

QUEENSLAND DIVING ACCIDENTS

John Knight

July 1988 to June 1989

The Queensland Dive Tourism Association of Australia (QDTAA) has published a Dive Tourism Accident Bulletin which appeared in Neville Coleman's "Underwater Geographic" (ISSN 1032-5212) No 28, pages 72 and 73.

The QDTAA is to be congratulated on providing such a report. Unlike other diving accident reports there is a mention of the number of dives involved (250,000) but unfortunately this is just an estimate of dives carried out in Queensland in the time covered by the report, not a record of the number of dives performed under the auspices of the reporting companies. Minor injuries were probably under reported as 74.1% of the injuries were classified as serious.

In twelve months there were 27 accidents reported by members of the QDTAA, three of which were fatal. Two of these were attributed to drowning (one not on scuba and so classified as a minor accident) and one to cerebral arterial gas embolism (CAGE). The minor accidents reported were divided into non-scuba and minor injuries. Non-scuba included a death (mentioned above) while swimming, facial laceration from a trigger fish, an exploding scuba tank in a dive shop and a person reported lost and later found alive. At least three of these were very major problems for those involved and difficult to classify as minor incidents. Minor injuries were salt water aspiration, a bleeding ear and reverse ear squeeze.

Of the 20 serious accidents while using scuba 80% were decompression sickness (DCS). However the pie chart of major scuba-related accidents shows 10% were drownings and 10% CAGE so presumably one drowning was resuscitated and one CAGE victim survived leaving 16 cases of DCS.

Nearly 50% of the serious diving related accidents occurred off Cairns and over 35% off Townsville. These two centres provide the bases for most dives in Queensland.

Of interest is the fact that females outnumbered males in the ages groups 15-24 (M 2, F 5) and 25-34 (M 2, F 3) but in the age group 35-54 it was the other way round (M 3, F 1). But as the numbers are small it is quite possibly due to chance.

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The QDTAA report for July 1989 to June 1990 is now available. In this year there were 34 accidents, three fatal. One was attributed to drowning while the other two were

cardiac, which were classified as minor accidents as they were not related to scuba diving. 21 of the accidents (62%) were classified as serious. (13 DCS, 3 CAGE and 5 scuba related drowning or near-drowning). Besides the two cardiac deaths there were 11 other minor accidents, mostly salt water aspiration.

The estimate of recreational scuba dives, from regional membership and certification surveys, was about 884,000 dives in the twelve months. There were no statistical differences between the incidence of accidents between the two years.

Young (aged 15-24) and older (35-54) females outnumbered males in the accident statistics, but in the 25-34 age groups males predominated. However with 9 females (43%) to 12 males (57%) females, who are estimated to be about 25% of the Queensland diving population, are over-represented. The report draws attention to the fact that if the two years are combined it seems that females are three times as likely to have a major diving accident (usually DCS) than males. The QDTA is to be congratulated for drawing attention to this and recommending that there is a need for improved diving training for females.

This year the accident winner, if one can use the term, is Townsville with 10 accidents per 100,000 dives, up from just over six last year. This may be due to the fact that the boats that visit the Yongala wreck, which is in deep water, are mostly based in Townsville. Unfortunately no absolute figures for accidents by area are provided this year.

These reports, and an interesting table of the 1989 accidents are available from the Mr David Windsor, Secretary of the Queensland Dive Tourism Association of Australia (Inc.), PO Box 122, Chermside, Queensland 4032, Australia.

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THE DILEMMA OF THE PATENT FORAMEN OVALE

Michael Gatehouse and Tom Wodak

The SPUMS Journal, (Vol 19, No 4) contained two papers dealing with the latent condition, patent foramen ovale, (PFO), one by D.F.Gorman and S.C.Helps¹, and the other by D.Davies.² In addition a thought provoking editorial³ on the subject has prompted the writers to address the legal issues which PFO raises.