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Report of the Oceania Canoe Association 2023/2024

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The Oceania Canoe Association (OCA) is responsible for the delivery of continental canoeing championships and development initiatives in the region for the disciplines of canoe slalom, canoe sprint, canoe polo, canoe marathon, ocean racing, standup paddling (SUP), wildwater racing, and freestyle canoeing.

The 2023 competition season represented the first opportunity for most Oceania nations to participate in continental and world championship events since the arrival of COVID-19 and the prospect of qualifying quota ahead of Paris 2024 was a priority for many of our federations.

Progressing the development of canoeing in the region with a particular focus on the regional games and strengthening relationships with National Olympic Committee and continental organisation partners was an equally important focus for OCA during 2023/24 – no small challenge given the region covers one third of the globe but is sparsely populated with mainly small island nations, between which travel is expensive and time-consuming.

OCEANIA CHAMPIONSHIPS

Oceania holds continental championships each year for the Olympic canoeing disciplines of canoe sprint and canoe slalom. Non-Olympic discipline championships are typically held biennially (in odd years).

In 2023 we were pleased to return to a full programme of continental championships, as follows:
Oceania Canoe Slalom Championships (January), Auckland, New Zealand
Oceania Canoe Sprint Championships & Asia Pacific Cup (April), Lake Karapiro, New Zealand
Oceania Canoe Marathon and SUP Championships (April), Geelong, Australia
Oceania Canoe Polo Championships (December) Napier, New Zealand

2024 events included:

Oceania Canoe Slalom Championships & Olympic Qualification Event (January), Penrith, Australia
Oceania Canoe Sprint Championships & Olympic Qualification Event (February), Penrith, Australia

GLOBAL EVENTS IN OCEANIA

We were delighted to have the International Canoe Federation's (ICF) 2023 Ocean Racing World Championships hosted by Paddle Australia in Perth from 30 November – 3 December.

A 20km battle from Fremantle's Bathers Beach, finishing at Perth's Scarborough Beach saw more than 480 paddlers from 23 nations across the world taking part. Perth, often regarded as the home of downwind paddling, provided outstanding conditions, with a 20 knot south-west wind guiding them up the west coast. It was a history-making event for Australia, with athletes Jemma Smith becoming the first woman in ICF history to win two Ocean Racing World Championship crowns and Cory Hill winning his third, the first man to do so.



In April 2023 the OCA President attended the Oceania National Olympic Committee (ONOC) and Olympic Sports Federation of Oceania (OSFO) week of general assembly and associated meetings held in Brisbane. The focus of the event was how to maximise the benefits offered by the Brisbane 2032 Olympic Games for sport in the region.

Paddle Australia, and indeed OCA, and our Oceania athletes will enjoy the development of world class canoe sprint and canoe slalom venues in Queensland. This process is being well-supported by the ICF with the President and other senior officials already having visited Brisbane to work with Paddle Australia and establish relationships with the local organizing committee, with legacy benefits of the Olympic venues a high priority.

In 2024, attendance at the ONOC and OSFO general assemblies held in Fiji during April, provided an opportunity to build all important relationships with NOCs and strengthen canoeing's place on the Pacific Games programme.

PACIFIC GAMES

The Solomon Islands Pacific Games 2023 (Sol2023) were held from 19 November to 2 December and saw over 5,000 athletes from 24 countries compete in 24 sports.



The 2023 Games included the inaugural kayak competition which was run in conjunction with the Va'a programme. The kayak events offered included MK1 500, WK1 500, MK2 500, WK2 500, MK1 15km, WK1 15km, MK2 12 – 16km, and WK2 12 – 16km. Each nation is entitled to one entry per event, with a maximum of 2 men and 2 women per nation. The kayak events were contested by 20 athletes representing Solomon Islands, Cook Islands, Tahiti, New Caledonia, Samoa, and Palau. Results

attached.

Special thanks to the Pacific Games Council, International Va'a Federation, and Solomon Islands National Federation for their support and collaboration, and to Matt Warren (NZL) international technical delegate for his technical expertise, considerable time commitment, and enthusiasm. We now look forward to the 2027 edition of the Pacific Games in Tahiti, where the

Tahitian National Federation is already working with the government and organising committee to ensure a successful event.



OLYMPIC GAMES & WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SUCCESS

Oceania athletes performed on the world stage with great credit across multiple disciplines in 2023 and 2024. Performances of significance at World Championships during 2023 included:

- Jessica Fox (AUS), 2023 World Champion WK1 canoe slalom
- Jessica Fox, Noemie Fox, Kate Eckhardt (AUS), 2023 World Champions women's kayak team canoe slalom
- Dame Lisa Carrington (NZL), 2023 World Champion WK1200 and WK1 500 canoe sprint
- Dame Lisa Carrington, Alicia Hoskins, Olivia Brett, Tara Vaughan (NZL), 2023 World Champions WK4 500 canoe sprint
- Alyssa Bull (AUS), 2023 World Champion WK1 1000 canoe sprint
- Ben Sainsbury (AUS), 2023 World Champion MVL1 200 paracanoe
- Curtis McGrath (AUS), 2023 World Champion KL2 200 paracanoe
- Dylan Littlehales (AUS), 2023 World Champion KL3 200 paracanoe
- Cory Hill (AUS), 2023 World Champion open men's ocean racing
- Jemma Smith (AUS), 2023 World Champion open women's ocean racing

The Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris proved to be the highlight of the competition calendar for 2024. Our athletes demonstrated that Oceania is a canoe slalom powerhouse, winning four (of six available) Olympic gold medals. Notably Australia topped the medal table as the most successful canoe slalom nation.

