



Rob McMurray

It's cold. It's dark. You're floating in the ocean clinging to the hull of your upturned boat, praying that the bait that's spilled around you doesn't attract sharks. Any real hope of rescue won't present until dawn, when you can get inside the boat to retrieve the EPIRB and activate a search.

This scenario confronted Rob McMurray and his mates when a rogue wave capsized their boat off Green Island a few months ago.

"We found out just how fast accidents can happen," Rob recalled of the September incident.

"While I was retrieving the anchor using a retrieval device buoy around 9pm, a wave hit us and suddenly all four of us were in the water."

With the marine radio underwater, the men were left trying one thing after another, with a seemingly endless run of bad luck.

First they raised the V-sheet. A couple of yachts went past but the 6.4 metre boat wasn't sighted. Then they waited for dark to use distress flares, but they couldn't attract the attention of passing vessels.

After a terrifying night huddling together for warmth, Rob was finally able to retrieve the EPIRB from inside the cabin. Then the boat sank, leaving them anxiously treading water with only the V-sheet until the rescue helicopter arrived and winched them to safety 90 minutes later.

Rescue crews spotted the men from an altitude of 4000 feet. Ten hours after they left for an enjoyable fishing trip, at dawn the following day, their ordeal was over.

Rob concedes the outcome could have been much worse. Having the proper safety equipment at their disposal gave them several chances to raise an alarm. However had the safety equipment been in easy and immediate reach, the rescue may have happened sooner.

"I wouldn't have had to wait until daylight to set off my EPIRB if it was kept with all of my safety equipment," he said.

"Now my grab bag of safety equipment and EPIRB is always within easy reach. It could be the difference between an accident and a disaster."

Things can go wrong quickly. Rob and his mates were lucky because they had prepared for the possibility of an emergency.

His advice: "Be a responsible skipper. Use a safety grab bag to keep all your safety equipment together and accessible. Check your gear regularly before heading out so you can enjoy your day with peace-of-mind."