

# COAST GUARD MARKS 200 YEARS OF LIFESAVING SERVICE

The Irish Coast Guard continues to celebrate its landmark bicentenary this year, its milestone 200 years of lifesaving service was marked at an event in Louth in September, which also saw the presentation of special commemorative service tokens to 950 volunteers nationwide in recognition of their valued service.



*The second annual report on the National Search and Rescue Plan shows evidence of inter-agency co-operation and training.*

Speaking at the bicentenary event at the Greenore Coast Guard Station in Louth, Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan TD said that the Irish Coast Guard Service remains a very critical part of Ireland's emergency response system.

"Last year, the Coast Guard reported a 12% increase in the overall number of incidents coordinated during 2021. Hardly a day goes by without hearing of the extraordinary work carried out bravely and selflessly by its staff and volunteers.

"Whether it's the rescue of someone from the sea, a cliff or mountain rescue, the provision of maritime safety broadcasts, ship casualty operations or the investigation of pollution reports, they provide a 24/7 service for, and on behalf of, the Irish people."

#### NATIONAL MARITIME SERVICES

Staff and volunteers from 44 Coast Guard units across Ireland provide a national maritime search and rescue service and a maritime casualty and pollution response service. Together, they respond to almost 3,000 callouts and save on average 400 lives a year.

Approximately half the number of callouts are in response to maritime incidents, a quarter are inland search and rescue while another quarter involve assisting the National Ambulance Service.

Today the Irish Coast Guard uses state-of-the-art technology to support its work. However, over the decades, its volunteers have had to rely on horse drawn carriages to carry equipment, climbing cliffs on ladders and line-firing rockets to reach grounded vessels, for example, in their rescue efforts. The 200th anniversary is an opportunity to reflect on the legacy and rich history of this crucial rescue service.

Modern volunteer Coast Guard units provide a combination of Rescue Boat, Cliff Rescue, Shoreline Search Capabilities, and Emergency Community Support in conjunction with the other emergency services.

The development in the use of small drones (Unmanned Aircraft Vehicles UAVs) provide the units with an enhanced search capability while Coast Guard helicopters provide 24/7 services out of four bases in Dublin, Waterford, Shannon and Sligo.

#### ONGOING COMMITMENT AND DEDICATION

Minister of State with responsibility for the Irish Coast Guard, Hildegard Naughton TD said that the work of one of the state's principal emergency services is both challenging and varied. She acknowledged the commitment of staff and volunteers for providing this crucial service and particularly for maintaining service



Staff and volunteers of the Irish Coast Guard pictured alongside Ministers Eamon Ryan and Hildegard Naughton at an event to celebrate 200 years of the Irish Coast Guard at Greenore Coast Guard Station in Louth.

crucial service and particularly for maintaining service delivery throughout the Covid pandemic.

"The dedication and commitment towards protecting people along our coastline and inland waters is palpable to say the least. I continue to hear stories of volunteers leaving their families at home at the dead of night, or on Christmas Day, to assist a person in difficulty; a fact that demonstrates the personal sacrifice that is made by our volunteers 365 days of the year. Without our volunteers we simply would not have this lifesaving service.

The Minister has also announced the publication of the second annual report on the National Search and Rescue Plan, submitted by the National Search and Rescue (SAR) Committee. The report shows evidence of inter-agency co-operation, made possible by the close bonds forged locally between the services and inter-agency training and exercising.

<https://www.emergency-services.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Search-and-Rescue-Plan.pdf>



Transport Minister Eamon Ryan pictured with Kevin Doherty and members of the Greenore Coast Guard Station (from left) Owen Connolly, Denise Fegan and Eddie Marmion as they mark the bicentenary of the organisation's lifesaving service.

# Irish Coast Guard

## GARDA CÓSTA na hÉIREANN

**About the Irish Coast Guard:** The Coast Guard's role is to provide maritime search and rescue, maritime casualty, and pollution response service. The Coast Guard is a division within the Irish Maritime Directorate of the Department of Transport.

The organisation can trace its roots to 1822 after the passing of the Coast Guard Act in London. Initially, the Coast Guard took on revenue protection and coastal defence duties and acted as a reserve force for the Royal Navy.

By 1860, there were approximately 200 Coast Guard stations around the country. However, many of these were attacked and destroyed during the War of Independence and Civil War. After the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, the Coast Guard along with its 109 remaining stations were handed to the Irish Free State and remained as the Coast Life Saving Service (CLSS).

In 1990, the Irish Marine Emergency Service (IMES) was established and in February 2000, this became Garda Costa na hÉireann, or the Irish Coast Guard (IRCG).

### Commemorative Proof of Service Wreck Token:

The token is based on original Proof of Service wreck tokens which were issued to all Coast Guard stations since 1822. When the Coast Guard members or members of the public attended to a rescue, the Officer in Charge would give all who attended the rescue a Proof of Service wreck token.

Anyone who was issued with a token would then hand it back to the Inspector when he next visited the Coast Guard station as proof of his/her attendance at a rescue. He/she would then be paid the appropriate amount in exchange for the token.

These tokens were maintained at each Coast Guard station. Two types were cast over the 200-year period and while both had a clipper on one side, the British version (1822-1922) had the Crown on the other side while the Irish version (post 1922) had the harp. Very few of these original tokens have survived, however they are an important part of the 200-year history of Ireland's Coast Guard service.

