# Episode 11 - Marine and Rescue-v1.mp3

**John Pratt:** [00:00:04] Hello and welcome to Tasmania Police's brand new podcast, This is Tas Police. I'm Inspector John Pratt and I'll be your host as we chat to a wide range of Tasmanian police officers about why they joined the job and why others should too.

**John Pratt:** [00:00:22] We're coming to you today from Lutruwita, Tasmania. And before we start our conversation, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of the land upon which we work and pay our respect to elders past and present. We recognise the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the continuing custodians of the rich cultural heritage of Lutruwita, Tasmania.

**John Pratt:** [00:00:48] Welcome to This is Tas Police. Today we're chatting to Senior Constable Matthew Smith and Constable Fiona Russell about marine policing to find out what it's like to work on the water at Tasmania Police. Matt currently works in Marine and Rescue Services and Fiona worked with the team between 2005 and 2012 prior to moving to King Island, where she spent eight years doing marine work as well. These two officers have spent a lot of time travelling around Tasmania on the 34 Marine vessels that make up the Tas Police fleet. You might have seen them like the Vigilant, Dauntless and the Van Diemen on the water around the state. Today we're going to talk about how you transition from uniformed policing into this specialist area, and I might add a thing or two as well, due to the amount of time that I spent at Marine and Rescue Services. Thanks for joining us today, Matt and Fiona.

**John Pratt:** [00:01:31] Firstly, so our listeners get to know you a bit more. Can you give us an overview of your career so far? Let's start with you Fi. What motivated you to join the service?

**Fiona Russell:** [00:01:40] So I've been in the job 29 years now. I had started nursing at uni and didn't really want to do that at that stage. The academy were having a bit of a break and not recruiting, so I'd applied and then all of a sudden they notified me while I was in uni and away I went. And I think really I didn't have any background or family in the police service. I just travelled to Clifton Beach quite regularly and used to see them running around at Rokeby around the academy grounds and thought, that looks like fun and I didn't look back.

**John Pratt:** [00:02:13] So once you got into the job, what other areas did you work in?

**Fiona Russell:** [00:02:16] So I was with Hobart Uniform for a short time and fairly quickly went on to do a fair bit of time in investigations, including the drug squad, which I enjoyed immensely. So I'd done that for some time and sort of thought that perhaps I need a bit of a change and I'd always loved the water. Growing up I was a swimmer and played water polo and surf lifesaving, so I looked at Marine and they were interested in taking female officers at the time and I applied and got in.

**John Pratt:** [00:02:47] Thanks for that. Matt, can you tell us about your journey to becoming a member of Marine Services?

**Matt Smith:** [00:02:51] So I've been in the job nearly 12 years now. I haven't done a huge amount of investigative work but spent a fair bit of time on the watch in various parts of the state and then moved to Flinders Island, which is where I sort of commenced or started working in marine areas. I had a boat up there basically that I ran for a couple of years and then got a gig down in Hobart with the Marine section.

**John Pratt:** [00:03:13] So yours is almost the opposite where you've started on a Bass Strait island and then come to Marine, whereas Fiona's gone from Marine to a Bass Strait island.

**Matt Smith:** [00:03:20] Yeah, I was thinking that before. It's, it's quite funny actually. It's virtually the polar opposite.

**John Pratt:** [00:03:24] Can you tell us the difference about the marine work you did on Flinders Island as to what you do on a day to day basis now?

**Matt Smith:** [00:03:29] So, Flinders like I said, we had our own vessel up there. It was more a transport vessel to get to other parts of Flinders Island. We had a lot of different outer islands that had people on them that we still had to place at Flinders. So I suppose a large majority of marine work on Flinders was just getting to and from those islands as opposed to here in Hobart Marine, where we focus on the fishery industry, commercial and recreational as well as all the MAST enforcement stuff. So that's the recreational boating just out and about as well. So as well as the rescues.

**John Pratt:** [00:04:02] For those of us who aren't familiar, can you explain what Marine and Rescue Services does on a day to day basis?

