

Maputo fines crew R19 000 and confiscates their yacht

Brendan Seery

MOZAMBIQUE has confiscated a South African yacht and fined its crew more than R19 000 for alleged illegal salvage diving in its territorial waters.

The boat, the Richards Bay-registered Corolita, will only be returned to its owners if they pay \$80 000 (about R225 000).

Three of the five remaining crew members — Vivian Harvey, Michael Bailey and Richard Bailey — have been given permission by the Maputo authorities to leave Mozambique, but have decided to stay aboard with skipper Alan Ubsdell and the yacht's engineer, Neil Harvey.

The Mozambicans ordered Mr Ubsdell and Mr Harvey to remain in detention aboard the Corolita in Maputo harbour.

The South Africans intend appealing against the decision tomorrow morning.

The yacht and its 11 passengers and crew — who set off from Richards Bay on a diving holiday on December 27 last year — were detained earlier this month by the Mozambicans, and the vessel was placed under guard in Maputo.

Contacted by radio telephone in Maputo yesterday, Michael Bailey said the five had been “utterly flabbergasted” when they were informed of the penalties yesterday morning by Maputo harbour authorities.

“This thing has just got worse and worse by the day. It's like a nightmare. They told us originally when they confiscated our diving equipment that we would get

it back. Then they said we wouldn't have to worry about the yacht. Now this. The officials we have dealt with have been totally unreliable and untrustworthy.”

In addition the Mozambicans alleged that the yacht had been used to bring people illegally into the country.

The head of the South African Trade Mission in Maputo, Dawie Laubscher, accompanied crew members to the meeting yesterday with port authorities, and helped translate the proceedings, which were held in Portuguese.

Mr Bailey said the meeting was “nothing at all” like a proper maritime court.

“We were simply informed about what the decision was. We didn't get a chance to say anything on our behalf.”