

**MELBOURNE-HOBART EAST COAST AND MELBOURNE TO
HOBART WEST COAST YACHT RACE PRESENTATIONS
BY
THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
DERWENT SAILING SQUADRON - TUESDAY 31ST DECEMBER 2013**

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you this afternoon for the prize presentations for the Melbourne to Hobart Eastcoaster and Melbourne to Hobart Westcoaster Yacht Races. On behalf of all Tasmanians I extend an especially warm welcome to all the visitors who have arrived in Hobart for the end of the yacht races. Your presence in Hobart along with the competitors in the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and the Launceston to Hobart Yacht Race adds to the festive air which pervades the city at this time of year. This year more than 120 yachts took part in 4 different races, all – or nearly all - ending up in Hobart within a few days of each other. This really is the very best time to be in Hobart, for yachtsmen, for visitors and for residents alike and it gets better every year, with the Hobart Summer Festival now offering eleven days and nights of entertainment with a distinctive lean toward fine food, wine and, of course, the occasional refreshing ale.

But I think that you will all agree with me that this afternoon we should pause for a moment to remember Dr Joe Cannon for the 480 nautical mile blue-water classic Melbourne to Hobart Yacht Race was the brainchild of Stan Gibson from Hobson's Bay Yacht Club in Melbourne and Dr Joe Cannon a Life Member of the Derwent Sailing Squadron in Hobart. Joe, who was our family doctor for many years, passed away just two weeks ago aged 90 years. Although towards the end he was very deaf and unsteady on his feet his mind was as sharp as ever when earlier this year I had the privilege of conferring on him the insignia of the Order of Australia awarded to him for his service to the sport of sailing. Joe and

Stan intended what became known as the Westcoaster as an alternative for Victorian and South Australian sailors who wanted to be in Hobart for the celebrations but did not want the logistical hassle of getting the yacht up to Sydney to compete in the Sydney to Hobart.

Some of you may recall that in the early days, the Westcoaster received widespread criticism because of the fearsome reputation of the west coast of Tasmania. Some critics even described the race as Russian Roulette with yachts. However, Stan Gibson had done a study of the weather patterns at the time and convinced critics that it was not as dangerous as initially believed and so the first Westcoaster was run in 1972. This year is the forty-second time that the Westcoaster has been run and despite the early reservations, it has proven to have an enviable safety record due largely to the careful management and education programs put in place by the ORCV.

This year 18 yachts crossed the starting line in Melbourne and although the numbers are down a bit this year, it is interesting to see that the skippers were evenly split with 9 choosing the west coast and an equal number choosing the east coast, so it would be fair to say that the west coaster, which has just been run for the forty-first time, retains its popularity but at the same time the relatively new east coaster is clearly here to stay. This year it was a hard race for both the Eastcoasters and the Westcoasters. I am told that the weather has been described as “fresh to frightening” on both sides of the island and the sail makers are rubbing their hands in glee. But ocean racing is a tough and highly competitive sport. It takes time and commitment on the part of every member of the crew. The boat has to be prepared for the race. The crew has to train for the race. Gear has to be bought, fitted and tested. I pay tribute to the families of the ocean racers – wives, husbands, partners, children, mothers and fathers. Every member of every family of those who sail in the Melbourne to Hobart shares the anxiety

and fears that are associated with this race. Without the support and encouragement of the families of those who sail in the Melbourne to Hobart it would not be possible for the crews to equip the boats, train for the race and enter the competition. I salute them.

Congratulations also go to the officials from both the Ocean Racing Club of Victoria and the Derwent Sailing Squadron, the time keepers, marine radio operators and all the other volunteers. You have just organised and managed two very exciting races. Most importantly, although the conditions saw the loss and damage of some gear there was no loss of life or serious injury sustained by any person.

And of course, last, but by no means least, my congratulations go to all those who are to receive trophies this afternoon, your achievements are inspirational to sailors and would-be sailors around the country. Ocean racing can be a very expensive sport and naturally the public gaze focuses upon the larger yachts fitted out with the latest carbon fibre sails and the latest technology, but when you are at sea and racing on a handicap, it makes little difference whether you are sailing one of those modern machines or sailing a smaller and more conventional boat for it is a high level of seamanship, and the discipline and teamwork of the entire crew as well as personal courage and endurance that prevails. So I salute those values in all you who compete in this very tough sport and I hope to see you all back again next year.