeah.

A In charge of the sailing office and the whole programme for the CYC. I've also been, after I left there, eight years later I was director of the club for two years on the board, plus I've known all, a lot of commercial yacht deliveries overseas, probably a couple of hundred thousand miles all told, and you know, sailing off-shore mostly in racing boats.

Q10 O.K. Can you take me back to your position at the CYCA when you were part of a race committee, is that correct?

A Correct, yes.

Q11 Can you just tell me your experiences in relation to that, who was on that committee and what was your role?

A Because I was the one full-time employed staff in that committee, the, when I started there in 1988, I think the year before, maybe two years before,

because there had been some legal problem it was decided that the race committee, the race committee for the CYC, or the sailing committee, would employ a professional race director, and there were actually two people employed at the time, there was Greg Halls and Mike Fletcher, so that, that structure was already in place when I started there. My job was pretty much the day to day administration of the sailing office which, for the Sydney Hobart race, accept the entries, prepare the notes of race, sailing instructions, liaise with all the various officials, water police and NSB, as it was then, and just do mainly the paperwork. And the planning.

Q12 O.K.

A Did that, in conjunction with Greg Halls as the race director, and Mike Fletcher who would come in and oversee the whole operation.

Q13 Right. Now, you said just a minute ago there was some sort of legal problem and a, a permanently employed race director was put into place, what was that about?

A Well, it was one of the, it was the race director who was then it was, somebody got accused of cheating or something.

Q14 O.K.

A Wasn't a technical problem, it was -

Q15 Right.

A An administrative problem that they felt it was, I

think that the reason they brought in a professional race director was they felt it was unfair for a volunteer, as the term was, to put up with that sort of pressure.

Q16 Right, O.K. Now, when you were a group, like, a racing committee group back in those days, can you take me through the procedures that you adopted as a threesome, was there was only three of you involved?

A Only, yeah, well, I was employed by the CYC.

Q17 M'mm.

A The other, Mike Fletcher and Greg Halls were contracted by the CYC.

Q18 Right.

A And the sailing committee of the CYC still looked after the whole, you know, over the, what was going on.

Q19 Right. So, your committee consisted of -?

A The race committee consisted of Greg Halls as race director.

Q20 Yeah.

A Mike Fletcher as the assistant race director and myself as the employed staff member and normally two people off the sailing, CYC Sailing Committee.

Q21 Right.

A And two or three from the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania Sailing Committee.

Q22 O.K. So that formed the race committee?

A That formed the race committee for the Sydney/Hobart

race.

Q23 Right, O.K. Now, what procedures did you adopt so far as, well, actually, if you could take me from how you organised the race as a group.

A As a group. Well, I would normally get, the start, of course, is right back at the beginning of the year when you issue a notice of race. And I would draw that up and put it together and it would go to the sailing committee and they would discuss, you know, various paragraphs in it, and they'd say, no, that's not what we want. Do this, do that, what have you, and I'd re-draft it. Once that was done, that was well before Greg Halls and Mike Fletcher came into the act, this is, what, back in February/March.

Q24 Right.

A That would then be mailed to all prospective entrants.

Q25 Yeah.

A And, with an application for entry. At the same time, the sailing committee would nominate three, a vetting committee to oversee the applications as they came in and make sure they complied with the eligibility.

Q26 So, they were separate to the race committee?

A Separate to the race committee, yes.

Q27 Right. They worked independently?

A Worked independently.

Q28 Right.

A Normally three people from the CYC Sailing Committee. I would then get the entries, applications for entry in, list them -

Q29 Which in those days consisted of what?

A Similar thing, form, application for entry and to make sure that all, that the boats that were applying for an entry form complied with the conditions of entry.

Q30 Right.

A Eligibility in other words.

Q31 And that was spelt out in the sailing instructions?

A That was spelt out in the notice of race.

Q32 Notice of race.

A Yes, yes. And then the vetting committee would look at each one, I would usually make notes on the applications but the, each individual from the vetting committee would come into the sailing office in their own time, sometimes weekends or on their way home from work, and have a look at the, the application for entry and they would either approve it or say this boat doesn't comply without having this done, or there was insufficient crew experience, and there were three letters, three standard letters that we'd send out, one was sent to the applicant with an entry form and a letter saying your entry is accepted, and there were very few of those because, you know, a lot of boats, you knew, were going to change their certificates anyway, they tend to do

that. The second letter was, here's an entry form, and the entry form was posted back to them, it will be accepted subject to certain conditions, like, they hadn't filled in, hadn't filled in their crew experience thing properly, or, or they, or they hadn't sent a rating certificate or safety certificate and the letter would say, you know, your entry will be accepted subject to meeting these conditions. The third one was sent to them without any entry form saying, you know, your application is incomplete because of, rah, rah, rah, and you know, they just wouldn't even get, until you send the correct information, you won't even get an entry form.

