

# UFO visits our Cherub champs

New Zealand yachtsmen Phil McNeill and Bill Wallace thought something fishy was going on when their yacht struck a UFO in the middle of the world Cherub championships off Brisbane.

They later learned that the unidentified fish object which shook their 3.7 metre Cherub was a dugong — one of the rarest sea animals in the world which can weigh more than 450kg.

Australia is one of the few places the dugong or sea cow is found.

"We didn't know what had struck us," said Phil McNeill.

"I've never even heard of a dugong before and no one told us we'd ever hit one out here. We barely saw the thing, just felt it and saw all this water rush up before us.

"The thing disappeared, then our rudder just dropped off," said McNeill.

McNeill and Wallace were about 2km offshore and in the last stage of a heat of the championships when the broken rudder forced them to drop out.

It was particularly bad luck for the pair, who have a good chance of winning the world series.

Three of the seven heats have been held. McNeill and Wallace have won two in their home-built



A dugong

Cherub Foreign Affair and were leading in the heat when they hit the dugong.

McNeill: "We were so pleased with ourselves. We had pulled up from third to first and were well out ahead . . . then we hit that dugong."

Foreign Affair's wins have been outstanding, according to series liaison officer Mr Danny McKeown.

Most cherub races are won by only a few seconds, but New Zealand won the first 12-mile race by 4m 11 sec. Their other winning margin was 18 seconds.

McNeill and his 17-year-old partner Bill Wallace are both from the Bay of Islands, but do most of their sailing in Auckland waters.

The championships end on Sunday.

PH