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# Nine men trapped in upturned hull saved

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volunteer worked. The owner was asked to open up.  
Pretorius said chainsaws and axes were flown back to the rescue site, where the Kowie's hull was cut open.

"They were underwater from 2am to 8.15am, in a 3m<sup>2</sup> area, in total darkness and in an upside-down boat," said rescue swimmer Marcus Oshry, who had been expecting "the worst".

He said they first cut a small hole in the hull so they could communicate with the fishermen. He noted that the space was airtight, with no water or oxygen getting in, and that after being trapped in there for hours, the fishermen probably had little air left.

"I don't know how much longer they would have survived in there," Oshry said.

After the hole was widened, the fishermen were extracted one at a time.

"It was absolutely unbelievable. People were jubilant and whooping," said Oshry, who also carried the last fisherman ashore. "He burst into tears, and made me burst into tears as well," he said.

Port Alfred police spokesman JP Van der Merwe said the survivors were lucky as most of the men slept inside the hull.

"The skipper is a strong



**PULLED TO SAFETY:** Nine chokka fishermen were rescued from inside the upturned hull of their 15m boat "Kowie" by NSRI volunteers from Port Alfred and Port Elizabeth. One crewman died and the skipper swam ashore.  
Picture: MARCUS OSHRY/NSRI

swimmer, but the others never would've made it. Also, when rescuers set out the tide was going out. If it had gone in, they could not have rescued them until late afternoon - by then the air in the hull probably would have run out," he said.

He said fish were strewn on the shore, and that the boat was returning to East London with

about six tons of fish on board. Eastern Cape police spokesperson Mali Govender said: "The skipper was the only person awake. He steered the boat towards safety, but a wave engulfed it and it overturned near the Riet River mouth close to the shore."

A rescue team retrieved a body on the shore at 7am. An

hour later, they reached the boat and broke open the bow to save the fishermen inside.

"They found nine people aboard that were safe and they were brought back to shore where they received medical care," Govender said.

After they were treated on shore, the nine rescued fishermen were taken to Port Alfred

Hospital, where casualty duty nurse Lindsay Fray said: "They were treated and have already been sent home. They are fine."

The survivors could not be reached last night. One, Ncedile Nqabaka, had earlier told SABCTV news: "We are grateful to be alive."

Those involved in yesterday's rescue included the

police, air force, Ndlamba Fire and Rescue and various emergency services.

Oshry said: "You have to remember, we're volunteers. We train every weekend for this kind of scenario. This is what it's all about."

Pretorius said: "Thanks go to my crew. They and all the others did a great job."

# Dramatic rescue from capsized boat

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Grace Huang, Aziz Hartley and Sapa

IN A dramatic rescue mission, which included opening a hardware store after hours so rescuers could get access to power tools, nine fishermen were pulled from their capsized boat after being stuck in its hull for over six hours.

But they lost a mate who drowned. Len Strydom's body has been handed to the Health Department's pathology services.

At 4am yesterday, the NSRI was alerted that a chokka fishing boat, the East London-registered Kowie, had been struck by lighting and capsized near Port Alfred.

The skipper swam about 2km to shore and walked another four to raise the alarm while a 4m swell pushed his capsized boat towards shore, said Jaun Pretorius, the NSRI commander in Port Alfred.

"He did not know the fate of his remaining 10 crewmen," Pretorius said.

He said rescuers who responded saw the upturned hull in the surf, but could not immediately get to it due to rough conditions. Pretorius said that, while the body of one fisherman washed up on the beach, there had been no sign of the other nine.

"As the tide ebbed, we were able to get swimmers to the upturned hull where they banged on the hull and were surprised to hear a very clear response," Pretorius said.

What followed was a SA Air Force helicopter flight to a Port Alfred hardware store, closed on a Sunday, where a