



Wendouree Ballarat Rowing Club



Annual Report 2019 -2020

I would like to begin by thanking all those present for continuing to show their support. I will begin by reminding everyone of the Wendouree Ballarat Rowing Club Vision.

'We want to create an environment that fosters rowing in the local community and provides rowers with a pathway and opportunity to compete and be involved on the National & World Stage.'

As evidenced by the AGM being presented online, I think it is safe to say this year is like no other year on record. We have been dominated by one topic this year, COVID-19. Some say that it is not dissimilar to the Spanish flu in 1919 however when I look back through the records the club recorded one of its best membership levels ever in 1919. Fingers crossed we have a similar result however the lockdown remains, and the club is closed until mid-September.

The interruption to our sport of rowing began on Friday the 13th of March. After a day of competition at the Head of Schoolgirls an announcement was read out to the dismay of the rowing community. The balance of the regatta had been suspended. With out any knowledge of what was to come some felt this was an overreaction.

- March 14 the Australian Government advises against gatherings of 500 people or more.
- March 16 Victoria declares a state of emergency and the State goes into lockdown.

The affect of this lockdown and world outbreak puts sport on hold. All national and international events were suspended not long after the first lockdown.

Prior to the lockdown the club was in the final stages of organising 22 rowers to attend the Australian Nationals. Flights were booked and uniforms ordered. Unfortunately, we had to cancel this very important event in our calendar. Wendouree Ballarat Rowing Club initiated a program to take crews to the nationals in 2019 and the success of this program was noticed by many. This year we saw a squad of crews heading to Sydney from Ballarat City which was evidence of our success. This meant for the first time in many years' multiple crews, from Ballarat, would be competing in national events at the Australian Championships. Unfortunately, this was not to be.

As the club came out of the first lockdown, we recognised the importance of launching a Winter Program to get participation levels up and running again. Being the only program on offer at the time we found that the subscriptions were quickly snapped up. The program was restricted by the governing bodies, to single sculls for some time with crew boats only on offer late in the term. We had a good level of rowers returning to the program. We were beginning to talk about running some racing and rowing was returning to some normality.



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Rowing Report

Head regattas:

We started off the season with crews representing the club at Saltwater and Head of the Goulburn regattas.

This was the first time in a number of years that WBRC attended the Head of the Goulburn regatta. It was a great event starting at the Nagambie rowing course and finishing at Tahbilk Winery. Two WBRC scullers (Will Ussher and Charlotte Ashley) rowed the full 7.2km race in single sculls which was a significant effort given the wind on the day. Our female Masters crew also participated and enjoyed the festivities at the finish line.

A highlight of the year for rowers was rowing on the Yarra River. Melbourne Head in late November saw a mix of juniors and masters once again proudly showing the club colours – this time on the Yarra River. A big thanks goes to Ashley Pittard who coxed our masters women expertly down the course. The following week WBRC had our first entry in Head of the Yarra for many years, and our men's eight had a great hit out competing strongly in the Mens C class to enjoy a few drinks at the finish line.

Country regattas:

The club was well-represented at other country regattas throughout the racing season, with entries at Dimboola, Hamilton, Ballarat and Wendouree-Ballarat Regattas. Unfortunately the two rowers entered in the Dimboola regatta encountered in issue on the way to the regatta – so the club ended up with scratching's in the races as well as some significant scratches to one of our club singles. At the Nestles Hamilton Regatta on Lake Hamilton the club had entries from our Phoenix College members, Masters, and our junior program.

Early in the new year, following a juniors camp in Geelong run by Head Coach, **Paul Blanchfield**, the club had 7 entries in the Ballarat Regatta and a huge 28 entries at the WBRC regatta. Phoenix College students, Masters and club Juniors all raced under WBRC colours again this year. The regatta was once again a great event with volunteers from across the club coming together to put on a fabulous weekend for the broader rowing community.

State Championships and Nationals

We had 12 entries in State Champs and **22 rowers** prepared to compete on the national stage in Sydney in March. Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the nationals event was cancelled and we missed the opportunity to take part. This was disappointing as the club was looking forward to having back-to-back representation at nationals again after great performances in 2019.

Social activities:

To encourage rowers hoping to return to the sport, we ran a "Return to Rowing" program once again. This year we charged for the program and numbers were down from the 20 participants in the previous year. The program ran into the annual Christmas Row, where we celebrated success in



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obtaining a grant from Ballarat City Council for Active Women and Girls. Other notable social occasions were the International Women's Day row, and a new free program "Mondays in March" aimed at both "learn to row" participants, as well as rowers returning to the sport. Many club members participated and helped out with these events. I would like to mention the support from the **Murfett** family at Mondays in March.

Online programs:

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the club to close, we saw this is an opportunity to engage with club members in new ways. Sessions were held each week with a mix of ergo, general fitness, and some tailored ladies only sessions. Learn to row seminars were also held by the Head Coach to expand on the Mondays in March (and dubbed Mondays in May). An online bingo night was delivered using the club's bingo set and the Secretary's skills from a previous job as a bingo caller. Special thanks to the members who supported these activities, especially Kim Gay and Kelly Bevan for their regular attendance and support in hosting.

The club was able to return to rowing on-water for a brief period and partnered with Ballarat City Rowing Club to run some informal time trials and participate in the Geelong sculling series.

Overall, it was a challenging season for the club, but we have learned some new ways of working to help us continue to improve our programs moving forward.

The club would like to thank the rowing committee for its leadership through this challenging period headed up by **Alicia Ivory** and her vice captains **Tim Wright** and **Kelly Bevan**.

On a positive note we have still managed to have some success in other ways this year. Our Captain, **Alicia Ivory** has turned her attention to grant applications in recent times and has had some recent success. On the back of grants, we have been able to improve our fleet and equipment. This year we added lightweight women's coxless Quad/Four to our fleet. This boat is targeted at improving the opportunities for women in rowing. Around \$18,000 has been raised this year which has proven to be a huge boost to the club.

The Wendouree Ballarat Regatta was again, a huge success. Numbers were very strong, and the racing was competitive. **Eric Waller** headed up the organising committee to assist us in running a seamless regatta this year. In the face of rising regatta costs the club was glad to clear approximately \$10,000 for this regatta. Sponsorship was well down on the previous year due to some late changes in broadcasting. We managed to address the fiscal issues around last year's regatta by adding a levy to the event. The regatta now runs at a small profit. The regatta will hopefully continue to be a strong as we partner with the **City of Ballarat and Rowing Victoria**. This partnership will also bring new opportunities to Ballarat with possibilities of new regattas and higher quality events.

Streaming the regatta live, on the internet and on the large screen added an additional 10,000 views of the regatta that may otherwise not have been able to watch. We had a large screen on site again that allowed spectators and participants to view the starts and



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progress of races. For the first time we were able to utilise live timing and the many cameras recently installed up and down the course.

The committee would like to recognise **Eric Waller** for his continued involvement in the management of regattas and his commitment behind the scenes to ensure the growth and longevity of rowing in Ballarat.

The Committee would also like to recognise **Paul Bilson** for his excellent work as the Regatta Secretary.

Wendouree Ballarat Rowing Club continues to host Damascus College and Phoenix College. We see these partnerships as important relationships to improve the atmosphere around the club and improve the connection between club and school rowing.

I would like to finish by saying it has been a pleasure working with the committee this year and much has been achieved in a year that has seen many clubs question their ability to continue on. We must come out of this current Covid-19 challenge stronger and reinvigorate the rowing community together. Thank you to all the committee and I look forward to your involvement in the next 12 months.