

Marlborough Sounds adventure trip turns to horror

Lois Cairns and Bellinda McCommon

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FLOWN TO HOSPITAL: An injured passenger from one of the two boats involved in a Marlborough Sounds collision is loaded aboard the Westpac Rescue helicopter to be flown to Wellington Hospital.

CLAYTON MORGAN

An afternoon on the water turned into a horror experience for students on an Outboard Bound cutter after it collided with a dolphin watch catamaran in the Marlborough Sounds and began sinking yesterday afternoon.

One student, from Whangarei, sustained a broken leg. Seven others had moderate injuries.

Other boats raced to pluck the students from their fast-sinking vessel. All aboard the cutter were wearing lifejackets.



RESCUE WORK: One of the boats involved in the Marlborough Sounds collisions is lifted onto a barge.

CLAYTON MORGAN

A dolphin watch passenger, Alison Kelso, from Nelson, said the catamaran was about 20 minutes out of Picton heading toward Motuara Island in the Queen Charlotte Sound when the boats collided about 2.30pm. She was standing on deck, facing Picton, when she felt a huge thud in her back.



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She told the Marlborough Express two children were thrown on to the deck and there were people screaming everywhere.

A police spokesman said the students, who were paddling near Wedge Point, saw the Dolphin Watch Ecotours boat approaching and tried to alert the skipper they were on a collision course but to no avail. The catamaran rammed into their boat, throwing the students into the water.



HIT: People from an Outward Bound Cutter boat in the water near Picton Harbour after being hit by a Dolphin Watch boat.
ALISON KELSO

They were plucked to safety and ferried to Picton by a boat from nearby Lochmara Lodge and by the dolphin watch boat. None of the 14 passengers and four crew aboard the 13m-long dolphin watch boat were injured.

Picton Harbourmaster Dave Hoskins said conditions on the water had been good and police and the Maritime Safety Authority would be investigating how the vessels collided.

Outward Bound chief executive Trevor Taylor said he was still trying to piece together what happened but the cutter involved in the collision had sunk. All 12 students were safe and families were being contacted.

The students had started their 21-day course on January 31.

Glen McNeilly, one of the directors of Dolphin Watch Ecotours, said he did not know why the skipper of his boat, who was very experienced, had not seen the cutter. He had been stood down pending the outcome of an investigation.



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The skipper involved in yesterday's incident was not the one in charge of the Dolphin Watch boat when an Australian tourist was injured by a propeller in December. That skipper had been fired.

McNeilly said the collision had left a gaping big hole in the front of the catamaran and it would be out of action for some time.

Two students were flown by Westpac Rescue Helicopter to Wellington Hospital, the one with a broken leg and another, also from Whangarei, with a suspected broken ankle that turned out to be sprained. The others injured – three men and three women – were taken to Blenheim's Wairau Hospital by ambulance.

A hospital spokesman said four had been treated and discharged.

– Sunday Star Times

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