Not to be outdone, New Zealand's women's canoe sprint athletes ensured an Oceania nation also topped the medal table for the most successful canoe sprint nation.

Additionally, we were very proud to have Oceania represented by athletes Samalulu and Tuva'a Clifton (Samoa) and Raina Taitifong (Guam) who have received support from the Oceania development programme.

Oceania Paralympians from New Zealand and Australia continued their inspiring performance record to secure four medals with Curtis McGrath (AUS) sealing his place in history with a gold in the men's KL3.

At the recent canoe polo World Championships held in China, New Zealand won the senior women's world championship title.

In addition to the remarkable athletic performances highlighted above, it has also been pleasing to see Oceania officials represented at world championship level across a range of disciplines during the 2023 and 2024 competition seasons.

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

Canoe Slalom Continental Training Programme

The Oceania Canoe Slalom Continental Training Programme continues to be based at the WERO white-water facility in Auckland, New Zealand, where Canoe Slalom New Zealand provide coaching support for a development programme targeting local Pacific Island communities. Importantly, this programme provides opportunities from recruitment of new paddlers through to support for current elite Oceania athletes. While the programme was in hiatus during 2020, 2021, and much of 2022, there has been some progress in 2023 and enthusiasm for expansion in 2024. Pleasingly a young Tongan paddler that is an alumni of this programme competed in the 2023 Australian Open event with OCA supported Cook Island paddlers also participating at continental and global level competition in 2023.

Paracanoe

OCA encourages all national federations to identify potential athletes with a disability who are interested in participating in Kayak or Va'a sprint events. Currently successful paracanoe programmes are run in Australia, New Zealand, and Tahiti. Pleasingly, the ICF's Paracanoe Committee provided assistance in early 2024 with the delivery of a regional classification course and paracanoe workshop in Australia. Our thanks to the Committee and Paddle Australia for their support of this initiative.

Canoe Sprint Continental Training Programme

In February 2024, OCA organised a development camp for Oceania Athletes leading up to the Olympic Qualification & Oceania Canoe Sprint Championships. This camp provided coaching for all the athletes, race strategy, exposure to elite competition, and team boat experience.

Excluding New Zealand and Australia, 17 athletes from seven national federations attended the camp, eight of whom were female. The nations that participated were Samoa, Guam, Palau, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Tahiti, and Cook Islands.

The camp was held for three days with two paddling sessions a day at the Sydney International Regatta Centre. OCA was able to run the camp with Paddle Australia's support in sourcing boats and coaching for the athletes.

Athletes participating in this development opportunity from Guam and Samoa earned Olympic quota for their NOCs during the continental qualification event.

National Federation Activity

The Oceania Development Programme provides support for local programmes in Oceania's developing nations. National federations are invited to request support for equipment donations, as well as athlete, coach, and officials' development. OCA meets these requests as funding allows.

Tahiti



Women in sport meeting in Tahiti

An energized Tahitian National Federation is taking a considered approach to development of canoeing in their nation. During 2023 the OCA President visited Tahiti (with Lara Collins from the International Va'a Federation and Danika Mowlem from Canoe Racing New Zealand) to assist with their planning for international event bids in ocean racing, local junior development, equipment needs, paracanoe, and women in sport initiatives.

Following this visit, the Tahitian Federation made a significant equipment purchase to support their development programme with assistance from Canoe Racing NZ and a funding subsidy from OCA. We look forward to continuing to work with Tahiti as they work to strengthen the sport with a view to success at the 2027 Pacific Games. The Tahitian Federation has also successfully bid to host a future Ocean Racing World Championships.

Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands National Federation has received significant support from OCA (and the ICF development programme) in preparation for the Pacific Games event. This has included:

- A boat donation of Nelo 510 singles, paddles, and kayak erg. This donation package is supplemented by Nelo 510s and 660s that were purchased for the Pacific Games and are now an equipment legacy for the local federation.
- Coach education and resource provision in conjunction with two technical visits (9 – 13 May and 30 October – 5 November) in advance of the Pacific Games. Two local coaches now oversee an athlete training programme.
- Athlete development pathway towards participating in the 2024 Oceania Canoe Sprint Championships established.
- Officials' education undertaken so that local regattas can now be run to a good standard.