Q33 O.K, so, this would happen about what month, approximately?

A Well, they're notoriously slow putting in - - -

Q34 Yeah.

A - - - putting in applications, applications always close the 31st of October.

Q35 Right.

A And you get 75 per cent of the applications in the last week of October.

Q36 O.K. These applications, were they mailed directly to the sailing office?

A Yes. Yes.

Q37 So, if they - - -

A Always came back to the sailing office.

Q38 Sailing office?

A Yes.

Q39 Now, is that, was that mail in those days distributed from the main part of the CYCA or did the mail go directly to the sailing office?

A Went directly to the sailing office.

Q40 O.K, and the procedure, what procedure would you adopt after the application forms come in?

A Well - - -

Q41 Would they be placed into baskets or folders?

A They'd be placed in files, in a file.

Q42 Yeah.

A Alphabetical file with each boat name, when they were placed in the file, they were, they were also added to a spread, two spreadsheets, one spreadsheet for the sailing office which would have all, you know, get the ticks on it for when they complied with different things, putting in their documentation, et cetera, and when they paid their money. The other one, before that even went up, had to go to the vetting committee first because they wouldn't get an entry form until the vetting committee had looked at it. And the vetting committee had to actually put a signature on that form to say that they can, they had looked at it.

Q43 One signature or all members of the committee?

A All members, three signatures.

Q44 On, on the acceptance form?

A On each boat.

Q45 On each boat?

A Yeah, three signatures before a boat was, before they were even acknowledged that they'd sent an entry, an application in.

Q46 O.K. So, is it the case, then, that if an application form came in through you at the sailing office, that would be sent to the vetting committee?

A Correct.

Q47 They would have a look through?

A Well, it was put in the file.

Q48 Yeah, put in the file.

A And the vetting committee would come in individually.

Q49 Yes.

A At different times, look at the file, see which ones had their signature on, that they'd already looked at, and then go through the others.

Q50 So - - -

A 'Cause there'd be new ones every day.

Q51 It could be the case that one of the members might come in on a Monday?

A M'mm.

Q52 Sign it.

A Yeah.

Q53 Next Wednesday, another members comes in.

A Yes.

Q54 He looked at it.

A Yeah.

Q55 Then he signed it.

A Yeah.

Q56 Which gave two signatures?

A Yeah.

Q57 And it may be a week later?

A Not a week, I mean, I - - -

Q58 Or a couple of days later?

A - - - used to chase them all the time.

Q59 O.K.

A They were a bit slow to get in there sometimes and that held, that held other things up. I mean, I couldn't - - -

Q60 All right.

A - - - couldn't send the entry form to them until - - -

Q61 Yeah.

A - - - the vetting committee had actually signed each one.

Q62 But not necessarily all three signatures would go on the sheet at the same time?

A No, no, no.

Q63 That's what I'm saying.

A Very rarely.

Q64 O.K. Now, if the vetting committee found the, a particular problem, say, for example, a, a ratings certificate, stability certificate?

A Out of date or something, yeah.

Q65 Out of date,

A Which was often the case.

Q66 Would they send that back to you?

A Yes, they wouldn't sign it, they wouldn't sign the thing to say it's accepted.

Q67 O.K, so, they'd send it to you, and what would you do?

A I would then send that person who sent the application in, depending on whether we knew the boat or not, and expect it to comply later on, then they would get that specific letter saying your application is accepted subject to providing a current valid certificate.

Q68 O.K. When that returned, what was the procedure then

- - -

A When that returned?

Q68 - - - when it returned to the sailing office?

A Then the vetting committee would sign it, they would then put their signature to it.

Q69 All right. Now, is it the case, back in 1994 we're talking about or around that?

A 1994, yeah, yeah.

Q70 Is it the case that if three signatures didn't appear on the form.

A Mm.

Q71 Then that boat wasn't ready to race according to the club?

A Yes, that's correct.

Q72 Who, whose responsibility was it, prior to the race,

to ensure that those three signatures existed on the entry form?

A Mine.

