

21 July 2002

Immediate Use

EXTENSIVE SEA SEARCH UNDERWAY OFF QUEENSLAND

Australian Search and Rescue is coordinating the search for two crewmen from a sunken fishing trawler in the Great Barrier Reef near Innisfail.

The search, involving 10 fixed wing aircraft, three helicopters and five vessels, commenced after a third crewman clinging to an upturned dinghy was picked up by a cruise vessel about 8 pm last night about 12 nautical miles (22kms) offshore.

He had been in the water for over 40 hours following the overturning and sinking of the fishing vessel *Eastern Leader* near Otter Reef from a snagged trawl line about 20 nm (37km) offshore.

The survivor said he and another deckhand had clung to the swamped dinghy for several hours before the deckhand left to attempt to swim to shore.

He said the fishing boat's skipper had not been sighted since the vessel overturned and sank.

Following the alert from the cruise ship *Reef Endeavour*, Cairns Water Police handed coordination to AusSAR late last night and a Cairns helicopter with night vision equipment was tasked but nothing sighted.

Poor weather - 25 knot winds and 2-3 metre seas, is hampering the large aerial search this morning covering an area of 1300 sq nautical miles from Dunk Island north to the Frankland Islands.

Further information:

David Gray

0418 164 901

