

**15<sup>th</sup> February 2023**

**Media release for immediate use**

***2023 Interislander Optimist Challenge and Port Marlborough Starling Championships***

Threats of a Tsunami in the past, 3 years not held because of Covid, now a Nationwide State of Emergency, the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the Interislander Optimist Challenge and Port Marlborough Starling Sailing Championships is getting off to a rough start before the sailors even take to the waters at Queen Charlotte Yacht Club on Shelley Beach, Picton, from Friday February 17 through to Sunday Feb 19<sup>th</sup>.

“Our hearts go out to all the families and people affected by Cyclone Gabrielle” says Commodore Rob Burn. “We wish them all the speedy assistance that can be given”

Nearly 160 sailors are registered to compete in the junior Optimist Class and the youth Starling class with many sailors and families from Auckland, Napier and Christchurch here early to both get out of the North Island weather and get set up for the event.

Dean Barker, one of NZ's top sailors and America's Cup winner is one of those early arrivals, “After the previous two years affected by Covid, it is fantastic to come with my kids to our first Interislander, we are really looking forward to a great regatta” says Dean.

The Interislander Optimist Challenge is one of two ranking regattas for all young sailors competing for places in Travelling Teams to represent New Zealand overseas, however a decision has now been made to leave the rankings out for this one time as some of the top ranked sailors are now struggling to get to Picton.

“Despite all the current challenges, the regatta will go ahead and will still be a vital build up for the NZ Optimist National Championships held at QCYC next Easter 2024, competition will be just as fierce” says Commodore Rob.

An extra bonus this year is Yachting New Zealand providing a Starling Coaching Clinic prior to the regatta with Gold Medal winning Olympian Jenny Armstrong.

The regatta programme has the official Welcome and Briefings from 9.00am Friday, the QCYC Cannon being fired then onto the Open Optimists and Starlings taking to the water sometime just before noon.

The renowned Taste of Marlborough Dinner is Friday night for those seeking their Marlborough Foodie Fix. Saturday and Sunday will see all Fleets on the water, the junior Green Fleet sailing straight in front of the Club, the perfect viewing spot with a great coffee in hand. Prizegiving will be held straight after sailors come ashore and Results are finalised.

Head QCYC Coach Kate Overend has overseen a large growth in numbers of junior and youth sailors over the last two years and this event will be a great chance to expose them to top competition but more than that, introduce them to fellow sailors from all over Aotearoa, make some great friends and have fun.

Picton locals and visitors are welcome to come see the action, grab a coffee and see our new Club facilities.

**For more information contact:**

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