



Augusta VMRS to the rescue

Sergeant Matthew Leishman (far left) with three of the AVMRG crew members who attended the canoe rescue: Skipper Paul Higginson, Commander Marty Graco and Constable Andrew Clarke, on board the group's 10 metre Naiad vessel at the iconic Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse.

The situation that faced Augusta marine rescue volunteers when they responded to a call for help recently involved a few more people than usual.

Their mission was to rescue 17 South West high school students and a teacher. Travelling in nine canoes, the group had come to grief after heading off for Augusta from Molloy Caravan Park, on the banks of the Blackwood River.

The craft had capsized in a burst of squally weather near Hardy Inlet, leaving some of the group in the water.

Seven Augusta Volunteer Marine Rescue Group (AVMRG) members quickly stepped in after a local shop owner alerted them to the emergency.

AVMRG Commander Marty Graco said a severe wind warning had been issued by the Bureau of Meteorology, but the canoeists were unaware of it.

"The group struck trouble rounding a headland, and ran into wind and waves of up to a metre high," Marty said.

"They were quickly swamped and their canoes overturned.

"We immediately contacted WA Water Police and the volunteers were on scene within about 45 minutes from when the alarm was first raised."

Two rescue vessels were deployed, with the crew on the first transferring the wet and cold group back to shore and a waiting ambulance, and the second recovering all the canoes.

The volunteers also lent a hand to help ferry the students to Augusta Hospital where they were examined and later released.

Marty said all emergency responders had worked well together to make sure the best possible response and care was provided to the students involved. WA Police Search and Rescue Coordinator Sergeant Matthew

Leishman commended the quick response from the AVMRG.

"The volunteers did a fantastic job under challenging circumstances and managed to transfer all 18 people safely to the jetty," he said.

"Everyone was pleased with the way it was handled."

Police, ambulance and hospital officers, along with Red Cross volunteers, assisted with supplying dry clothes and blankets for the students once they were back on dry land.

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