

Maritime Rescue Institute
Coastal Notes – 12 January 2005

In common with the rest of the world, we watched in horror as the trauma of the tsunami unfolded on our television screens. It was almost too much to believe, yet the pictures were all too real and awful.

By a strange twist of fate, over the past 6 months MRI, along with KNRM, the Dutch Lifeboat service, has been having discussions with the Colombo International Nautical and Engineering College (CINEC) in Sri Lanka with a view to helping them to set up a Lifeboat Institution. The Dutch had donated 2 small RIBs, which had only just reached Sri Lanka; they were due to go into service in SW Sri Lanka. MRI's role was to have been to assist with both the initial training and the longer-term development of the coastal lifeboats.

However, the tsunami changed all that and thoughts turned to the best way to offer worthwhile support. Sri Lanka has lost around 23,000 of its fishing vessels as well as large numbers of its fishermen, along with much of its infrastructure. Not only do the boats have to be replaced, but also the skills. MRI is based within a fishing area and has past experience of fisheries development in Somalia, Tanzania, Yemen and Oman and can draw on a wide range of relevant skills – fishing techniques, boat building, engineering, harbour management to name but a few.

Sri Lanka's coastline is approximately 2,000 km, so it is clear that no one organisation can support all of that area. The concept evolved that MRI could possibly offer support to a coastal zone equivalent to our own Kincardineshire coastline – around 50km. This support would bring together multi-skilled resources that would work through CINEC to regenerate the beach communities, and also incorporate the infrastructure for the enhancement of waterways safety and search and rescue. Assistance has already been promised by the Dutch and Icelandic Lifeboat Organisations, as well as other Scottish coastal communities, the fishing industry, local authorities, the marine industry, along with politicians at local, national and international level.

Accordingly, this weekend representatives from MRI will leave for Sri Lanka for meetings with the relevant officials and community representatives, view the coastal region and compile an operational profile and project template. Once this has been done, the aim would be to get things started as quickly as possible. These people need help now, not 6 months down the line.

For further information or to get involved with MRI as a volunteer, please contact 01569 765768 or email hamish.mcdonald@btconnect.com.

Visit www.maritime-rescue-institute.org to find out more about the MRI.