

Text by Simon Pridmore

**There are times when conditions on a dive may become challenging, and divers must decide whether to abort the dive. Simon Pridmore offers insights and advice on how to handle such situations and how to abort dives in a safe way.**

It was the second dive of a long-anticipated trip, and the site was Mioskon Island in Indonesia's Dampier Strait—one of the crown jewels of the area known as Raja Ampat or Four Kings. This is where new arrivals often get their first glimpse of the vast volume and variety of life in the waters of this protected patch of northwest Papua.

This relatively shallow, encircling reef is also where many divers see a wobbegong shark for the first time. Justifiably, expectations can be sky-high for a dive at Mioskon. Normally, it is a benign site—the current is mild enough to ensure that the schooling fish come close enough to the reef for you to see them, but not so strong as to cause any problems. On most dives here you would not even notice the current.

## **A full moon**

But this was not a normal day. There would be a full moon rising over Raja Ampat that night, and many dive operators were avoiding the popular submerged pinnacle sites in the strait

for fear of awkward strong currents. So Mioskon was busier than usual. A dozen tender boats were drifting just offshore, waiting to pick up post-dive passengers, lined up like tour busses at Disneyland.

Unusually, they had all dropped their divers at the same spot, because on this particular day at Mioskon, the speed of the prevailing current had shrunk the sheltered—and therefore diveable—section of

the reef to just a few hundred metres.

The group of seven—a guide and six diving customers—entered the water near the top of the reef and descended. As they drifted along, they came upon divers from other

# Abort!

*A Dive Truncated...*





Group of divers reef-hooking in strong current.



SIMON FRIDMORE

groups. Everyone was getting in each other's way, all the gear looked the same, they were finding it difficult to stay together and the guide was working hard to keep the group united. The current was becoming erratic and unpredictable, and twenty minutes or so into the dive, one of the seven divers lost control of his buoyancy. The guide went to help the diver and stayed close to him after that.

### Splitting up

As they went deeper, beyond 20m, the group eventually became divided into three mini-groups: the guide plus one, a buddy pair next to the reef, and the remaining three divers close to the sandy seabed. The visibility was good, and they could all see each other, but the current had become stronger. Soon it reached a point where everyone had to cling to a rock to stay in place. Nobody was having any fun. They had reached the end of the reef line. There was nothing interesting to see and if they let go of their rocks and allowed the current to take them, they would be swept out into open water.

They were still only halfway through the planned dive time, but they were all more than halfway through their air. Although the goals of the dive had not yet been met—they had seen no wobegongs nor schooling fish—it was now clear that they were not going to be achieved. There was only one sensible thing to do.

The guide signalled to the buddy pair on the reef that they should all ascend, making their way slowly up the reef, hand over hand if necessary, taking advantage of the shelter afforded by reef outcrops, and end the dive. He then signalled to the other three divers that this was what he was planning.

### A dilemma

The three divers had a decision to make. They could swim across the sand towards the reef and against the current and re-join the guide, or they could just make a blue water ascent from where they were. The first option would be hard work and they would probably use a lot of their remaining air just to get back to the reef. The second option would separate the team,

but all three of them were confident, experienced divers and the guide evidently had good control of the rest of the group.

They looked at each other. One diver raised a thumb and the other two immediately agreed. Three thumbs up. Blue water was the call. They quickly made sure the guide had seen them, let go simultaneously and were immediately carried off. They watched as the reef quickly disappeared behind them, assumed the ascent posture—head up, fins down—glanced up and started kicking gently towards the surface, forming a loose triangle, each keeping the other two in view and just beyond arm's length.

