



Terms of Reference for the Independent Review of Community Rescue Boats Ireland (CRBI)

Date: 27/1/2026

1. Background and Context

Community Rescue Boats Ireland (CRBI) describes a nationwide network of independent voluntary rescue services that support water-based search and rescue operations across Ireland. These units are established by local communities in response to water safety needs and some are categorised as 'Declared Resources' by the Irish Coast Guard (IRCG), allowing them to be tasked to incidents via Marine Rescue Coordination Centres.

Water Safety Ireland (WSI) is mandated under Article 4(1)(f) of the Water Safety Ireland (Establishment) Order 2019 (S.I. No. 56 of 2019), to provide instruction, training, assessment, and certification in aquatic rescue for community rescue boat crews. WSI also serves as the certifying body for the VAT Refund Scheme for rescue boat services under S.I. No. 249 of 2013 (Value Added Tax Refund of Tax Order).

Given the evolving landscape of marine emergency response Water Safety Ireland seeks an independent external review to evaluate CRBI's current operational model, governance, training effectiveness and inspection regime.

2. Purpose of the Review

The purpose of this review is to provide an objective, evidence-based assessment of:

- The effectiveness and efficiency of the current CRBI structure, governance, and operational practices
- The adequacy and consistency of VAT inspections, risk assessments, and operational audits.
- Whether WSI is fulfilling its statutory responsibility to deliver the level and standard of training required under legislation, including training, assessment, and certification in aquatic rescue for CRBI crews.
- The suitability of the current oversight model, specifically the role of WSI in the oversight of CRBI.
- The long-term strategic vision for CRBIs, including funding, training, and regulatory alignment.



3. Scope of the Review

The review will examine the following areas in detail:

3.1 Governance and Oversight

The statutory and operational basis for WSI's role in CRBI administration, including its legal training responsibilities under S.I. No. 56 of 2019. This will include assessing how IRCG's statutory authority, command structure, and coordination responsibilities under the National SAR Plan and related maritime legislation interface with WSI's administrative oversight.

3.2 Operational Effectiveness

Review of the Station Management Committee (SMC) structure, roles, and responsibilities. Assessment of operational readiness, crew training standards, and compliance with safety protocols. Examine the delivery, quality, and sufficiency of training provided by Water Safety Ireland (WSI) to CRBI crews and management personnel, as required under S.I. No. 56 of 2019, Article 4(1)(f). Determine whether WSI's training programmes and certification processes meet the national and international standards, including the Irish Coast Guard Rescue Boat Operational Guidelines 2024 expected of declared search and rescue services.

3.3 Inspections, Risk and Safety Management

Evaluation of the VAT inspection process, including adherence to Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (Rescue Boats and Related Equipment) Order 2013 and assessment of the process's adherence to statutory criteria, ensuring that all activities meet the required legal, financial, and operational standards. Assessment of Risk Assessment and Safety Management Systems as directed by the Irish Coast Guard Rescue Boat Operational Guidelines maintained by CRBI stations which are recognised as declared resources, including risk registers, inspection certificates, and compliance with national safety codes as required. Where risk assessments identify, evaluate, and control hazards to ensure rescue operations are conducted safely and in compliance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and ISO 45001:2018 standards and Safety Management System ensure continual improvement, documenting and reviewing safety procedures, responsibilities, and controls to maintain high operational safety standards. To assess if the VAT inspection and risk assessment processes could be reviewed together through a unified, evidence-based cycle to save time and resources while ensuring compliance and consistency.

3.3.1 Community Rescue and Recovery Craft Outside Declared Resource Status

There are a number of other community-based organisations across Ireland that operate Rescue and/or Recovery Craft. This review should consider the role, operational standards



and sustainability of these community operators, under the egis of WSI, within the broader rescue ecosystem.

3.4 Financial and Administrative Arrangements

The review should seek to examine all funding arrangements for CRBIs.

3.5 Future Strategic Direction

The review will identify and assess options for the long-term governance, operational alignment, funding and sustainability of Community Rescue Boats Ireland and Community Rescue and Recovery Craft Outside Declared Resource status.

The independent reviewer to propose a suitable governance and operational model, if based on the findings of this review, they identify a structure better suited to achieving efficiency, accountability, and sustainability in Ireland's community rescue framework.

3.6 Further Information

Call for Submissions and Submission Requirements

Water Safety Ireland invites suitably qualified and experienced individuals or organisations to submit proposals to undertake this independent review.

Submissions should clearly demonstrate the applicant's capacity to deliver an objective, evidence-based review in line with these Terms of Reference and should include, at a minimum, the following information:

3.6.1 Applicant Details and Credentials

- Name of individual / organisation and principal contact details
- Relevant professional qualifications, accreditations, and memberships
- Demonstrated experience in areas relevant to this review, such as emergency response, maritime or water safety operations, governance reviews, regulatory oversight, training standards, or public sector evaluations

3.6.2 Proposed Approach and Methodology

- An outline of the proposed methodology for conducting the review
- Details of how evidence will be gathered (e.g. document review, interviews, site visits, stakeholder engagement)
- Proposed reporting structure, including interim and final deliverables



3.6.3 Work Plan and Timeframe

- A proposed timeline for completion of the review, including key milestones
- Availability to commence the review within a timeframe agreed with WSI, and completion of same within 4 months.

3.6.4 Cost Proposal

- A detailed breakdown of costs and confirmation of whether costs are inclusive or exclusive of VAT

3.6.5 Additional Information

- Any additional information the applicant considers relevant to the assessment of their submission

Water Safety Ireland reserves the right to seek clarification or additional information from applicants and is not obliged to accept the lowest-cost or any submission received.

Any enquiries to be sent by email to: joannewalsh@watersafety.ie and rogersweeney@watersafety.ie

Final submissions to be sent to joannewalsh@watersafety.ie by 12pm Tuesday 24th February 2026.