

Winter Sailing can be Fun and Safe

If the question was put to you “What makes sailing in winter so different?”. Would you say you can’t get sunburnt or that the wind is less boisterous. Most likely you would say it is colder. And off course for winter sailing the weather is much colder.

I have not heard of the Waimakariri River ever freezing over but I have seen a photo of our Clubrooms surrounded by several centimetres of snow and during the winter the river temperature is often as low as seven degrees.

If it is so cold in winter we could just not bother about winter sailing at all. However in the many years sailing with this Club I have had some of the best days sailing during winter. You have clear, sunny days with a light, very steady breeze. What you might call ideal sailing conditions.

The issue for winter sailing is that it is cold. With this lower temperature there is the danger of hypothermia where our bodies loose heat over time faster than we can replace it. To counter this we dress warmly and do our best to minimise time spent in the water should we capsize. What we can do is have is a simple plan to mitigate against the effects of hypothermia so we can sail safely through the winter months.

For the last five years I have run the winter sailing programme for our Club. Over this time I have developed this three point plan to mitigate against the effects of hypothermia. The plan is posted on our website and has three main points which are the weather, the roster and the numbers.

The weather:

We will only sail on nice days. Some approximate criteria are shown in the plan.

The roster:

We will only sail if we have a suitable team to operate a support boat and someone to act as observer in the CAB. Also Club members sailing on the day might like to think about cleaning the changing rooms at the end of the day.

The numbers:

Now the criteria for numbers as our safety plan shows is that we must have at least six members who will be sailing. That is not five or four but at least six. This number is chosen because with six members sailing there is more likely to be a good range of sailing experience. For example if on our light wind day someone does manage to capsize it could be important to have an experienced skipper right there to speed up the recovery.

This is about sailors helping sailors. It is about minimising the time we might spend in the water. It is about reducing the risk of hypothermia.

With these criteria in mind the winter sailing day will be cancelled if we do not get six sailors pre-registered or if on the day we do not get that number prepared to sail.

If you are a keen sailor and like winter sailing then there are three simple steps you can take.

First. Read our website.

Second. Get your name on the roster to help where you can.

Lastly. Make your intention to sail known and pre-register.

We can enjoy our winter sailing by taking some very simple measures to reduce the risk of hypothermia. The weather, the roster and the numbers.

Last month we had our first winter sailing day and for the skippers and crew who sailed it was a very successful day. In fact we had a great day. We can hope that the weather and interest from Club members will make the next four winter sailing days will be similar.

Kerry O'Brien
Rear Commodore
Waimakariri Sailing Club
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