

A New rescue vessel that will be crewed by volunteers was officially launched at Findhorn at the weekend.

The 18ft rigid inflatable could prove a lifesaver for sailors and watersport enthusiasts who get into trouble in Findhorn Bay or the inshore waters of the Moray Firth. It will be operated by the Moray Inshore Rescue Organisation, formed less than a year ago with the aim of setting up a rapid-response rescue service.

Findhorn is one of the most popular yachting centres on the Moray Firth coast, and there have been a number of incidents in recent years where boaters have had to be rescued.

A steering committee raised £30,000 to purchase the twin-engined inflatable and the necessary safety equipment.

The vessel has been named in memory of businessman and Royal Findhorn Yacht Club member Glyn Whitehead, 62, who died in a yachting accident nearly three years ago. His body was recovered two weeks after his yacht was found drifting unmanned off Findhorn.

Saturday's naming ceremony was performed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's Inverness sector manager, Mike Armitage, with the help of Mr Whitehead's widow, Jeanne.

Mr Armitage said the new vessel had the capability of operating in shallow inshore waters because of its size and would prove a valuable addition to the existing rescue services provided by the Coastguard, the lifeboat service and the helicopter search-and-rescue unit at nearby RAF Lossiemouth.

Tim Negus, chairman of the team that will operate the service, said the response to fund-raising for the new vessel had been remarkable, with large donations from a number of sources, including HIE Moray and the Moray Firth Partnership.

"Raising money is only part of the story and it has been a major team effort to turn the early ideas we had into reality," Mr Negus said.

"We have now reached the stage where we have been able to purchase and equip the boat and provide equipment for crew members.

"Our next phase will be to work up our operational capabilities and procedures to a standard that meets the very exacting requirements of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency."