



OCEAN CRUISING CLUB®

For Immediate Release

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Crisis point, New Zealand denying cyclone season refuge for small cruising yachts

Devon, UK, 5 September 2020 – Upwards of 300 small yachts are stuck in ‘COVID limbo’ across the South Pacific, most are in Fiji and French Polynesia. Crews on these yachts are urgently seeking refuge from the forthcoming cyclone season commencing 1 November. The safety of these small yachts, sailed by families, couples and single handers, is at serious risk of compromise if they cannot gain safe haven before the end of October. New Zealand has, for many years past, been the preferred destination for yachts during this period. For many of these sailors their yacht is their home and they rely upon their insurance policies for a sense of security. Insurance cover becomes invalid for any yachts remaining in a recognised cyclone belt throughout the world. Small Pacific nations are not equipped to safely berth or dry store this number of yachts, and any that do remain in the region will lose the safety net of their insurance. This is what makes the situation an urgent humanitarian issue.

The Ocean Cruising Club has been lobbying the New Zealand Government since April in an effort to persuade them to facilitate the entry of these small yachts, who through no fault of their own, find themselves stranded in a COVID 19 limbo in the Central South Pacific cyclone zone.

In June, a response advised that an exemption to New Zealand border closure would be possible for humanitarian reasons or other compelling needs. The OCC regard escape from the cyclone belt such a compelling reason. Yet recently, the OCC were advised by New Zealand Health that to avoid **hurricane/cyclone season in the Pacific is NOT considered a compelling reason!**

Since these yachts will have been isolated at sea for at least 14 days during a voyage to New Zealand and are prepared to remain in a quarantine anchorage on arrival as an additional safeguard. It seems inexplicable that they can, in any way, be regarded as a threat under COVID 19 restrictions.

The yachts would normally be arriving in Northland in October and early November. The crisis now is that even if New Zealand offers exemptions for cyclone refuge, the four-week application process, plus additional time for visa processing, means we are effectively running out of time. To safely make passage to New Zealand yachts require a suitable weather window and any further delay puts them at increased risk. An urgent solution is now required.

Fiona Jones, the OCC Indo-Pacific Coordinator says: *"I am now desperate to find a solution for these crews in the Pacific. My husband and I sailed our yacht into New Zealand in 2006 and we were welcomed everywhere we went. The hospitality shown to us in remote areas of South Island and Stewart Island will never be forgotten. Since then two of our children and 6 grandchildren have become citizens of New Zealand, and we are very proud that they have done so. None of us wants COVID 19 cases brought into New Zealand."*

Guy Chester, OCC Roving Rear Commodore advised that the OCC had been working with the Marina Operators Association and Sail South Pacific to ensure COVID safe protocols can be in place for yachts arriving. *"With 2- to 6-week passages crews have been in quarantine for that time anyway. They are prepared to self-isolate aboard their yachts once they enter New Zealand and have an agreed protocol to ensure there is minimal risk to the New Zealand community."*

John Martin of Sail South Pacific has been working with Northland marinas to ensure COVID safe arrival and self-isolation aboard can be undertaken safely. John is arranging the Destination NZ "rescue" to coordinate staggered arrivals of the flotilla from French Polynesia and Fiji if New Zealand provides exemptions. John said: *"Yachts accept they need to have strict quarantine and medical records while at sea and to satellite track their route to prove their continuity of passage (thus quarantine time)."*

Chris Galbraith, the chair of NZ Marina Operators Association said northland port of entry marinas have developed strategies and protocols for clearance and isolation, currently being considered by government agencies.

Peter Boyd, Chair of the Opuia Business Association says: *"The annual influx of these vessels is a major part of the economic survival of marine services businesses, hit hard by the COVID shutdowns."* The yachts make a significant economic contribution.

The Ocean Cruising Club has written to Prime Minister Ardern and the Minister for Health on several occasions with no solution to date. What was an emerging situation has now reached a crisis point, and the OCC is urgently requesting that New Zealand provide safe refuge for yachts caught in 'COVID limbo'.

New Zealand is well known as a nation of sailors, and annually welcomes international cruising yachts to its waters. **The Ocean Cruising Club asks the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Health officials to ensure a humanitarian outcome is found urgently.**

ENDS

(Background information and Government correspondence attached)

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BACKGROUND

Letters to New Zealand Government

See attached two recent letters to the New Zealand Prime Minister.