Q73 O.K. So, you would manually check every entry to ensure that those three signatures of the vetting committee existed on that application form?

A Correct.

Q74 And then you reported that to - - -

A Sailing committee meetings.

Q75 Sailing committee meetings.

A Which then, in December, became race committee meetings.

Q76 Right.

A But there was still responsibility to the CYC, so, most of that, the eligibility part of it went back to the sailing committee.

Q77 Right.

A And you know, they would ask me how many boats have entered, how many have been approved, how many were still out, have outstanding paperwork, et cetera, and I'd just give them a report.

Q78 O.K. Now, whose responsibility was it to tick the columns which related to each boat and the requirements of those columns, in those columns?

A Once the entry had been accepted and we went onto the other spreadsheet, the safeties, safety certificate, safety compliance certificates were done by the chief safety officer.

Q79 So, he would tick?

A He would actually tick those, yes.

Q80 O.K, so, each, basically each - - -

A Yes.

Q80 - - - area would tick their own box?

A Yes, yes. But I, you know, as the employed staff, I would do the ticking when the certificates came in.

Q81 Right.

A Et cetera, because as I said, you know, certificates would be updated, normally when they first applied, they were usually certificate anyway.

But once the new one, they wouldn't get a tick on there until there was a current valid certificate.

Q82 Yes. Now, who sat on that vetting committee in '94, do you recall?

A In '94, I know it was, Hugo was on it and I think it may have been David Kellert who had been a past commodore and experienced yachtsman, and I was the third one.

Q83 You were the third one?

A Yeah, yeah.

Q84 O.K. Can you, or do you have any - - -

A There may have been another, there may have been a third person apart from myself, I'm not sure, I can't remember.

Q85 That's fine. Are you aware of what procedure they adopted in 1998 in relation to a vetting committee?

A Well, I'd be only guessing but I thought it was the

same.

Q86 Three?

A Three, yeah.

Q87 Yeah.

A Yeah. Yeah, well, they were very strict on it when I was there certainly.

Q88 Mm.

A Very strict on it.

Q89 If I was to inform you that the Naiad certificate did, in fact, appear at the club in some, some form, and was actually filed at the sailing office in the file referred to as 'certificates'.

A Yes.

Q90 Would you sort of be able to give me some insight as to, or some ideas as to how that certificate would have got through the system?

A I would, it would be virtually impossible to get through the system when I was there because three people had to individually look at it. In fact, there was, in fact there was a column on the vetting, vetting people's spreadsheet that you had to actually fill in the number of the limit of positive stability, or stability index.

Q91 Not just a tick?

A Not just a tick, no, you had to fill in the number.

Q92 Mm. And back in '94, was it the situation of grandfathering at 110 and - - -

A Yes.

Q92 - - - and the other stability requirement of 115?

A Yes, yes, there was a column for stability, whether or not the boat complied with the ABS, that's, you know, construction. I can't recall what other columns there, there were, crew experience, because that had to be on application.

Q93 Insurance?

A No, that went on the other spreadsheet.

Q94 Right.

A Insurance wasn't an issue about eligibility.

Q95 O.K.

A That, no, there may have been, I don't know, there were four or five boxes that we had to tick on the, on the standard letters that we sent out. I can't remember what the other, but definitely, yeah, ABS and stability were big issues then and, you know, if the three people didn't put their signature to them, they wouldn't have got through.

Q96 Was it the case back in '94 when you were involved with this sort of set up that there was a public announcement, a meeting by all the prospective sailors in relation to those that didn't comply, was there ever a list read out to people?

A At the - - -

Q97 At the briefing.

A At the race briefing?

Q98 Yeah.

A You always get a few that are dragging the chain.

Q99 Right. So, what would you do?

A Yes, yes, yes, but it normally, you would know that they were there because it would be people who had, who may, in the case of certificates, you knew they were being re-measured right up, right at the end.

Q100 So, what would you do, would you approach - - -

A Yeah, well, you'd say, you know, bring it down to the sailing office immediately after the briefing.

Q101 Right, O.K. And once again, that would be the same procedure so far as checking?

A I, well, I would expect so, yes.

Q102 Yes.

A You know, there'd be one specific thing outstanding or it may be their full crew list, you know, because with the application they only had to nominate their three most experienced crew, but you know, people would change crews at the last, the last minute, whilst they might've put in a full crew list a lot of them left that till the bitter end term.

Q103 How close up to the race did you check to ensure that everything was right?

A Well, it was a progressive thing and you'd have a couple of out-layers that, you know, you might be still checking right up until the briefing.

