**Five days of hell**

**JEREMY PIERCE**

THE Australian survivor of a sailing tragedy in the Philippines has told how he begged his dying mate to live “because he owed me a beer.”

Speaking for the first time about the ordeal, Cairns boatie Laurie Miller said he had spent five days in a life raft being smashed by a typhoon only for his mate Anthony “Johnny” Mahoney to die in hospital hours after their rescue by a Filipino fishing boat.

Mr Miller and Mr Mahoney were delivering a yacht to the Philippines with the boat’s new owner. Lionel Ansselin, in December last year when disaster struck.

It was Mr Miller who made the decision to abandon the sinking ship in the face of the typhoon and it still keeps him awake at night as he mourns the mate who never made it home.

“When you’re out in the deep blue you find out a lot about a man,” he said.

“Out there, the bulls--- stops. And there was no bulls--- about Johnny.”

In the hospital, I stood by his bed and told him to get his a--- in gear because he owed me a beer. But he never regained consciousness.

“I believe I did the right thing (in abandoning ship), but I wonder whether I could have done better, or more.”

Mr Ansselin bought the luxury yacht Katerina in Newcastle and hired a crew to deliver it to his home in the Philippines.

Mr Miller, 69, and Mr Mahoney, 73, got involved when the original crew deserted.

Both men had more than 50 years sailing experience.

The trio set sail from Cairns on November 24.

Early on December 13, Mr Miller discovered Katerina was taking on water. At midday he called to abandon ship.

The trio set off an EPIRB rescue beacon before launching the liferaft but within hours, they had been repeatedly flipped by cyclonic seas, and lost most of their supplies.

After five days two Filipino men in a fishing boat came to their aid.

As they made the five-hour journey to land, Mr Mahoney’s health declined.

The three men were rushed to hospital but there was nothing they could do for Mr Mahoney, who had suffered severe dehydration and organ failure.

Mr Miller plans to return to sea next week to help deliver a boat to Fiji.

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