BACKGROUND

Urgency

- **Only 60 days remain until the Cyclone season arrives** and all of these 300 plus yachts find themselves uninsured and outside of a safe haven.
- **Twenty plus days to await an answer to an application** leaves a maximum of 40 days. Most yachts average 120 miles sailing in a 24-hour period.
- Once and if exemption is agreed crews have to apply for a visa, again they cannot set to sea prior to gaining the visa. **Visa applications also take at least 10 days to be processed** so now we are down to a maximum of 30 days sailing time.
- The cyclone season is almost upon us, and your government is about to enter an **election process**. We sincerely hope that they can provide a remedy before entering any caretaker mode.

BACKGROUND

Quarantine on Passage - Self Isolation on Arrival

Many yachts will seek Opuia as the first port of arrival and we understand Bay of Islands Marina can accommodate quarantine on arrival on the "Attenuation Barrier dock" for initial clearance formalities and that vessels can then move to the Waikare River/Estuary to serve their quarantine at anchor.

Sail South Pacific (Destination NZ Rally) have advised that a business "Total Yacht Care" can provide provisions, fuel, waste disposal etc, using a contactless process for yachts whilst in Quarantine at anchor.

We understand that Marsden Cove at Whangarei has specific quarantine berths which can be isolated, with the yachts having access to power, water and sewage pump out. Contactless delivery of provisions for the time in quarantine is understood to be available.

BACKGROUND

Compelling Reason

The Ocean Cruising Club wishes to restate the emerging crisis among sailors facing risk to lives and property that is rendered uninsurable and needing refuge for the forthcoming cyclone season. We implore the New Zealand government to accept this as a compelling reason.

We consider that leaving the yachts without refuge could further endanger not only their crews but also emergency response crews should a cyclone event(s) occur.

By way of further support the lack of options and the compelling situation yachts find themselves in, please see a letter from the Managing Director of the UK/Australian company, Topsail Insurance (refer Statement from Insurer). This is one of the preeminent underwriters of small yachts sailed by couples and families across oceans. Like most insurers, cover is not provided in affected waters for the duration of the cyclone season. Traditionally, boats have moved from the South Pacific cyclone belt to Australia and New Zealand where they are normally welcomed.

Mr Stevens states:

“We are not aware of any insurer currently providing comprehensive insurance for offshore cruising boats within the Pacific region during the cyclone season. The risk to insurers for such catastrophe cover is just too high and insurers will not underwrite that exposure and are not offering any insurance for cyclone cover.

Cruising yachts are often the owners only home and major asset, which means that during the cyclone season, the owner is at high risk of substantial financial loss if a cyclone was to occur and cause damage to their forced uninsured property. Such financial hardship could potentially fall on government assistance for future support of that individual.

Furthermore, there is a potentially enhanced risk of physical injury or even death to the owner and the crew as a result of being on their boat trying to protect their uninsured property, as opposed to potentially more considered self-preservation, if the boat was insured and their asset secured.”

BACKGROUND

About the Ocean Cruising Club



The Worldwide Community for Adventure Sailing Since 1954

The OCC is the “home port” for those who have sailed long distances across big oceans. With 45 nationalities represented among more than 3100 members, and Port Officers around the world, we have a more diverse membership and a more international reach than any other blue water sailing organisation.

The Ocean Cruising Club exists to encourage long-distance sailing in small boats. A Full Member of the OCC must have completed a qualifying voyage of a non-stop port-to-port ocean passage, where the distance between the two ports is not less than 1,000 nautical miles, in a vessel of not more than 70ft (21.36m) LOA; associate members are committed to achieving that goal. This standard distinguishes the OCC from all other sailing clubs.

Our membership as a whole has more experience offshore than any other sailing organisation – in the number of circumnavigators, in the range of extraordinary voyages members have completed, and in the number of solo sailors and female sailors among our ranks. This is what sets us apart from other organisations, even as it draws us together as a group.

Web: www.oceancruisingclub.org

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/OceanCruisingClubMembers/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/oceancruisingclub/>

Twitter: @OCC_org

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