

Chairman's Report

August 2018

The Yakity Yak Kayak Club was formed in 1989 and has had thousands of members over the intervening years. It started as a predominantly whitewater club with sea kayaking. Today, Sea kayaking is now the predominant part of the club with Taranaki holding a strong White Water focus as well as splattering of river trips being promoted by other centres from time to time.

There are three issues that are effecting all clubs in these modern times, they are;

- 1/ recruiting new members
- 2/ the retention of existing members.
- 3/ the recruiting and retention of leaders.

I thought this Report would be the opportunity to address some of these issues and outline the next years focus and work plan.

Finding new members;

This has historically been the roll of Canoe & Kayak staff, promoting it as the best option for new customers wanting to start kayaking. Staff promoting the 'course-first' approach to their client, as the way to build skills, knowledge and relationships to allow ongoing, safe adventures with the Yakity Yak Club. This was and still is a symbiotic relationship that sees both the Club and Canoe & Kayak achieve their goals.

Separating the club and its management from Canoe & Kayak, for which the owners and managers once were once responsible, has seen a drop in conversions from first time enquiries to club membership. Instead, I believe, they are being turned into immediate sales of product.

The opportunity is for shop staff to promote the course and the club as the first step for beginners. For this to happen, club leaders and management will need to take a more proactive approach in the promotion of club trips to shop management and staff, to ensure the shop staff are fully engaged with the value the club offers to new 'want to be' paddlers. At the same time, Canoe & Kayak senior management, through all levels of training and marketing, need to ramp up the focus on the amazing opportunities that the public can get with the club and stores close relationship.

New membership needs to be encouraged through the existing leader and member network. Historically, we have seen poor results. So, I have been working on a new approach to see if we can grow the members ability to bring in new members. We currently have a raft of amazing trips available for members. What I am proposing is for leaders who would like to participate in a new membership drive to help in the following way.

As an example, I will use the two trips I have planned for this summer on the Whanganui to explain how the plan would work.

I have two dates for a 5-day Whanganui Trip, in November and March. I am holding 16 seats for people who are not currently members and 8 seats for existing members making a total number of 24.

The 16 new members, I will try to book for one date for their training weekend, so they build some comradery. I'll also encourage them to join in on club surf sessions and other club trips prior to the Whanganui trip. The other 8 members coming will be a mix of current leaders, trainee leaders and general members with a view to encouraging existing and new leaders to take on leading a trip themselves the following year.

In this way, if we had ten leaders promoting this new membership drive of promoting iconic bucket list trips to friends, work mates and family, we would generate 160 new members per year. This would also allow great training opportunities for new leaders to develop skills knowledge and the confidence to continue the growth.

Retaining existing members;

This all comes down to relevance, leadership, motivation and confidence. The club needs to be relevant to the members desires and to do this we have to know what they want. This is usually done by way of a survey that we should do to ascertain what members want.

Leadership and motivation are the big movers and shakers here. With the right skills a leader can run a trip in some horrific conditions, or to a boring destination, and the participants recall the trip as the best thing they have ever done. To address this, we need to expand the skill set of leaders to be super confident in the leadership role, so the trips are stunning. This will need a Leader development programme which may include attendance at conferences like the KASK Forum and training sessions held by senior leaders to pass on/share skills and knowledge.

Paddler confidence is where many drop out, and there are two areas need to be addressed. They are the confidence of the member to be able to “keep up” and the confidence of the person to be able to “get on” with other members.

The “Keep Up” issue can be managed by ensuring the new member has the chance to participate on trips that are within their skill, knowledge and fitness confidence zone. This requires leaders to be able to point the new members towards the next appropriate trip.

The “Get on” issue is also controlled by the leaders. Having a great introduction to skills, the pairing up of buddies, the inclusion in responsibilities and conversations will all go a long way towards building the feeling of inclusiveness. This in-turn gives a feeling of belonging to new members. This is also the responsibility of the Instructor running any club members through training. They’ll need to work hard during their training to build the individuals into a solid group of mates that want to go on and do more adventuring together.

It is apparent as membership grows, strong friendships and other activities than kayaking become a focus. By including other activities in the activity calendar, members will see more value in being a member. Planning annual events, monthly entertainment, meals, other outdoors activities such as tramping, biking, skiing will add to the community feel and the retention of members.

Building leadership capability and numbers;

We have an amazing group of dedicated leaders and new leaders coming on all the time. The training process is well established, but not always followed through on. This is where a more holistic and inclusive approach by instructors, charged with improving new leaders skill and knowledge, and the linkage with existing leaders and members needs some extra focus. We perhaps need to look for clarity about roles and an understanding of these roles may well help achieve better results.

The Club needs to effectively apprentice members to become leaders. In this way the Club identifies the potential leader (not currently done at all locations), the skill set required (Skills Active Sea Kayak Leader or NZKI), then sets a training plan (Leaders Training course), allocates the Club Leaders to mentor (not currently done everywhere) and the professional services needed (Kayak Instructors, Coast Guard, First Aid supplier)

Tying up a few loose ends in this, I think, will bring much improved results.

So how do we move forward;

Take the first step. If you see merit in my ideas and indeed have your own ideas on how we can improve or add to them, then join the Board tonight. For things to move forward, we need energy from motivated people.

I think dividing the Boards portfolios will also help. We would look for a Chairman, Financial, Membership, New Members, Retention, Leadership, Communications.

Most of these roles will require sub-committees to bring the energy to get the results and in some areas such as membership/ accounting, may need to be outsourced if we do not have volunteers with the skills required.

In so doing we will bring focus and energy to the club Governance that has been hard to achieve so far.

My last year has seen a full time focus on environmental battles and hence my effort towards the role as Chairman has been too low. The environmental battle over sediment pollution is now getting momentum and will require an enormous amount of effort to see change in the current pollution levels killing of our marine environment. The other focus on changing the zoning laws of our coastal zones to prevent the ongoing urban sprawl along our favourite paddling places. The Okura struggle highlights this issue that three Environment Courts have said no to the urbanisation of this coastal land and yet in two years the owner can reapply. Without law change, all the best wilderness areas we like to paddle will be urbanised unless the law is changed. These two issues, I believe deserve my full attention, as they impact on many of the things that I hold dear about living and paddling in New Zealand. Without change to current laws and practices, we will be leaving a vastly depleted paddling environment for the future paddlers.

A huge thank you to the current Board and Leaders that have volunteered their time and energy to help others enjoy our wonderful country by kayak.

If someone has the energy and drive to take on the Chairpersons role I am very happy to stand down as Chair and stay on the board. But if no one else wishes to step forward, I will need a motivated board to move the club forward especially with great organisational skills.

Cheers Peter Townend

Chair Person

Yakity Yak Kayak Trust