Q104 Right.

A And they're the ones that you read out.

Q105 Yeah.

A So, it's virtually two days before.

Q106 Do you, were you at the weather, or the briefing in 1998 at all?

A No.

Q107 You weren't, O.K. Did you race in 1998?

A No.

Q108 Did you play any role in the organisation of - - -

A No.

Q108 - - - the race in '98?

A No.

Q109 O.K. Were there any situations that you recall in your position where boats didn't comply up to race day or, in fact, lined up to race and were pulled back?

A The only one I can remember is one that his safety equipment certificate wasn't, wasn't up to date and he was told in no uncertain terms that he either had it there, I think it was a fire extinguisher, that was all it was, a fire extinguisher that hadn't been date stamped or some such.

Q110 That's fairly - - -

A And that was, he was told that, you know, he had to have it on the morning and that was it, otherwise he wouldn't be listed as an entry.

Q111 O.K.

A That was the latest, that was the latest one I could ever remember happening and generally speaking, you know, 95 per cent of the fleet would have all their paperwork in in time.

Q112 Now, I believe after '94 there were some, some changes in the club insofar as selection of race committees and race directors and that sort of thing.

A Yeah, well, I, after 1994, which was a big year with 370 boats, I went on holidays in January of '95 straight after the race, as I usually did, and when I came back the actual structure within the club had changed and Phil Thompson had been given the title of sailing manager and I was shifted into another office and it seemed to me as though I was being pushed sideways somehow, which didn't leave me all that happy, but I stayed on there because I enjoyed the job and -

Q113 What sort of qualifications do you feel a race director should have?

A Well, experience more than anything else, I would think, in race administration.

Q114 And racing itself?

A Yes, yes, yes, yeah.

Q115 Are you able to say whether that position filled by Mr Thompson brought to it experience both in administration and - - -

A In race - - -

Q115 - - - in sailing?

A In racing, certainly, you know, Mr Thompson's done a lot of racing but as far as, as far as organising events, I would think not.

Q116 All right.

A I had been, I had experience in that 'cause I had been previously as a volunteer out on the course a lot of times and, you know, you're dealing with, with the race director of regattas and what had you.

Q117 Mm.

A So, you know, that's where I gained my experience from, as a volunteer before joining the club full time.

Q118 Do you recall any problems that you can, you know, that are notable between '95 and prior to '98 in relation to race organisation?

A Well, the reason I left the club was because I had a disagreement with the sailing committee at the time about the method of scoring the Sydney/Hobart race results.

Q119 All right.

A And they had some fancy system there which was used in '94, which I strongly disagreed with, and it became a bit of a nightmare getting results out and the suggestion that I made of how to do it was rejected and I, my answer was, "Well, you don't need me here", so I sort of said, you've made me redundant here, the job that I started doing is no longer here so, you know, things are different, so I left, and when that race was run in '95, it was, I mean, it was a fiasco down at Hobart, they couldn't get results out and it was written up in the press and by the international press as a bit of a fiasco and boats

were changing position, you know, overnight, that sort of thing. And after '95 they dropped that system entirely and we do a system of time on time, which was what I'd suggested in the first place. That's the way it's run ever since.

Q120 And did the race committee or the race director adopt any procedures - - -

A Yes - - -

Q120 - - - in place?

A Also in '95, well, I wasn't there, but the club in their wisdom or the race sailing committee or whatever, decided not to employ an outside race director, so Greg Halls wasn't there in 1995 either.

I think Mike Fletcher was there to, just set the start lines or something, but not as, not as part of a race committee.

Q121 Right. Now, you're aware that the, that the race, or the sailing office has a secretary as such?

A Yes.

Q122 And, in fact, her name's Andrea Holt?

A Correct, yes.

Q123 What, did you have the same sort of situation in your day?

A Yes, yes, the girl that was my secretary in the sailing office, Elaine Guzzard, had, she was there when I started, she had been there for, I think she started off originally as a receptionist in the years earlier, but she had, she had a lot of experience in

the sailing office before I started and she was very efficient in what she did.

Q124 What was her role so far as applications coming in?
Filing and that sort of - - -

A Yeah, filing them and she would give them to me, and you know, and she would prepare all the, all the spreadsheets et cetera.

Q125 O.K.

A And make sure that nobody touched them.

Q126 O.K.

A She was very protective of, of the, you know, protocol and what have you, in the sailing office.

