

Melbourne Amateur Regatta Association Inc.
(Australian Henley)

2025 President's report

The aim of the Melbourne Amateur Regatta Association is to run a successful regatta in Melbourne. Melbourne is, in many ways, the ideal location in Victoria to run an amateur regatta, even if it is a narrow course with bends. It is a beautiful location and there are enough local clubs and schools for meaningful competition, without requiring excessive travel for the most people. It is held on the Yarra River, close to the city centre making it readily accessible to not only the athletes but also supporters and the public. As such it has an advantage over courses further away and continues to draw good entries.

Our 2025 annual regatta took place in hot weather on Saturday, February 22nd. Overall, it went well but a problem with the bow numbers for the morning time-trial led to some incorrect draws for the semi-finals. The root cause has been identified, and Rowing Victoria will implement procedural changes to ensure this kind of error cannot occur again. We are apologising to those crews adversely affected.

I am pleased to report this year our entries were up by 12% on last year but nevertheless our entries are still down on the numbers before the Covid years. If I look at participation over longer periods, in the 10 years since we introduced the time-trial plus matched pairs format in 2015 our entries are now up by 36%. Before that entries were only about 60% of what they are now.

The increase this year was partly in the events introduced last year, the Open Sculls and the Male School Coxed Quads and partly in the Masters' and other School events. Most of the Melbourne schools are represented each year, as are most of the local masters' crews. Disappointingly, the entries in the Club Coxed Eights continues to fall and club rowing in general is not what it once was.

Off course our position in the Rowing Victoria program does restrict the entries at Henley. There are two other regattas held on the same weekend, the Junior and Intermediate Schoolgirls Championship Regatta in Geelong and the Ballarat Head of the Lake which means we cannot run successful school events for Female Year 10 crews or any School Coxed Fours. Unless these clashes can be avoided it is hard to see any significant increase in entries.

On the spectator side, we don't keep statistics, but we always have many members of the public and supporters sitting on the south slopes of the riverbank or cycling along the bike path. It is one of our advantages that

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supporters can see their athletes performing at closer range than at other venues. We do try to attract as many spectators as possible as crowds create a positive atmosphere that will encourage more entries.

To swell the crowd and provide a better atmosphere, the Committee holds a lunch for our subscribers on the Henley landing, and it was pleasing to again welcome the group from Banks RC to increase the numbers. We have continued to offer the marque lunch for both our subscribers and Princes Bridge clubs. As well as the marque lunch, coffee, food and rowing apparel vendors were available and were well attended. Also, the “Pimms” Bar run by the Prince Wine Store was again a huge success. In general, spectators and competitors enjoyed the day.

On the financial side, as will be reported by Rob in his treasurer’s report, the Parks Victoria fee for using the river is the main reason our on-water activity operates at a loss which we haven’t been able to make up for by our off-water activity. This is a continuing challenge for the committee which needs to be addressed.

I will be retiring as president in November, and I especially want to thank the hard-working committee who have made my job, both doable and a rewarding activity and a pleasure. Thank you all.

On behalf of the MARA committee, the regatta participants and myself, I would also like to thank; - our many volunteers who helped on the day with buoy laying, timing and marshalling roles, the Boatrace Officials for managing the competition on-water and Rowing Victoria for their regatta management and results service, our subscribers and sponsors who are the main reason we can keep the costs down for the competitors.

The 2026 Australian Henley Regatta will be held on Saturday February 21st We hope to see you there.

David Yates

President

Melbourne Amateur Regatta Association

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