**Fiona Russell:** [00:04:06] Well, it's sort of twofold. So Marine and Rescue probably gives you a hint. So we're involved in any on-water rescue or anything that requires a boat or access to rescue someone on the water. And the other side of it is fisheries, which is quite a large component. So policing both commercial and recreational fisheries.

**John Pratt:** [00:04:29] Is there an average day that you would say takes place while you were attached to Marine and Rescue Services?

**Fiona Russell:** [00:04:34] Yeah, So while I was attached in Hobart. The average day would probably entail having a look at what commercial fishing and reporting was going on, making a decision on what location you might take a boat and launch from that day. It also depends on the time of year too, perhaps you might target recreational if it was a really busy Saturday and you thought Frederick Henry Bay would have a lot of boats out, so you might head that way. So you really have to just give some thought to where you're going to come across, I guess, the majority of people. And then you would choose the right vessel and either tow it or take one of the vessels from the berth, if there's one there available, and go out and enjoy the water. But police at the same time.

**John Pratt:** [00:05:18] You just mentioned rescue as opposed to marine work. Are there any particular highlights that you could tell us about whilst you're attached to Marine and Rescue Services? Any big rescues or anything?

**Fiona Russell:** [00:05:27] I particularly liked the rescue side of it. There's sort of no better feeling than coming across a stricken vessel and being able to assist people because they're at their lowest and often quite frightened and you're out in pretty foul conditions. But as a team you usually get the job done, which is another aspect I really enjoyed was the teamwork that is involved. You're never out there on your own trying to deal with a dangerous situation.

**John Pratt:** [00:05:52] Is there any one particular rescue that stands out for you?

**Fiona Russell:** [00:05:55] I remember, gosh, there were lot, I do remember one that involved a child up at Slopen Island. And they really they'd come aground and they were out on Slopen. And it was two men and a child of only about eight years old. And they were absolutely petrified. That one just stands out for me because we had to leave the vessel so that was never salvaged, got them aboard and brought them back to Hobart. A couple of them required medical treatment.

**John Pratt:** [00:06:20] How about yourself, Matt? Are there any particular jobs or rescues that stand out for you?

**Matt Smith:** [00:06:24] The one that stands out for me was during an offshore patrol on the Cape Wickham where it was the first time I'd seen what we call an RDF radio directional finder work. So we actually got a ping on our own instruments on the Wickham that said there was an EPIRB that had been set off and it was only a couple of mile away and we managed to get there and see three people aboard an upturned catamaran that was sort of right next to the cliffs. And that one stands out to me because we got the people off obviously, and managed to tow the vessel, which was ruined. But it stands out because it was that bit of equipment and technology that actually saved those people. If we had waited for AMSAR or the JRC to respond and get back to us, it probably would have been too long. So that one stood out to me quite a bit.

**John Pratt:** [00:07:08] As I mentioned earlier, Matt, there's around 34 boats in the Tas Police fleet. Are you able to give us a bit of a rundown on those vessels and also the equipment on them?

**Matt Smith:** [00:07:17] Marine I suppose composes of, of the main central hub, I suppose I would call it for being Marine and Rescue down in Hobart and then there are some outlying spokes stations. Those stations have generally smaller boats which are either plastic sort of six metre outboard ones or some of them have the bigger seven metre leisure cats. And then we've got us in Hobart who have the majority of the fleet and we've got cats and a couple of the smaller rib, six seven metre rib boats as well as this Dauntless that we're sitting on now, which is the newest of the fleet, and then our larger offshore boats containing the Vigilant, which is next to us, the oldest one that we've got, the Cape Wickham and the Van Diemen, which are the two biggest, most capable offshore boats that we've got.

**John Pratt:** [00:08:01] So when you go to work on a daily basis, are you on the same boat every day or do you move around the different vessels?

**Matt Smith:** [00:08:07] No, not at all. That's I think that's what I was going to say with Fi. Day to day, we get a lot of freedom in Marine. It really does depend on the time of year, say what seasons are open or what people are likely to be doing in boats, the weather. So it's like Fi said, you basically get in the office, have a look at the weather, any reports, commercial fishing that's come in and where people are likely to be going. And that's sort of where we try and go as well.

