

# Chopper rescues two Forth paddleboarders

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TWO paddleboarders who became stranded offshore were rescued by a helicopter after a 90-minute search.

The two women, believed to be in their 50s, got into trouble after weather conditions threw them almost three quarters of a mile offshore between Musselburgh and Inchkeith.

Maritime Rescue in Aberdeen received a mobile call at 11.30am yesterday and the pair remained in contact throughout, although the line was patchy due to rough seas and harsh winds.

Initially the South Queensferry lifeboat was deployed and after an unsuccessful half an hour search, a second lifeboat, from Kinghorn, was sent out.

However after this also proved ineffective, a Royal Navy Sea King helicopter from Prestwick with infra-red sensors was sent to sweep the area.

The helicopter soon became crucial to the search as the high waves made it difficult to determine the paddleboarders' location.

And as they became increasingly exhausted it became harder for them to communicate.

The paddleboarders were eventually found lying on their boards in the water about five miles north-east of Portobello.

The pair were both returned to safety and taken to the Edin-

burgh Royal Infirmary, where they were treated for suspected hypothermia.

Kinghorn lifeboat helmsman Neil Chalmers said: "This was a good example of team work between the various search assets. Queensferry lifeboat was initially tasked to search off Joppa, but once on-scene, the poor search conditions led to the request for Kinghorn lifeboat and the Royal Navy helicopter to assist.

"Conditions were difficult, with a force 4 southerly wind creating waves up to 1.2 metres high, along with spray and a strong sunlight.

"Soon after the arrival of the helicopter, the two females were located. The helicopter crew requested the two lifeboats to assist with recovering the casualties and their boards, before assessing them.

"Both casualties were found to be very cold, and in the early stages of hypothermia, so the decision was made to recover them both to the helicopter for rapid evacuation to hospital. Both were winched from Kinghorn lifeboat, and flown directly to the ERI."

He added: "The two casualties were reasonably well equipped, but we would always recommend taking a handheld VHF radio, rather than relying on a mobile phone, and checking the weather forecast before participating in water sports like this."