Searchers continued to probe Lake Alexandrina Tuesday morning for a man missing after a canoeing tragedy at the weekend claimed the lives of three girls.

But a police spokesman said that as time went on hopes were fading.

One of the three who died in the mishap was Ian Styles, 16, of Willunga.

The names of the others were being withheld at the request of relatives.

The four were among a group of 11 believed to be members of Willunga Venturer Scout Group — who left Hindmarsh Island about half an hour after the canoe, apparently beached for the island and via canoes to it and from Mundoo island.

They stopped at an island for lunch.

The group was blown off course by a strong squall, got into difficulties, and were separated.

It is understood some of the craft were swamped.

Two boys managed to get to shore near Point McLeay and raised the alarm at about 4.10pm.

A search began and subsequently built up to include 70 people from the CPS, SES, SA Police, local farmers, and nine boats, some of which were attended by local experienced fishermen with good knowledge of the area to be searched.

They were backed up by a RAAF helicopter equipped with night vision equipment.

About 3.43am, a girl was found alive near the shore of Loveday Bay.

The bodies of a boy aged about 13 and Ian Styles were found in the same area about 10.40am, and the body of a 30-year-old man, one of the group leaders, was located in the area soon after 11.45am.

About midnight, the helicopter located three girls and a boy alive on Whyalla island.

Still missing is a 40-year-old man, the leader of the group.

The search continued during the night and resumed at first light on Sunday.

It included the use of a helicopter, fixed wing police aircraft, surface craft and a foot search along the shoreline until conditions forced the withdrawal of the aircraft, followed by the helicopter, and later cancellation of the search last in the afternoon.

Search resumed on Monday, the bulk of it being done by helicopter and on foot along the shore.

All canoeists were believed to be wearing lifejackets.

Chief commissioner for the SA Scout Association Mr Robin Master said the association had launched an investigation into the tragedy that would focus on training procedures, safety policies, and regulations.

Of the weekend tragedy, he said the weather in the morning was calm.

The group’s training should have made them aware of weather reports.

It was never intended that the canoeists would enter Lake Alexandrina — they had planned to travel from Hindmarsh Island to that island and then via canoes to Mundoo, where they would camp overnight, and back to Hindmarsh Island.

Where they had intended to go was sheltered waters.

Meanwhile Victor Harbor Sea Rescue Squadron members believe the squadron should have been called into the search.

“We have boats in the water on Hindmarsh Island, about 2kms from where it all happened,” a squadron spokesman said.

“A boat could have been in the area in something like 45 minutes after leaving Hindmarsh Island.

“We could also have towed an inflatable craft over the barriages to the area, and that would not have been far behind it.”

The squadron first learned of the tragedy only in a roundabout way at midnight, and was not called in at any stage.

The spokesman said depending on clothing and conditions it would be reasonable to expect that a person could survive in the water for about three hours.

Squadron craft could have been there within the hour if called promptly, and would have given those in the water a chance, no matter how slim, he said.

He also said there was the question of the weather.

It was known since last Wednesday that the weather was not shaping up well and forecasts on Thursday and Friday were worse.

The squadron had planned an exercise in the area for Saturday but cancelled it on Friday night because of the weather, and held an alternative exercise.

The spokesman said that contrary to some people’s beliefs the waters where the tragedy occurred were not sheltered waters — they could be nasty.