

28 April 2022

Dear Paddlers

AO National Marathon Championships 2022

This is a Joint Statement with AOCRA and our host partner; Port Stephens Race Event team to update you on a couple of very important matters regarding the National Marathon Championships at the end of May. There is some confusion and miscommunication occurring on many social media platforms, so we understand it is important to clarify information and provide you with correct facts.

Short Course Race 12 kms

The National Marathon Championships is a 3-day racing calendar that is programmed to provide a race or multiple races for all our members to participate. Our membership is diverse in skill level which includes our most experienced paddlers that want to get out and chase bumps to our Novice paddlers that are new to the sport. It is essential we provide a race program with varying degrees of difficulty to attract all our paddlers to participate. It is important to note that the Short Course event is fundamentally a race to attract new paddlers to our sport and provide them with a pathway to race longer marathon distances.

For those of you that may not have paddled at Port Stephens there are various challenges that the area can provide both inside the heads and outside the heads, however the area outside the heads is not comparable to traditional waterways of Mooloolaba. The rock cliffs and islands make for any swell outside being more treacherous than a lot of waterways. Therefore, the decision to host the Short Course inside the heads is all about safety, paddler welfare and offering an event that allows all skill levels to compete.

It is imperative that our coaches understand their responsibility in putting crews on the water, ensuring they have passed all of the required pre-requisites to paddle and the crew with the steerer are capable of handling the conditions of the day.

Three years ago, the worst safety incident in NSW was in a short course event that went outside the heads and consequently had very serious and major accidents with numerous boats huli requiring on-water rescue. We were fortunate to have no loss of life or permanent personal impairment resulting from this event but also learnt a lot about on-water safety.

The inside waters of Port Stephens certainly present a challenge and our event team have assessed these challenges with appropriate support in place to offer a safe course for our Novice and lesser experienced paddlers. If on the day of a Short Course event, the wind and swell conditions represent a low and acceptable risk the Race Directors with AO Events team have the discretion to change the course and run an alternative route outside the heads, but only if it is assessed that safety can be maintained in relation to the skill level of all crews. The reason that Short Course events are not shown in Open Waters as a first option, is it is not usual for the ocean to be exceptionally calm at Port Stephens.

AO Events and Port Stephens teams are putting in many hours to make this event as successful as possible and are always open to constructive communication if you have any queries. However, incorrect and negative information being spread on social media does not benefit the sport in any way at all.

The 3 days of racing with celebrations on Saturday night is shaping up to be a great program with varying challenges for all our paddling community and we look forward to seeing you all in Port Stephens.

Yours In Paddling



Janine Nikora

AO National Events



Tony Compton

Port Stephens Race Director

