

Air search for yacht stopped

NEWS
KOLISWA ZULU 27/9/2005

THE 10-day air search for the missing yacht Moquini has been called off after aircraft specially dispatched from Durban yesterday failed to make any sightings.

However, the desperately worried families of the crew have not given up hope, still believing that they will arrive home safely soon.

It had been an exceptionally difficult decision to make, said Dave Claxton, the chairman of the race organising committee.

"It's a decision that Matthew Thomas, Richard Crockett and I made in the cold light of day having rationally and unemotionally sifted through every single shred of information we had, and objectively analysed it," said Claxton.

"Plus, we have consulted experts far and wide to see if there is anything we may have missed, or any stone we have left unturned - with the answer always being that everything possible has been done up to this point."

Private fund

Moquini went missing near Madagascar during the Mauritius to Durban race on September 16, after a truncated distress call was sent to the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre at Silvermine in Cape Town.

The yacht is captained by Graham Cochrane. The other crew members are Kurt Ostendorf, Neil Tocknell, cousins Sheldon and Mark Dickerson, and development sailor Michael Goolam.

They sailed from Mauritius on Saturday September 10.

The South African Air Force pulled out of the search six days after the yacht went missing and a private search party was established to carry on with the search, but it too has now stopped flights.

A private fund was established by the race organisers, **Sailing KZN**, in conjunction with the Royal Natal

Yacht Club to help finance the private search for the yacht.

Thomas, who finished the race on Sunday and who was asked to co-ordinate the private search and rescue mission, said "it is no longer feasible or practical to carry on with the search".

"We had two aircraft in the air and neither of them found anything, and we searched all areas, but we have called off the civilian search and everything's on hold," he said.

Denise Cochrane, Graham Cochrane's wife, said although the search had been called off, the families had not given up hope. She said she wanted to thank the public for all the support they had given them.

"There must still be funds and we must utilise those funds well," she said.

"The families will be meeting to discuss what is going to happen next, but we are not giving up."

Gail Dickerson said she believed her son and nephew would come home soon.

"My son Tristan has been searching every day, the ocean is very big and we have searched in all the areas where we felt they may be."

Feroza Goolam, who was over-

whelmed with emotion, said she did not know what she was going to do if her son did not come home.

"I'm so worried; I can't eat and I can't sleep at night. I'm still waiting for good news, and I know it will come soon and they will all come home."

The families asked that the following statement be issued on their behalf: "We, the families of the missing crew aboard Moquini have not given up hope of the crew being found, and would like to acknowledge the incredible and selfless effort the rescue team has put in to finding our husbands, sons and brothers.

"We would like to express our appreciation to the media for their responsible and sympathetic reporting on this search and rescue mission, and to the public at large for the wonderfully generous support of the RNYC Moquini Rescue Fund, and for their care, sympathy and support.

"We have been astounded at the support from school children who have donated their lunch money, to the corporate giants of South Africa who have supported us.

"Words just cannot express our thanks and appreciation sufficiently. With all our hearts we thank you."



COCHRANE



GOOLAM



TOCKNELL