

— Excalibur pair want answers for dead mates —

Crew sues boatbuilder

TWO Melbourne sailors who lost their best mates in the *Excalibur* yachting disaster three years ago will sue the boatbuilder for unspecified damages.

John Rogers and skipper Brian McDermott miraculously survived the capsizing after the boat's keel snapped off 40km off the New South Wales coast, northeast of Port Stephens, on September 16, 2002.

The sailors' lifelong friends Peter McLeod and Christopher Hayes, and two female crew members, drowned when the boat overturned in a matter of seconds.

Mr Rogers and Mr McDermott floated in 6m waves for seven hours awaiting rescue.

The pair will start court action today against the engineering companies that built *Excalibur*, and managing director Alex Cittadini, for lost earnings, and pain and suffering.

Mr Rogers, 53, had

Patrick O'Neil

known Mr McLeod and Mr Hayes since his early 20s and met Ann Maree Pope and Tracy Luke through the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron.

He said he was still haunted by their deaths.

An inquest into the tragedy has heard a structurally unsound keel, which had been cut and re-welded, was to blame for the \$1 million ocean racer capsizing.

The inquest heard the owner and crew were not told and it was only a matter of time before the keel broke.

Mr Rogers likened the re-welding of a keel to snapping off the wing of a 747 plane, sticking it back on and hoping for the best.

"It was a disaster waiting to happen and we weren't told anything," he said. "We want to get to the bottom of who cut it, why it was cut and why we weren't told about it."

Mr McDermott, 52, said the vessel was a time bomb.

"John and I got out — we were lucky," he said.

"There's normally 10 crew on board, so more lives could have been lost. It tears me up quite a bit."

As the men turned the 15m yacht in high winds on September 16, 2002, the boat inverted in a matter of seconds when the keel fell off, trapping four crew members.

Mr Rogers and Mr McDermott suffered hypothermia and were almost run over by a 60,000-tonne bulk carrier sent to their aid before being rescued.

The inquest, expected to conclude this month, is yet to find who cut and re-welded the keel.

The yacht's builders have all denied involvement.

Those responsible could face manslaughter charges and huge fines.

Lawyer Lee Flanagan, of Arnold Thomas & Becker, said his clients' lives would never be the same. "This incident has devastated my clients," he said.



Survivors: John Rogers and Brian McDermott. Picture: FIONA HAMILTON

Vitamin alert for women

WOMEN have been warned that taking B vitamins to ward off heart attack might actually increase the risk.

Norwegian researchers told a European Society of Cardiology meeting in Sweden that heart attack survivors who took high doses of vitamin B6 and folic acid together for three years were more likely to develop problems including a second heart attack or stroke.

Prof Kaare Harald Bonna, from the University of Tromso, led the research.

"We have found treatment with B vitamins does not prevent heart attacks, contrary to expectations, and may do more harm than good," he said.

The high doses used in the study were double the amount that people could buy over the counter.

Heroin in shoes

A MAN accused of smuggling 1kg of heroin into Australia in the soles of his shoes appeared in court yesterday.

The NSW man, 53, was selected by Customs Officers after arriving at Sydney Airport on a flight from Singapore.

An X-ray of his shoes led to the discovery of the heroin, according to a joint statement by Customs and the AFP.

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