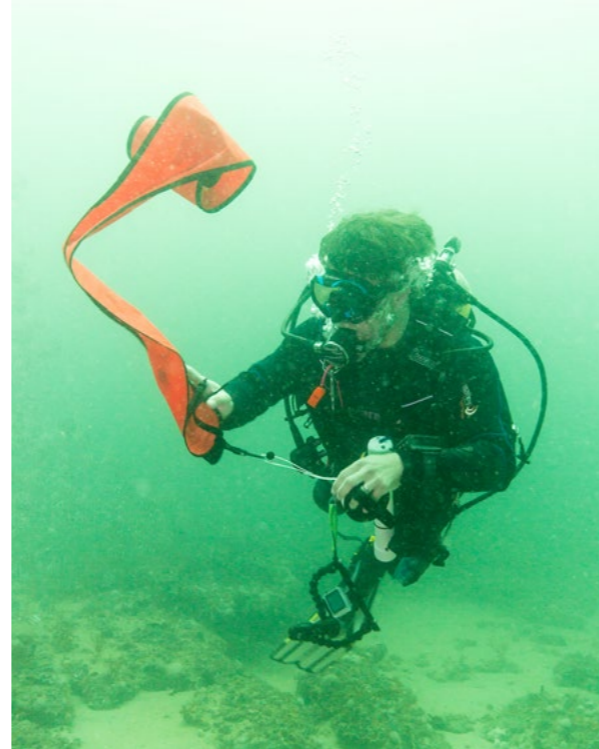
It soon became clear that the current was not just sweeping them laterally, it was carrying them down. They stayed calm and started using a more powerful kick, watching the depth reading on their computers closely. At first, they continued to sink but after a minute or so they could see that they were now making progress and gradually getting shallower. It was still slow going, but they were in no hurry.

Diver deploying a surface marker buoy (SMB) (right).



PETER SYMES

When deploying an SMB, look up to make sure the path is clear of boats and divers.



ERIC HEUFEL / FLICKR / CC BY-NC 2.0 DEED

A quick air check showed that they were all at around 60 bar and moving in the right direction.

At 15m one of the divers pulled out a surface marker buoy and attached a reel and line. The other two moved away a little but stayed level to give the diver with the reel a steady depth reference. The diver looked up to make sure the path was clear of boats and divers, then shot the buoy to the surface.

### Hailing a tender boat

The three of them ascended together, made a safety stop and surfaced. They were a long way from Mioskon. Rain was falling and there was mist on the water.

Now they had two important tasks. One was to attract the attention of a tender boat. But the second task took priority, and that was to make sure they were not run over by a tender boat, or a big dive boat for that matter. They were well aware of how much traffic there was around them.

So, the other two divers inflated their surface marker buoys and they all started blowing their whistles. After a few minutes a tender came towards them. It was not theirs, but that was irrelevant. They waved it

## A New Dive Book from Simon Pridmore

"Simon Pridmore's new book, *Technically Speaking* is an outstanding tour de force from one of modern diving's most accomplished practitioners and best-selling authors."

— David Strike, Oztek & Tekdive Convenor

"Simon has completed a complex task with consummate skill and has accurately unravelled the when's, the who's and some of the why's, much of which would have been unjustifiably lost in the mists of time if not for this work."

— Kevin Gurr, Technical Diving Inventor & Innovator

"It will take some doing to better this account of tech's first steps... as no matter how much you know or think you know; you will still find many obscure historical gems..."

— Kevin Denlay, Early Adopter & Wreck Finder

*Technically Speaking* is the latest book from best-selling Scuba series author Simon Pridmore. It is a selection of themed talks telling the early history of technical diving—where it came from, how it developed, how it expanded across

the world, who the important movers were and how, in the decade from 1989 to 1999, the efforts of a few determined people changed scuba diving forever.

These ten years saw the greatest shake-up the sport has ever seen but technical diving's road to universal acceptance was anything but smooth, many obstacles had to be overcome and there were times when even viewed in retrospect, it seemed that its advocates might fail in their mission. Ultimately, success came down to per-

severance, people power, good timing and more than a little luck.

Available in hardback, paperback and ebook at **Amazon Worldwide, Apple, Kobo, and Tolino.** See **SimonPridmore.com**



over and told the crew what boat they were from.

Soon they were picked up and rejoined the rest of the group—who had made an uneventful ascent up the reef with the guide—on the main dive boat.

When the three divers noticed how much air they had left, they found they each had just under 30 bar.

"Just enough!" one said. They all laughed.

### Good decisions

They had just enough air because they had made some very good decisions.

1. They decided to end the dive prematurely. They lived to dive another day.
2. They did not hesitate when it was obvious that there was no point in continuing.
3. They decided to ascend directly, rather than risk wasting air by trying to get back to the reef against the current.
4. When one decided to go up, the others did not argue, nor did they delay. They followed the golden rule, one up—all up.
5. They did not panic or get stressed when the current started taking



PETER SYMES

Once divers are at the surface, deploying more buoys makes it easier for searchers on the dive boat to find the divers (file photo)

6. They watched their computers to make sure they were heading up, rather than relying on instinct or feeling.
7. They raised only one surface marker buoy up from their depth, as they were close together and they wanted to avoid the risk of multiple lines becoming entangled.
8. They put the buoy up early to show where they were and to give themselves an ascent reference.
9. Once at the surface, they put up

- three buoys to give searchers a larger target to see.
10. They used their whistles because in low-visibility situations, sound can alert watchers to the direction they should be looking in.

