

THE NEW ZEALAND BRAVERY MEDAL (N.Z.B.M.)

William John (Bill) GILCHRIST

Date of action: 27 October 2002

Date of award: 23 October 2005

Citation

On 27 October 2002, Mr Gilchrist, aged almost 70 at the time, rescued a man from the surf off the Arawhata River. The man had been swept into the river while whitebaiting. Despite trying to swim to safety, he was carried out by the strong current into the surf on the river bar. The river was running higher than usual because of heavy rain the previous night and the sea was significantly rougher than normal. The man's family noticed what had happened and tried to persuade other whitebaiters with boats to go to his rescue. All but one, Mr Gilchrist, declined because of the dangerous conditions. The man had managed to stay afloat on his back in the cold water for approximately 15 minutes before Mr Gilchrist reached him in his small aluminium dingy. He called out for the man to hold on to a handle on the back of the boat, as conditions were too rough for the man to attempt to climb aboard. At this stage a wave broke over the top of the dingy, which was nearly swamped. Despite the conditions, Mr Gilchrist managed to tow the man up the river for a few hundred metres to the safety of the river bank.