

Coastal Rowing in **New Zealand**

Possessing many similar attributes to surf lifesaving, the sport of coastal rowing is building momentum here in New Zealand with the scope to develop into a hugely popular discipline.

Well-established in Europe and Asia, coastal rowing has two racing formats – endurance and beach sprints – with World Rowing hosting the annual World Rowing Coastal Championships (where the endurance format is raced) and the World Rowing Beach Sprint Finals.

In New Zealand the sport is still in its infancy but there have been signs of real growth over the past couple of years with pockets of coastal rowing developing in a number of areas including Auckland, Wellington, Picton and Nelson.

At the heart of the development of coastal rowing in New Zealand has been Nelson Rowing Club. Last year the club hosted three beach sprint events, each of which grew in size and popularity, and then in January Nelson proudly hosted the first National Championships of Coastal Rowing Beach Sprints event at Moturoa/Rabbit Island.

This attracted more than 60 competitors from nine clubs (Horowhenua, Petone, Picton, Blenheim, Nelson, Cure, Avon, Union, St Margaret's). Rowers competed in coxed quads in an exciting head-to-head elimination-style competition.

Races involved a short sprint on the beach followed by a 250–300m row. Crews then rounded a 180 degree turn before the row back to the beach and sprint for the finish line.

Fundraiser at Nelson Rowing Club and coastal rowing boat saleswoman Sally Knight is naturally a huge fan and describes the experience of rowing the boats as 'magical'.

'They are so stable and smooth, but also surprisingly nimble on the water,' she says. 'The quad boats are coxed, they are fun to steer, can do tight turns, and can handle the waves easily. The whole crew will be laughing as they paddle out into the ocean.'

The club purchased its first coastal quad in 2018 and has since added a further two to its growing fleet. Heavier, wider and more stable and robust than a regular rowing boat, with an open stern to allow easy drainage of water, coastal boats come in three types – single (35kg) double (60kg) and coxed quad (130kg).

While the boats are proving popular with masters paddlers, Sally insists people of all ages will love to row the coastal boats.

'The beach sprint events are good fun for masters, club members and kids – anyone can have a crack at it,' adds Sally. 'But I also think the coastal boats are ideal for people who are more cautious in the water, because learners feel really safe. And then there is the adventure aspect – we took a double out to Lake Rotoiti on the most beautiful day. It was just like going out on a tramp except in a boat. They have a wide appeal.'



The Wellington Rowing Association (WRA) is keen to see the sport of coastal rowing develop, with secretary Sally Rose believing the discipline is ideal to meet the unique demands of the region.

'It is a sport designed for people in Wellington because the wind is so hectic here and we are not on the water as much as other regions.'

Last November a 'Have a Go' coastal boats session organised by the WRA to coincide with the Wellington Provincial Championships proved an unexpected hit after windy conditions forced an extended delay of the Saturday regatta.

At a loose end, organisers who intended to run the 'Have a Go' initiative on the Sunday opened it up to everyone waiting for the regatta to start on the Saturday, and as a result over 120 school-age rowers got to experience coastal rowing.

'We put out a few buoys and organised some round robin races,' she explains. 'Rowers were constantly queuing and we had a really captive audience. The feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive; everyone was keen to give the sport a go in the future.'

The following day more than 50 adults gave the coastal rowing boats a go, and Sally and the five-person WRA coastal rowing sub-committee received similar feedback to the day before.

Simon Smith, leading masters rower and head coach of the highly successful Dunstan High School rowing programme in Central Otago, is also a big fan of coastal rowing boats, saying they offer an attractive training alternative.

'It just gives you the option to go out in conditions you normally wouldn't think about going out in,' explains Simon, who says Dunstan Arm Rowing Club has a couple of singles and a coastal rowing double.

'We are lucky at Lake Dunstan to have consistently calm conditions in the morning, although in the afternoon we often have a strong nor'wester coming down the lake. For me, who is out on the coach boat most mornings, I'll be out in the coastal boat on an afternoon, especially in spring or summer, maybe 50 per cent of the time.'

The heavier nature of the boats means it allows for greater stability on the water and this too has its advantages, according to Simon.

'It enables you to become more confident rowing in the rough water,' he adds. 'They are a stable platform for novices to learn in. A great transition to the smaller boats. They are a great tool.'

Whatever future awaits the sport of coastal rowing, there is little doubt it is here to stay, and in many ways the sport is tailor made for New Zealanders.

'So many of us have grown up spending so much time in the sea,' Sally Knight explains. 'Coastal rowing is a great option to keep in touch with rowing while adding in the unpredictability of the waves and rowing by the beach. There is a real adventure element to coastal rowing, plus it is just plain good fun.'

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Simon Smith, Dunstan High School Rowing programme

Coastal Rowing community

Coastal rowing is one of the fastest growing rowing communities in the world and World Rowing organises the World Rowing Coastal Championships and World Rowing Beach Sprint Finals. In the former the endurance format is raced, in which crews compete over four to six km around multiple turning points.

The Beach Sprint is a head-to-head elimination style of racing. Competitions are structured so that athletes who progress further are required to race multiple times within a short time window.

The 2021 World Rowing Beach Sprint Finals take place in Oeiras, Portugal, from September 24–26. The World Rowing Coastal Championships take place at the same venue from October 1–3.

Coastal rowing has a more recreational arm, too, and in 2019 Nelson Rowing Club hosted a World Rowing Tour. More than 40 paddlers from around the world gathered at the top of the South Island to row in coastal boats for the week-long tour.



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ATHLETE COMPETING IN THE 2014 WORLD COASTAL ROWING CHAMPIONSHIPS THESSALONIKI, GREECE



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