**John Pratt:** [00:08:28] Fi, you were a police diver for just over seven years. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

**Fiona Russell:** [00:08:32] Yeah. So I joined the dive squad in 2005. Tas Police are very supportive of you gaining qualifications and I think particularly Marine and Rescue offer that. So we had Australian Diving accreditation scheme, which was a commercial ticket at the time and so I finished the course and gained that and then joined a squad of about, I think we had sort of 18 to 20 members and we'd be involved in all manner of things statewide. Anything that sort of required searching underwater, sometimes salvaging stolen cars. Yeah, it was a very good job and an actual highlight of my career.

**John Pratt:** [00:09:13] Police diving, certainly not something that's for everyone, like crawling around in farm dams in the middle of the night isn't always much fun. Can you tell us about a couple of the memorable jobs that you did?

**Fiona Russell:** [00:09:22] Yeah, that's very true. So a lot of the diving was blackwater, we call it, where you have no vision. You're very much reliant on control from the surface and your buddy diver. But there's some challenging aspects to that as well, because it's a really good feeling when you're able to find something that you're meant to locate, which is a piece of the puzzle for a larger investigation. For example, a firearm or a knife or something like that. So although it was challenging, there was some good results as well. But then on the flip side, occasionally we'd have something like training where we might choose a really nice location. One that really springs to mind, we got to go to a few times, sort of out of Pirates bay around to Waterfall Bay, and I'm sure it's probably some of the clearest water in the world because it was magnificent. So that would kind of make up for all the bad stuff.

**John Pratt:** [00:10:13] And one of the last questions for the day, and I think anybody that's worked in Marine and Rescue services gets asked this by just about everyone they deal with, what happens to the abalone fish and rock lobsters that are confiscated for being undersized or in excess of limits? Matt, can you tell us what happened?

**Matt Smith:** [00:10:28] They all get very professionally dealt with and it's generally if they're seized for evidence, they go in a freezer for any court or anything like that. If they're alive and there's been an offence committed with them, then we always try and throw them back.

**John Pratt:** [00:10:41] Yeah, I think it's probably pretty important to note that the role of Marine and rescue services is to protect the natural resources. So taking them and freezing them just for the sake of it doesn't really protect.

**Matt Smith:** [00:10:50] Yeah, exactly. Yeah. So if they are alive, we always try and throw them back.

**John Pratt:** [00:10:53] Fi, is there anything you'd like to say in relation to that?

**Fiona Russell:** [00:10:55] No. That was pretty much what was happening back when I was at Hobart Marine and continued that while I was stationed on King Island.

**John Pratt:** [00:11:03] Yeah, look, Marine and Rescue Services is certainly quite an unbelievable job. It's one where you get to sort of see all areas of the state in some of the nicest conditions and in some of the worst conditions. A lot of the time you do get to see people that are out there that are very happy to see you because they don't want to be out there at that particular time. And certainly for diving, as you mentioned Fi, is a great way to see some great parts of the state, but also swim in some areas that you don't actually see. Thank you very much, Matt and Fiona, for joining us today. It's been really great to talk to you.

**Fiona Russell:** [00:11:31] Pleasure.

**Matt Smith:** [00:11:32] Pleasure.

**John Pratt:** [00:11:37] That's it for today's episode. This is our final one for 2022. But don't worry, we'll be back in January with plenty of brand new episodes. We hope you have a great holiday and more importantly, a safe one if you'll be spending time on the roads.

**John Pratt:** [00:11:50] Remember the fatal five. Don't speed, don't drive distracted or tired. Wear your seatbelt and never drive after drinking or taking drugs.

**John Pratt:** [00:11:59] If you like what you heard today, please subscribe on your favorite podcast app. And while you're there, consider leaving us a review or a rating to let us know how we're going. You can also stay up to date with podcast episodes on our website at recruitment.police.tas.gov.au/podcast.