Q127 Now, if I take you to a race day situation, Sydney to Hobart race day situation, what would be the responsibility of the committee in your time, you know, what you believe should be the situation so far as manning the sailing office?

A The sailing committee at the time or actually not quite then, but prior to 1994 when Gordon Marshall was the chairman of the sailing committee or a senior member of the sailing committee, I think it was policy that the sailing office was manned seven days a week, regardless of the Hobart race, it was seven days a week, Saturdays, Sundays, even if there's no racing on because, the philosophy being that the members were entitled, the sailing club members were entitled to have their sailing office open if they just wanted to make inquiries. And that's the way it

was. And on Boxing Day, on the start of the Hobart race, I was always out on the water, left about 11.00 and came back in after the race had started. But Elaine, the secretary, always stayed in the office Boxing Day because, you know, the phone would be running hot all the time, we had to have someone there to answer it.

Q128 What was the protocol so far as the, in your time, so far as the weather bureau, if there was an upgrade of weather and facts to come through, would they generally go through the sailing office?

A Yes, there was only one fax machine at, in the club at the time when I was there and that was in the sailing office. Certainly if, you know, if there was a weather forecast came through, there was a file there for weather forecasts and, you know, when we came back from in the, on the water, Greg Halls and myself and Mike Fletcher and anyone else that was involved at the start, she would have anything that had come through there, notes and phone calls, whatever, she would have that there and she'd make sure everybody saw it straightaway.

Q129 All right. What would have been your situation if, when you were involved in sailing organisation, if a storm warning had just been faxed to the sailing office some one and a half hours after the start of the race, what would be your procedures?

A One and a half hours after the race, that would

probably be while we were still out on the water, but when we came in which would be around about then, one and a half hours, 2.30, yeah, 3 o'clock we'd be back in the sailing office and normally there and right through until the, till the first SKED was completed, and you know, that would, we would then sit down with Greg Hall and myself and who, or whatever other members of the sailing committee were there, the race committee, and it would certainly be Greg Halls, Mike Fletcher and myself and the chairman, you know, you'd look at everything that came in, not just weather report, anything, anything that was notable, you would sit down and say, well, what are we going to do with this.

Q130 Right.

A It could be a complaint that someone, you know, someone had a prang at the start and they're stanchions were bent and do we let them go or do we call them back, or you know, whatever.

Q131 Mm.

A You know, it could be incidents that happened at the start. Not just the weather, but anything, we always discuss whatever Elaine had piled up for us when we got back in off the water.

Q132 So, what, what are your views in relation to sort of one and a half, two hours after the beginning of the race, a storm warning is issued, to your mind, is that a serious situation which, which should've been

discussed or looked at by the -

A Most certainly, yeah, yeah, well, can't imagine it not being, as a matter of fact.

Q133 Yeah.

A Just cannot imagine that not being discussed and I can't imagine not being broadcast at the, at the SKED, I would think it's a waste of time broadcasting straightaway because most of the boats don't keep the radios on anyway, but the first SKED is usually a test SKED to make sure they can get all the boats and find out which one's got which signals and tell them to try and fix it.

Q134 What time would that be, about?

A 1 o'clock start, the first SKED, late in the afternoon, anything between 4.00 and 7.00 in the afternoon. Usually earlier rather than later because, you know, you want to try and get them when they're all close together, you know, because the first SKED's not worth calculating, well, you do calculate it but it's not worth publishing the results or anything 'cause they're all so close together. But it really is a test SKED to make sure the computer computes properly, that the radios that are working and, you know, the input's right, you know.

Q135 So, up to the race had started and everything was, everything was happy, is it the case that a portion of the race committee then moved to Hobart to race

control?

A Normally on the second day.

Q136 The 27th?

A You go there, yeah, the 26th, definitely not the 26th. The 26th, you're usually trying to, you know, that's the time when you're a bit uptight and you're waiting to pounce on anything that could possibly go wrong, you know, you - - -

Q137 So, you - - -

A There would be someone, there would be someone, usually three people, I would stay there, Greg Halls would stay there and Mike Fletcher would stay there, at least until probably midnight.

Q138 At the sailing office?

A At the sailing office, yeah, yeah.

Q139 For what reason, problems?

A Just monitor the radio.

Q140 Yeah.

A Telephones.

Q141 Yeah.

A Anything that may or may not happen.

Q142 O.K, so, you'd go to Hobart, well - - -

A And then - - -

Q143 Basically - - -

A I never went to Hobart.

Q144 All right.

