

Additional Response to Question 7.1 (Survey)

Subsequent to a broad email consultation with our members, the vast majority of our class wish to add the following:

Our Sport is in Decline.

We see these as the largest problems facing sailing in NZ:

- 1) Too many young sailors leave the sport of sailing just after they leave Starlings – perhaps 90% of them. This disastrous situation has persisted for some years now.
- 2) Many clubs are struggling to keep up activities, with dwindling numbers of sailors and volunteers to man rescue boats, etc.
- 3) Preferred YNZ senior classes, with the exception of the Laser, have very poor retention rates for active sailors.
- 4) Our medal tally at the Olympics has dwindled.

We would like to suggest a positive way to correct this situation.

We believe a good part of the reason for all four problems is that there is an over-emphasis on elite sailors and elite classes. It is understandable, because more medals mean more funding, and fewer medals mean less funding. As a result YNZ is more or less forced by external funding factors to concentrate on the short-term need to get medals at the next Olympic or International competition.

This short-term formula simply has not worked.

Given the dictates of the funding methods, it is not our intention to blame YNZ. However, we think that the whole system needs to be reviewed independently. We would also say that the funding bodies need to review their part in this too.

NZ Classes and the YNZ “Sailing Tree”

The Laser is the only senior class on the YNZ tree that can claim to be broadly popular. The 470 has had every status advantage plus YNZ promotion for well over twenty years now, but where are the large 470 fleets in ‘grass-roots’ club sailing?

By and large, normal sailors prefer classes other than those YNZ promotes. The few seniors who are keeping local club sailing alive are generally not sailing classes promoted by the YNZ tree. (Laser excepted.) This means that by promoting the tree, YNZ is failing to promote broad participation in our sport. By pushing its set classes, YNZ has unintentionally reduced the numbers of boats sailing.

Successful Olympic Countries

Among the most successful Olympic yachting countries in recent years have been the U.K. and Brazil.

The UK has 107 recognised dinghy classes, covering ISAF, manufacturers' classes and their traditional classes (similar to NZ-based classes). We understand that every one of their Olympic sailors sails in one of those traditional classes each year. The British have a healthy, broad participation in their sport, which leads to success.

We understand that Brazilian Sailors commented that they did not sail Olympic courses much, either sailing on local club courses in tricky conditions, or at sea on long-legged courses where they learnt to feel the rhythm of the wind and waves and their boats. This supports our hand-written response to 7.1 on the survey sheet.

Loss of young sailors

When young teenagers compete to become future Russell Coutts and Chris Dicksons, there is an immediate need to achieve results, and of course in a large fleet only one boat can win. The end result is that the others are failures, and they leave.

Preferably, all these young sailors should have fun and enjoy their sailing. In fact we think that grass-roots sailing at small clubs was what fuelled the era up to the point of Barnes/Jones/Dickson. In that earlier era, top sailors who were winning in all sorts of classes would move to the Olympic Classes automatically.

We feel that indigenous classes have not been encouraged by YNZ. They have been seen as detracting from Olympic exploits. We note that there is no mention at all of 'Classes' in YNZ's four key goals.

Changes needed

We believe that the U.K.'s success proves the point that Olympic medals are the end-product of a healthy system. We now need to promote broad participation in sailing, rather than persist with our current policies.

We used to have a lot of popular classes that gave NZ a large pool of yachtsmen from which to draw talented sailors for the Olympics, etc. For various reasons, that pool is now all but gone. We need to rebuild it, and have more people in the talent pool.

We believe that a new effort needs to be made to get youths to stay in sailing past their 18th birthday, and whatever kind of boat they want to sail should be left for them to decide.

We believe that increasing total fleet numbers throughout the country should be the first priority for building Olympic champions in 20 years from now. We need to drop the current practice of cramming all our talented youths into pressure-cooker training for short-term aims.

Local clubs at grass roots should be encouraged in every way possible. So, rather than getting on an Olympic treadmill, young sailors should go out racing, sailing and having fun. If they start to succeed in the fashion of Barnes/Jones/Dickson/Reeves et al, they will not need prompting to get into the appropriate class.

The 3.7 Class would urge YNZ to:

- Look beyond the hunt for Olympic and International medals. These are the **end-product** of a healthy system, not the beginning.
- **Start promoting popular adult lower-level sailing in NZ** outside the limited scope of the YNZ 'Sailing Tree', to retain young adults.
- Stop training programmes that leave the vast majority with little reason to enjoy sailing.
- Consider what is being done for small backward clubs and indigenous but popular classes (they have proven popularity by surviving thus far) because there will never be a large pool of NZ sailors without them.

Classes have died in numbers. YNZ now risks the death of **clubs in numbers**. Even clubs like Rotorua and Hamilton are struggling to keep up activities, while a number of smaller clubs are close to dying out.

In closing, we would quote two prominent class members who emailed these lines after we had a very poor turnout for our Auckland Champs this year.

- 1) Jeff Christensen, father of recently prominent Optimist sailor:

“Yachting New Zealand

This group can really only seem to focus on international classes to the detriment of NZ yachting....as they will ultimately discover (and perhaps already have with the dwindling Olympic results). There needs to be some recognition by this group that there is more to sailing than trying to get kids to focus on international classes where few can succeed. Somehow this organisation needs to be driven to support a wider variety of yachting in New Zealand.”

- 2) John Clinton, ex Olympic Coach, etc etc:

“I believe that the basis of a successful class must be with club sailing. I also believe that this is where YNZ are going seriously wrong with Olympic sailing. The classes need to go back to the clubs.”

The 3.7 Class agrees with both.

But if YNZ comes back to the clubs, we fervently hope that they will not do so with only the classes on their unpopular 'Sailing Tree', and a training programme similar to the one that has helped to deplete both our clubs and classes.