



# Huge sea rescue after killer storm

*2 die, 10 lost in yacht race chaos*

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Hobart - A massive search-and-rescue operation was under way today after savage seas battered the prestigious Sydney to Hobart yacht race, leaving two yachtsmen dead, a British sailor presumed dead and nine others missing.

More than 25 civil aircraft and five Australian Air Force planes were involved in the search for the nine crew of the Winston Churchill. They radioed last night that they were abandoning ship.

Another yacht, Atara, sent out a mayday early this morning seeking urgent help, said David Gray, head of the Australian Maritime Authority's media department.

"We're starting to get a fair handle on the situation now, but our greatest concern is for the yacht Winston Churchill and we've just this minute got a distress call from Atara," said Mr Gray.

Rescue officials confirmed two crew died on the stricken yacht Business Post Naiad. Their bodies were left behind as the seven other crew were airlifted to safety.

One of the men had a heart attack, but it was unclear how the other had died.

Prominent British yachtsman Glyn Charles was identified by the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia as being lost overboard from Sword of Orion, which rolled over in the Bass Strait late yesterday.

Only two other people have died in the race's 54-year history.

Mr Gray said weather conditions had eased somewhat with seas down to four metres and visibility up to two kilometres.

At least 58 boats had retired from a field of 115 in conditions described as some of the worst in memory, with wind gusts overnight of up to 148 km/h.



Rescue: a helicopter winchman lifts a crewman from the Stand Aside to safety

REUTERS

Mr Gray said most of the yachts that were knocked out were demasted, although some rolled over with at least one rolling twice. "Virtually everyone rescued has got an injury," said Mr Gray.

"They were the worst conditions I have seen. It was horrendous," said Geoff Boettcher, skipper of Secret Men's Business, which limped into the fishing port of Eden on Monday. "You would get hit once and think 'Hell, I don't want to do that again in my life'. It was survival mode for many hours. We were getting five, six - maybe seven-metre waves breaking on the top and that's roll-over material on any yacht," said Boettcher. Abandoned yacht Stand Aside looked

like a child's broken bathtub toy after a nine-metre wave tore away its mast and half its cabin, exposing the crew to the cruel sea.

"Most of the crews are in survival pattern. They're not racing any more. It's a fight to stay alive out there," said Innkeeper crewman Kevin Lacey.

"You get what we call in sailing circles square waves and you bounce off these waves," Lacey said from Eden.

"You come off the top of them and there's nothing underneath. The boat just drops, sometimes they drop three, four, five metres. It is like going over a speed hump that is three feet high and you are doing 90 miles an hour."

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Dismasted: racing yacht Stand Aside tows a life raft after being battered by giant waves during the annual Sydney to Hobart Yacht race yesterday