A I always stayed in Sydney.

Q145 O.K.

A Right through, in all the eight years I was there, I never went to Hobart.

Q146 All right.

A I stayed in Sydney.

Q147 Why was that, Bob?

A Well, because that's where the computers were, that's where you can work quietly without having a lot of people around. What would happen is Mike Fletcher and Greg Halls would go down separately, one in the morning and one in the afternoon of the 27th, usually. Same with the media centre, half of them would go down in the morning and the other half in the afternoon, that's just so that, so that there would be an overlap, you'd have people in Hobart and people in Sydney for the second day of the race. But all the computing and calculating and results and what have you, was done in Sydney.

Q148 Right.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q149 Do you feel the transfer to Hobart would jeopardise any, any calculations or any, any decisions?

A We tried it once and it was a dismal failure, we had trouble down there with the computers and communications and there was trouble with everything.

And we went back to, certainly for the 50th race, we went back to doing it all in Sydney.

Q150 O.K.

A 'Cause they could monitor it, it's you know, zipped

down, we always had an ISDN line so that we could update their computers down there at the same time as ours were.

Q151 Mn.

A So, really there was no point in having it down in Hobart and it was much quieter in Sydney 'cause you weren't, you weren't harassed by press or, you know, we had an office upstairs out of the way and, you know, you could do things quietly without having people chasing you, you know, if you're a bit slow getting them out, they just had to wait. As far as communications go, that was all done from Sydney. There were times when they would receive it better in Hobart, my understanding was that down in Hobart, I don't know whether they had a permanent radio listener down there, I'm not sure because I never went down there. But it was all handled from Sydney when I was there.

Q152 Has it ever been the case where there's been, at the start of the race, damage occur as a result of a - - -
-

A Yes.

Q152 - - - of a collision?

A Certainly has.

Q153 And have you ever recalled any yachts as a result of that damage?

A No, not that I can remember, I know a couple of them have retired immediately, worst being when

..... was hit by a power boat and broke the bow off it. But there have been boats damaged at the start that have come back.

Q154 If a collision had occurred at the start of the race and you were notified within the short period of time, what would your reaction, what would your immediate reaction be to receiving that information?

A Well, you know, there's damage and damage and I think it's really up to the people on the boat to assess whether it's damaged enough to make them turn around or not. You know, you're not in a, sitting in an office, you're not in a position to determine whether a boat's just got a scrape or a bit of a ding or something, or whether it's, you know, structurally, you know, unsafe to continue. But I, you know, we would, if it was seen, if somebody from the race committee saw it and said, gee, you know, that boat copped a hell of a whang there, you might possibly call the boat up and say are you sure the boat's all right.

Q155 So, you would check if - - -

A If somebody saw or reported it that they were hit pretty hard, yeah, yeah, but generally speaking, you know, there's a few battle scars scored at the start line and they're of no consequence anyway.

Q156 But structural things, certainly you would question those?

A Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think so, you know, if someone

said to you we saw a prang between so-and-so and so-and-so, and you know, got a hole in the aside and I'm putting a bit of sticky tape on it, I think then you'd have give them a call and say are you sure your boat's O.K.

Q157 Did you think that was your responsibility as an organisation, as a group?

A That sort of thing, no, not really, I think it's more a conscience thing than anything else, but as responsibility, no, I don't think so, I mean, the people on the boat should be able to assess whether their boat's capable of continuing or not.

Q158 O.K.

A It's their judgment.

Q159 Bob, is there anything else, I know that you're very conscious of safety issues in regards to EPIRBs and

- - -

A Yeah, well, I do believe there are some things that are, safety regulations are, could be improved considerably for, you know, some things are overboard, like a fog horn, you know, you have to carry round a party hooter on your boat, what that's going to do, I've no idea, I mean, that's something that is absurd. The thing I feel most strongly about is life rafts, I think they kill people, quite frankly and the only reason someone gets in a life raft is because their boat is going to sink, so, you

know, they don't get in it just for the joy of seeing what it's like and they normally don't sink when the weather's calm and the sea's calm, when you can sit comfortably in a life raft. So, to me, the obvious thing is don't let the boat sink.

Q160 Yeah.

A And whilst that may sound a bit simplistic, it is very, very easy to deploy inflatable bags inside a boat and they just cannot sink, the salvage people can re-float a submarine with airbags and there are companies that make them, there are companies that advertise them, and personally, my personal view is that if life rafts weren't used and airbags were made mandatory I would suggest that most of the people who have perished at sea in yacht races would have survived if they didn't get off their boats.

