

## ACR PLB Saves Lives Again

The adage that 'those with a 406EPIRB/PLB live' has been proven to be true once again, this time by the crew of a cutter-rigged sloop, Sambaluka en-route from Noumea to Brisbane.

At about 3:00 am, the yacht struck an uncharted reef 350 nautical miles west of Noumea. At the time Sambaluka was under full sail and making five or six knots when with little warning the sounder showed they were quickly running into shallow water.



In little more than 10 seconds the Sambaluka had gone from blissfully sailing through the night to be stranded on a coral reef. As the stricken yacht began taking on water, the four person crew set off their ACR Aquafix PLB registered in New Zealand.

The ACR Aquafix is a compact personal locator beacon (PLB) which emits both a GPS derived location and personal details via the dedicated emergency 406 MHz frequency to GEOSAR and LEOSAR satellites. ACR products are marketed in Australia by safety specialist company RFD Australia.



In addition to the ACR PLB signal being quickly detected by the GEOSAR satellites, the Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Wellington also picked up a weak mayday call from the yacht.



On board Sambaluka the situation was deteriorating fast. Despite the engine driven pumps working at 100% capacity, the yacht was sinking. After the engine room flooded and the engine stopped, the crew were still able to communicate their plight on battery operated radio.

However, the distress signal activated by the ACR PLB200 had the rescue effort in full swing.

Australian rescue authorities radioed the P & O cruise ship the Pacific Sun to alter course and head to rescue the Sambaluka crew, about 120 nautical miles away.

In the meantime a French military aircraft was despatched and flew over the reef dropping a 15 man life raft below.

The Pacific Sun arrived at the Sambaluka six hours after turning around. The shallow and uncharted waters of the reef meant that the Pacific Sun had to keep a safe distance away. A motorised life boat was lowered and quickly rescued the four stricken sailors who had by now been forced to abandon Sambaluka which had broken up, and take to the life raft.

The Pacific Sun with almost 2000 passengers on board was returning to Brisbane from Vanuatu when the call to assist was received from AMSA, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

Commenting on the rescue, Mark Barker of RFD stated that once again the success rate of 406 EPIRB/PLBs in rescue cannot be overstated.

“There is little question that left to their own resources, these four yachtsmen would have perished along with their boat on a little reef in the Coral Sea,” said Mark Barker, Managing Director of RFD Australia.

“Gladly they had an ACR PLB on board, it was properly registered and it was activated quickly. Once the authorities receive an EPIRB/PLB distress signal a whole raft of measures are put in place to effect a rapid rescue.”

“Our experience is that when people find themselves in distress and activate their EPIRB/PLB, most have a great outcome.”

This was certainly the case for the crew of the Sambaluka, all alone in the middle of the Coral Sea and shipwrecked on a reef.

RFD is a world leading supplier of marine safety products and inflatable watercraft marketed under a range of brand names. Some of these brands include Aquapro inflatable boats, Plastimo boating equipment, ACR electronics and Aquaglide water sport products.

Beginning in 1920, RFD is primarily involved in the supply and service of marine, fire, life support and gas control equipment.

For all information concerning supply and pricing of individual products within the broad range, please contact your regional RFD branch office.

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