

Crisis Management Case Studies



Tropical Cyclone Ului, a Category 3 storm system with winds gusts of up to 200 kilometres, crossed the north Queensland coast at 1:00am, Sunday 21 March 2010. The impact caused widespread but moderate damage across the region and cut power for several days to an estimated 60,000 homes and businesses between Airlie Beach and Townsville.

Whitsunday Private Yacht Charters

www.whitsunday-yacht.com.au/

Whitsunday Private Yacht Charters is a boutique charter business specialising in skipper yourself boating holidays. Based at Abel Point Marina, Airlie Beach, the company has been operating for 20 years, with its current owners taking on the business six years ago.

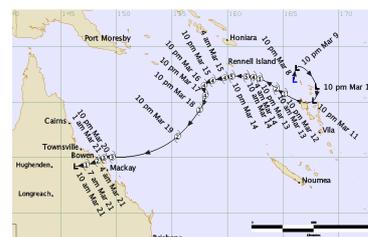
Staff numbers remain fairly consistent, though, in peak season the company operates with eight full time and five part time employees. The high turnover of charters usually requires an extra three to four part time cleaners.

1. Risk Management

Private Yacht Charters has a risk management plan for all its vessels. The plan covers crisis and incidents such as groundings, cyclones, medical emergencies, sinkings, hole in a vessel, persons overboard, fires, capsizing, dismasting, rigging failures, and storms.

2. Cyclone Warnings

Within the Whitsundays region seven bare boat companies make scheduled calls (scheds – pronounced skeds) to their charterers each morning and afternoon. Each operator has its own designated sched times but everyone using that particular radio frequency can tune in and hear all bulletins broadcasted. Once the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) issued a Cyclone Watch for Ului, the scheds were used to update charterers on its progress.



In addition to the BOM site, the management at Private Yacht Charters followed the bulletins of other USA-based weather sites and the Australian Government's Land Carers website.

3. Preparations

It can take up to three days to bring all the boats back to harbour and a good couple of days to lock down the vessels. All charter companies comply to an Agreement that sets down procedures to be followed, depending on weather conditions. The early warning meant charterers had a few days to come closer to shore.

On the preceding Wednesday, Ului shifted course and by Thursday was tracking towards the Whitsunday Coast. On Thursday morning the management team used its sched to call in all its vessels. Boat owners were also contacted and advised of the situation.

Once the boats were safely docked in harbour teams of two worked to lock down each vessel, each one taking three to four hours to complete. Headsails were taken down and dodgers, biminis, covers and awnings were either removed or tied down. Eight lines - sheet lines, spare lines, and extra mooring lines were used to doubled tie each vessel to its own four cleats. BBQ's were tied down, the main sails were wrapped and life rings were removed and stowed away. Outboard engines also removed from the dinghies before filling them with water and lowering them into the sea.

In the final hours, the office was packed up and secured and the computer server was backed up. The timing was perfect. The harbour closed on Friday.

4. The Impact

While Abel Point Marina sustained some damage, which was quickly attended to, Private Yacht Charters had no structural damage to their vessels.

Power was out until the Tuesday after Ului hit. There was no available fresh water for several days, but this had little impact on the business as the charters were out of action until the following Friday - enough time for all essential services to be back up and running.

The management had taken a hard copy list of boat owners, and charterers that were booked for the following week were contacted via mobile phone. The mobile was able to be charged using a 12volt battery - commonly used to generate the boat radio communications.

While charter operations were suspended there was no income flowing to the business and the boat owners wore the cost of the week-long shutdown.

5. Lessons Learned

No one at Private Yacht Charters had ever been through a cyclone before. Thankfully, the company was spared any structural damage to its vessels and could recommence operations within one week of the storm. However, they did learn a number of important lessons. These included:

1. The importance of shared decision making and including staff in on discussions and giving them a say, together with the need to trust your own decision making as the manager and make a call, even when it might over rule the consensus.
2. Without mains power Private Yacht Charters and its staff used a 12 volt battery with an inverter as a power source to recharge mobile phones.

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3. Post-storm, the company did not know what was going on because it had no access to TV, computers or a battery operated radio. Next time it will be prepared with a battery operated radio.
 4. Generally, across the region, if private boat owners had taken more care to prepare their vessels properly, a great deal of damage could have been avoided. Once a boat is left unattended and drags or breaks away from its moorings, it can cause a domino effect as it smashes into one boat and then that boat smashes into the next and so on.