Q161 M'mm.

A And I think, you know, they're not, they're not expensive, in fact, I would say that sufficient air in a bag inside a boat would be cheaper than a life raft. It just cannot sink, it's as simple as that, will not go down even if it's full of holes. It would stay afloat.

Q162 Just on that if, and hypothetically of course, if, if the life, if the inflatable bag failed, and same could happen to a life raft, would it not be prudent, though, to also have a secondary safety measure where, where the two could be used as a, as an item?

A Possibly, but you know, I mean, if you say a life raft could fail and the boat sinks and the life raft fails then you, you know - - -

Q163 That's exactly what I'm saying, but do you feel that there is still - - -

A No, because I think there is less chance of inflatable bags failing than there is of life rafts, you know, I mean, I think even in the '88 Hobart race, a couple of life rafts didn't inflate or inflated when they shouldn't have. You punch a hole in the side of a boat and you know it's going to sink unless you fill it up with air. You don't have to have all the automatic inflating gear, you know, just have a dive bottle and a valve, you can open the valve, it fills up the bag and then what can go wrong?

Q164 Do you think that the type of life raft, if that's the way that the trend goes, could be improved apart from, let us say, the AYF approved pack, and go towards a SOLUS which is - - -

A It's still a life raft and I think jumping into a rubber ring of any sort out in a big storm is infinitely more life-threatening than keeping the hull afloat. You know, I mean, I honestly believe that life rafts kill people, they don't save them.

Q165 In what way do you say that, when you say life rafts kill people?

A Well, you know, well, they get into them because they

think their boat's going to sink and if they knew their boat wasn't going to sink there is still a temptation to jump into a life raft, you know, it is, you know, a psychological thing, it's a life raft, you think it's going to save your life but, and particularly when a boat's getting rolled and smashed and the mast's banging against the side and you think it's going to come through, there is definitely a temptation, people have jumped into a lot of life rafts and the boat has been found later on. You know, why did they get in the life raft, because they thought the boat was going to sink and they'd be safer in the life raft, and they've died for that. In the Fastnet race of '79 or whenever it was, when they lost 16 or 17 people, all bar two of the boats were found still floating, and why did those people get in the life raft? They thought their boat was going to sink. If they knew their boat was not going to sink - - -

Q166

A - - - and they didn't have a life raft to get into, they'd be alive today.

Q167 Just getting onto the Fastnet race, you've read and are very experienced about the Fastnet race and what come about from the findings of that.

A As best I can understand, very little has changed.

Q168 That's what I was going to ask next, of course - - -

DETECTIVE SERGEANT GRAY

Q169 What we'll do is we'll suspend the interview for a tape change. Time on my watch is now 8.55pm, this interview is suspended for a tape change.

INTERVIEW SUSPENDED

INTERVIEW RESUMED

DETECTIVE SERGEANT GRAY

Q170 This electronically recorded interview between Detective Sergeant Gray and Mr Bob Brenac, at Pymont Police Station, is recommenced. Time on my watch is now 9.32pm. I'll hand you to Senior Constable Upston.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q171 Bob, we, prior to the break we were talking about the Fastnet race and the tragedy of that. We were going to talk about anything that occurred from the Fastnet race that was picked up here, perhaps from your experiences and lessons learned. Do you believe there's been any lessons learned as a result of that?

A There was a lot of talk about it at the time and certainly after the Fastnet disaster, Gordon Marshall who's done a lot with the CYC in the past, he took it very seriously and got copies of the, of the report that was done afterwards and went through that with a fine-tooth comb. But frankly, the CYC has already had a lot of the procedures in place, particularly relating to radio SKEDs more than anything, that were already in place here. I believe since the Fastnet disaster, that the, the long races over there,

Fastnet in particular, they do have radio SKEDs, so they're in touch with the boats all the time. But -

- -

Q172 Just keep your voice up, please, Bob.

A Yeah, sorry. But my, my opinion is that very little came out of it. You know, it was a grand report that sort of went nowhere. Mind you, a lot has changed since those days too, there are, there is much better equipment around than they had in those days and I still get back to the point that a lot of those people would not have died if their boats didn't, if they hadn't abandoned their boats and got into life rafts. But you know, I wasn't there, I know quite a few people that did sail in that race and they had very short, sharp seas, et cetera, I can't imagine why anyone would jump into a life raft while their boat was still floating, particularly in those conditions. I, I've done a life raft exercise in pretty bad conditions, in fact, the exercise was called off an hour after it started because of the conditions. But you know, like I say, life rafts are one step up from swimming and not much of a step anyway.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT GRAY

Q173 I believe there was an inquiry around '94, '95, in relation to a death in the Hobart.