### Lessons learned

Having less than 100 bar in your cylinder at 20-plus metres in a raging current that is carrying you along is very different from having less than 100 bar when you are in complete control in calm water.

- Air is time and wasting time by delaying decisions is wasting air.
- Air is time and getting stressed wastes air.
- Acting as a team and trusting your team members is key.

The dive is not over when you start your ascent. It is not even over when you reach the surface. It is only over once you are back on the dive boat.

Until you are back on the dive boat, you need to stay alert. At no point can you stop concentrating and think-

## NEW 4 in 1!

Simon Pridmore has released a new single-volume e-book, bringing together four books in his bestselling *Scuba* series:

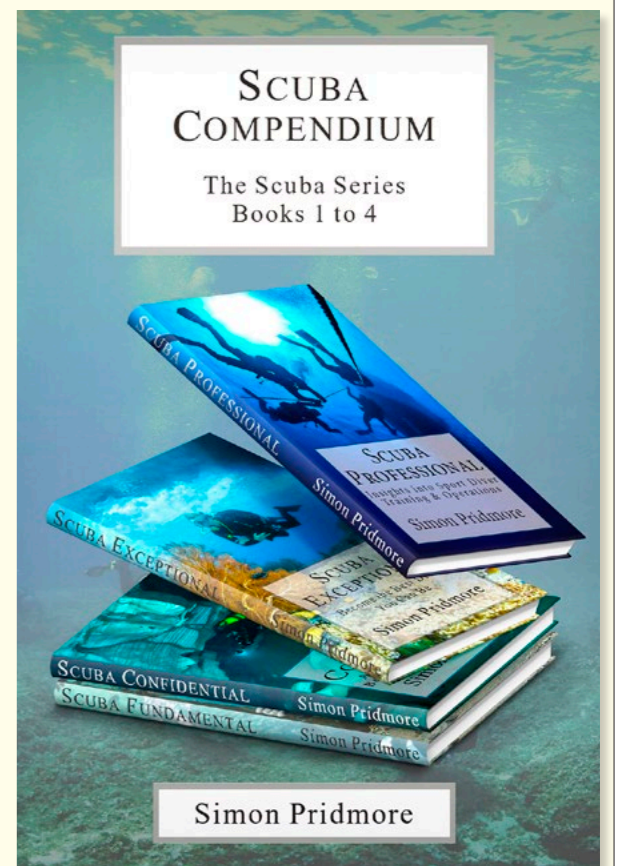
- *Scuba Fundamental – Start Diving the Right Way*
- *Scuba Confidential – An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver*
- *Scuba Exceptional – Become the Best Diver You Can Be, and*
- *Scuba Professional – Insights into Sport Diver Training & Operations*

As Simon puts it, this is “a remastering and repackaging of the original albums rather than a greatest hits.” Nothing is missing. *Scuba Compendium* gives e-book readers the advantage of being able to access all the knowledge contained in the four books in one place, making this a unique and easily searchable work of reference for divers at every level.

Simon has always promoted the idea of safer diving through the acquisition of knowledge, which is why he has chosen to release this highly accessible version. If you have read his work before, you will know that he provides divers with extremely useful advice and information, much

ing about where you are and what dangers you may face—such as an unexpectedly strong current or a speeding dive tender in low visibility. ■

*Simon Pridmore is the author of the international bestsellers Scuba Fundamental: Start Diving the Right Way, Scuba Confidential: An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver, Scuba Exceptional: Become the Best Diver You Can Be, and Scuba Professional: Insights into Sport Diver Training &*



of it unavailable elsewhere; his points often illustrated by real life experiences and cautionary tales. He examines familiar issues from new angles, looks at the wider picture and borrows techniques and procedures from other areas of human activity.

E-book File Size: 5298 KB  
Published by Sandsmedia  
Sold by: **Amazon, Kobo, Tolino** & others  
ASIN: B09DBGHJSC

**simonpridmore.com**

*Operations, which are now available in a compendium. He is also the co-author of the Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Bali and the Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Raja Ampat & Northeast Indonesia. His recent published books include The Diver Who Fell From The Sky, Dive into Taiwan, Scuba Physiological: Think You Know All About Scuba Medicine? Think Again! and the Dining with Divers series of cookbooks. For more information, please visit his website at: **SimonPridmore.com**.*