Samoa

Samoa was supported with a technical visit from coach Anne Cairns from 13 – 21 September 2023. Outcomes from the visit included:

- Strengthening relationships with the NOC.
- Providing assistance with equipment (previously donated by ICF/OCA via the development programme) maintenance and access.
- Coaching athletes selected to represent Samoa at the Pacific Games and looking ahead to participation at the continental qualification event for Paris 2024.
- “Have a go” opportunities for a wide range of age groups.
- Capitalising on enthusiasm generated by the International Va’a Federation’s long distance world championship event that had been held the month prior to introduce existing paddlers to ocean ski and kayak.



Cook Islands

The Cook Islands continues to run a junior focused local development programme (pictured below) that includes sprint and ocean racing paddling. In addition, OCA has provided financial assistance for targeted elite athletes (canoe sprint and slalom) to compete internationally.



New Zealand



Canoe Racing New Zealand has been developing resources that are available for use by Oceania’s developing nation federations. These include: the “Try Learn Explore” programme designed to encourage participation and development, as well as supporting coach education programmes, and the “Paddle Able” programme for athletes with disabilities.

The New Zealand Federation was also delighted to see the reinvigoration of the wildwater racing discipline with athletes competing at the 2023 World Championships. If

any Oceania nations have an interest in developing this discipline, OCA would be pleased to provide advice and assistance.

Australia

Paddle Australia Western Sydney Whitewater Club has successfully developed young training squads such as the “SLAY” squad for 10 to 14 year-old girls to train and develop whitewater skills over the past year. Similar to the WERO programme in New Zealand, Paddle Australia will now look to establish an Oceania Squad that will concentrate on developing the Oceania Nation Paddlers through the Western Sydney Club.

MEMBERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Danielle Woodward and Maree Burnett continue to represent Oceania on the ICF Board of Directors, and Maree also sits on the Executive Committee. This has required attending in person board and/or Executive Committee meetings during 2023 and 2024 in Budapest, Dublin (including attending the ICF’s inaugural Women’s Symposium), Lausanne, London, and Antalya, as well as frequent online meetings.

The OCA’s 9th Congress was held in Australia in February of this year. The meeting provided an opportunity for Oceania national federations to reconnect at the first in-person meeting post Covid-19.

The Congress re-elected OCA board members Sue Natoli (AUS), Ron Rolleston (COK), and Matt Warren (NZL) for a further term and we welcomed newly-elected board member Anne Cairns (SAM). In most cases the OCA board members are also very actively involved in the delivery of canoeing programmes in their own nations. We gratefully acknowledge the significant role they play in progressing canoeing locally and regionally, and thank them for their ongoing support of OCA.

We continue to gratefully acknowledge the ongoing support OCA receives from the ICF Executive Committee and Board of Directors, ONOC, and Olympic Solidarity. The very welcome funding grants and strategic assistance offered by these organisations to OCA, to our national federations, and directly to athletes remain crucial to the development of canoeing in the region.

In the two years since our last report to the ICF Congress, we have welcomed the opportunity for the Oceania canoeing family to reconnect through regional development events and competition, and are immensely proud of the performance of all Oceania athletes competing on the global stage. We recognise the continued engagement and collaboration from our national federations and their national Olympic committees and are grateful for continued enthusiasm the of our athletes, officials, and administrators across the Oceania Region.

We now look forward to Australia hosting the Canoe Slalom World Championships in 2025 and Oceania hosting a series of ocean racing events in the lead up to Tahiti hosting the Pacific Games and the Ocean Racing World Championships in 2027.

2023 PACIFIC GAMES KAYAK RESULTS (Inaugural event)

Event	Nation	Athlete	Medal
WK1 500	Tahiti	EYCHENNE, Iloha	Gold
	Samoa	CAIRNS, ANNE	Silver
	New Caledonia	ROBIN, Charlotte	Bronze
MK1 500	Samoa	CLIFTON, Tuva'a	Gold
	Tahiti	THUAU, Nohoarii	Silver
	Cook Islands	GEORGE, Andre	Bronze
WK2 500	Tahiti		Gold
	Samoa		Silver
	New Caledonia		Bronze
MK2 500	New Caledonia		Gold
	Tahiti		Silver
	Solomon Islands		Bronze
WK1 distance	Tahiti	EYCHENNE, Iloha	Gold
	Samoa	CAIRNS, ANNE	Silver
	New Caledonia	ROBIN, Charlotte	Bronze
MK1 distance	New Caledonia	LEGAVRE, Benjamin	Gold
	Tahiti	THUAU, Nohoarii	Silver
	Cook Islands	GEORGE, Andre	Bronze
WK2 distance	Tahiti		Gold
	Samoa		Silver
	New Caledonia		Bronze
MK2 distance	New Caledonia		Gold
	Tahiti		Silver



Pacific Games WK1 500 medalists



Pacific Games MK2 500 medalists



Pacific Games WK2 500 medalists



Pacific Games MK1 distance medalists