

23 July 2002

Immediate Use

EXTENSIVE SEA SEARCH CONTINUING OFF QUEENSLAND

Australian Search and Rescue is continuing to coordinate a search for two men from the sunken fishing trawler *Eastern Leader* in the Great Barrier Reef near Cairns.

Today's search, using 9 fixed wing aircraft and three helicopters, will cover a 1335 square nautical mile region north and south of Cairns. A Customs Coastwatch aircraft is expected to conduct an electronic and visual search of the region this morning.

The search commenced on Sunday (21/7) after a man clinging to an upturned dinghy was picked up by the cruise vessel *Reef Endeavour* at about 8 pm on Saturday night (20/7). He was about 12 nautical miles (22kms) offshore.

He had been in the water for more than 40 hours after the *Eastern Leader* snagged a trawl line and sank near Otter Reef about 20 nautical miles (37km) east of Innisfail.

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

He said the fishing boat's skipper had not been sighted since the vessel overturned and sank. A large amount of debris from the trawler, including a life ring in the water east of Cape Grafton, has been located.

Yesterday's search area between Hinchinbrook Island and Cairns was searched five times by the 14 aircraft and four helicopters used in the operation.

The weather in the search area today is moderate with 20 knot south easterly winds and two metre seas.

Further information:

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