



2022-23 PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Community sport plays a valuable role in our 'social infrastructure' – at its best, community sport is an inclusive environment for people of all ages, cultural backgrounds, walks of life and experience. As President, I have been very much aware of our club's place in both the paddling and local community.

Community sport clubs like INCC Yarra Paddlers with their combination of human capital, facilities and know-how that has been built up by generations of committed volunteers, enriches our lives. Since its inception in the 1950s, the club has nurtured champions and encouraged thousands of people to participate in the sport for recreation, make social connections and to appreciate our special bit of nature on the edge of a big city.

INCC Yarra Paddlers occupies a council-owned building in a public park. The constraints of the facilities has led to our club having greater emphasis on the use of a club fleet and in doing so, has provided low-cost, low-risk entry to the sport. The decades-long campaign for fit-for-purpose facilities has had a couple of encouraging developments this year. The Yarra Council has undertaken work to assess the feasibility of building boat storage capacity closer to the water – and engaged architects to develop concept designs for the Panther Pavilion and access around Fairfield Park. If approved by Melbourne Water, not only would this free up space to provide space for programs and members in a redeveloped Panther Pavilion but would be huge step forward in accessibility and safety for our youngest and oldest members who struggle with the 98 steps to the water. The committee, coaches and other members with relevant experience have provided feedback to council on the concept plans and we have our fingers crossed that this time, the project will progress beyond the planning phase.

Central to community sport is the development of young people, not just as athletes but as active community contributors. In 2022-23, we had 133 juniors registered with the club. Kelly Murray led our work to ensure the club is meeting our obligations under new Child Safety regulations and to raise awareness of child safety generally.

For many years INCC has partnered with Methodist Ladies College and Camberwell Grammar to provide the infrastructure for their kayaking programs and to provide a pathway for their students to continue in the sport when they finish school. We were delighted that this year, Carey Grammar has joined the paddling community by trialling a small program for a dozen or so students in term 1. The program was managed by the Marathon Committee of Paddle Victoria and will proceed again in term 1 next year with over 40 young people. We hope that Carey will go on to establish kayaking as permanent part of their sport program.

Only three years ago, the committee took the decision to re-invigorate and invest in our club junior program. We engaged a young coach, Chris Burns, as Manager and Head Coach. Chris and the program have flourished to the point where in terms two and three this year, the program had 36 and 38 participants respectively. Not only has participation grown, Chris and his team of regular coaches have helped our young members achieve some great things as

you will hear later. In particular, I want to acknowledge Chris' role in coaching Emma Murray and Isabella Parish to their victory at the Nationals and on to represent Australia at the World Championships in Denmark a few months ago.

An important aspect of the program is our efforts to attract and engage young people from the local community. This continues to be challenging but one that I hope we will continue to work on. Given the nature of our sport and professionalisation of junior coaching, kayaking is a relatively expensive sport for young people when compared to footy, netball, cricket and basketball which enjoys greater government support and a larger pool of parents and coaches. Our club's adult members contribute to the cost of running the junior program and through the purchase of boats. This year, we purchased six new boats suitable for smaller, lighter paddlers – 4 K1s and 2 K2s – and these are getting plenty of use. The club will continue to look for ways to support junior development and to reduce the barriers for young people to get involved in the sport.

We had 176 adult members, the majority of whom enjoy paddling for recreation, fitness and social connection. We also have a dedicated and talented group of competitive adult paddlers who represent the club regularly in Paddle Victoria events and perform at the highest level in State and National championships.

Our learn-to-paddle program is the primary pathway for new adult members. Interest in the program has been high since the end of COVID restrictions, with 71 people completing the course last season. Rachel de Kretser has been managing that program and doing a great job encouraging people to keep on with their paddling and to join the club.

Like other clubs and the schools, we are experiencing a significant shortage of qualified coaches for our junior and adult programs. I encourage club members to consider qualifying as a coach – it is a fun and rewarding way to stay active and contribute to the community.

The governance of community sport relies on volunteers and I want to thank every member of our committee for their contribution this year.

While everyone on the committee puts in many hours of work in their portfolio, I want to make special mention of Deb Bennett's contribution as she is stepping down this year after serving for many years. Amongst many other contributions, Deb has served with me on the Project Reference Group for the redevelopment, has mentored and supported Chris and as you might guess, has been the key organiser of today's event. As a former President and long-term committee member, Deb has made an outstanding contribution to the club.

Finally, a big thank you to you – our community – for making this club such a special place.

Candice Charles
President