A There was an inquiry after the '93 Hobart.

Q174 All right.

A Not so much because of a death, I don't think, but the fact that so many of the boats retired and there was a lot of trouble down in Eden.

Q175 Right.

A Because they couldn't cope with the number of boats coming in there.

Q176 And there were certain recommendations, being - - -

A Yes, yes. And we put some of those recommendations into place certainly for the '94 Hobart race because of the big fleet, we, the club decided after '93 that we would have a club representative in Eden.

Q177 Right.

A In a caravan with a mobile phone so that they could liaise between the club and the coast patrol and the water police down in Eden, the water police down in Eden. And that certainly happened in 1994 and it was very successful because not that the, a lot of boats retired because of the conditions but a lot of boats retired just because of the sheer number of boats in the race.

Q178 Did that continue, that type of liaison down in Eden?

A Well, my understanding is it didn't.

Q179 Do you know why?

A Probably because of cost, I guess, or they couldn't find anyone to volunteer to go down there, in fact, I, my understanding of the '98 race is that Greg Halls actually rang the CYC and said, "Have you got someone at Eden because you're going to need someone

there", and Peter Bush rang him back and said, "No, we haven't, would you volunteer yourself?", and he'd left straightaway and went down there.

Q180 Did you find that sort of, to get rid of that component as being sort of - - -

A Well, I think from all aspects, not, it was a very successful move on the part of the club to have someone down there in a caravan with a telephone, so they could, you know, someone that knew the boats, knew the people, when a boat would come in, you know, 'cause it's sometimes hard for the coast patrol and other people down there to recognise boats or, if they can't get them on the radio as they're coming in or leaving again, but yes, that was a very good move and I'm surprised that it wasn't still in place.

Q181 Who chaired the investigation in relation to '93?

A Who did chair that? I can't recall.

Q182 O.K.

A I know Greg was very involved in it, though, as he was in this other one.

Q183 Bob, is there anything else that you feel that you'd like to tell us in regards to your experiences as, as being closely involved with the Sydney to Hobart racing?

A Well, you know, at the risk of sounding a little bitter, I felt that the club after the '94 race, the 50th race, there was a lot of internal politicking that didn't do the club the world of good and I don't

think, I don't think that it has done the race itself, it has made it less efficient, quite frankly, that's a personal opinion and I'm not trying to blow my own trumpet, but you know, with Phil going in there, I just don't think he had what was needed to do that job and with the team we had in there prior to that, with Greg Halls, Mike Fletcher and myself, you know, it was, years of experience had gone into it, and that just went out the door straightaway. Because you've got to understand that, like I say, the sailing committee and all the committees at the club are volunteers, I mean, you don't bring someone in as a volunteer and they become an instant expert, you don't read a book and become a master of it. And that's pretty much what I see has happened down there.

Q184 And you think it's been detrimental to the image of the club?

A Yes, I believe so. Yeah, I think so. I'm sorry to see that happen, quite frankly, 'cause I've been a member down there for 35 years.

Q185 You still are a member?

A Yeah, yeah. I think, you know, generally speaking yacht racing has changed a lot, there are not as many people doing long races as used to, I think for whatever reason, possibly some of the adventure's gone out of it, and I would be sorry to see too much happen other than after the, after this inquiry,

other than specifics that are going to improve safety. And like I say, I reckon keeping boats afloat is the simplest and most obvious answer. And I've raised that in the past at the CYC and, you know, and with safety people who to the YA and thus the AYF and, you know, it's just a case of it'll never happen.

Q186 Why?

A Well, I don't know, 'cause people like to push their own barrow, I suppose, maybe I'm doing the same, but you know, I have no doubt whatsoever that, you know, putting airbags in boats would save lives.

Q187 O.K.

A But other than that, the administration down there, like I say, I think I did a better job and, you know, outside management seems to be the way a lot of other clubs are going now, too, not necessarily clubs but organisations are using, using, you know, outside consultants and people who are professional in their field rather than, you know, volunteers who are essentially amateurs, no matter what they think they are, they're still amateurs at the job.

Q188 O.K. Anything else?

A No.

Q189 O.K. Time by my watch is now 9.41pm, this interview is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED