



An Independent Lifeboat for the Broads

Following nine tragic drownings along the nearby North Sea beaches between 1971 and 1975, the Hemsby community took decisive action to improve local water safety. The first step was to form a local Rescue Service, initially operating with a 4.5m Avon inflatable, generously loaned by the local Sub Aqua Club.

Later that year, thanks to the support of the Norfolk Broads Lions Club, the Hemsby Inshore Rescue Service (HIRS) was officially established. This allowed the team to purchase their own vessel – a 5m *Avon Searider* RIB, powered by a 40hp Mercury outboard – aptly named *Sealion I*.

The 1980s marked a period of significant development for the service. One of the most important milestones was the official recognition of HIRS by HM Coastguard as a *Declared Facility*, making Hemsby an integral part of the UK Search & Rescue (UKSAR) organisation. This status means the station must adhere to the Coastguard Code of Practice for its operations and procedures, all of which are regularly monitored by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA).

Other notable achievements during the 1980s and '90s include the construction of a new lifeboat station and the acquisition of three successive replacement boats – *Sealion II, III, and IV*. Over this period, HIRS responded to more than 250 emergency call-outs, known as *shouts*.

Hemsby's role is somewhat unique, with over 70% of call-outs relating to incidents on the Norfolk Broads, in addition to those on the nearby beaches.

In 1999, a serious incident on Hickling Broad highlighted the need for a dedicated freshwater lifeboat, as the standard RIBs were not ideally suited to the shallow waters often encountered on the Broads. As a result, the turn of the century saw the introduction of the first *Lifeboat for the Broads*.

Today, this vital role is performed by a 14-foot *Seastrike/Goodchild Marine* dory – a very shallow draft aluminium rescue boat, powered by a 30hp outboard. The dory can be rapidly deployed to any of the 32 launch sites along the 125 miles of the Broads, towed by a *Mitsubishi L200* tow truck. On average, the Broads Rescue Boat responds to around 40 incidents every year.

Meanwhile, Hemsby's sea-going RIB (an *Atlantic 75* lifeboat) continues to respond to numerous off shore emergencies, operating in increasingly challenging conditions due to severe and on-going coastal erosion, which makes launching ever more difficult. With the current managed retreat strategy and no new sea defences planned, the entire Hemsby Lifeboat Station and its operations are now in the process of relocating – a project expected to take approximately a year.

The commitment and adaptability of the Hemsby Independent Lifeboat team remain at the heart of everything they do, ensuring the safety of all who enjoy the Norfolk Broads and nearby coastline.



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Contact: secretary@hemsbylifeboat.co.uk