

ATTRIBUTABLE TO SIR RUSSELL COUTTS, SAILGP CEO

SailGP operates all over the world, and no doubt there are marine mammals in the water in all of the locations we race. We've never had an incident in 35 events.

Our people and our athletes care deeply about marine conservation. In addition to our normal marine mammal protocols, SailGP has had this extreme marine mammal management plan forced upon us in Lyttelton, demanded by the Department of Conservation, Ecan and Ngāti Wheke for this event. Otherwise, SailGP would not be permitted to race. Other harbour users, including commercial users, are not subject to such protocols.

In particular Guy Harris, the harbourmaster, has been extremely restrictive in prohibiting practice for our international teams, including this morning where they were desperately seeking his approval to allow them much-needed time on the water. He refused without giving any reasons. Earlier in the week, he also stated to me that because SailGP is a commercial entity, other non-commercial entities and views have priority.

Unfortunately yesterday was another example of there being almost no balance in the decision making – another example of New Zealand being handcuffed by unprecedented layers of bureaucracy and red tape.

I find it astonishing the amount of influence Iwi have over the authorities here in New Zealand. The Department of Conservation would not allow racing in Lyttelton unless SailGP had approval from the Iwi. I suspect most New Zealanders don't realise the full implications of such a stance.

It's been my experience throughout my long career connected with the ocean, that dolphins are extremely intelligent mammals and are inherently aware of boats around them. The Hector's dolphin is not an endangered species as Otago university professor Liz Slooten recently claimed. That was a lie.

Of course, with any decision like this there needs to be a balance. For example, one could say that because there is a chance of a road death that we shouldn't be allowed to drive on the roads. I suspect most people would conclude that such a stance would be far too extreme and not practical. Inherently, as a society we accept an element of risk in our daily lives.

The Department of Conservation, Ecan and Lyttelton Port Company have enforced services upon SailGP - (which is an international company with its main offices in London and New York) - that are not required and not demanded anywhere else in the world, yet are nevertheless imposed as a condition for allowing the races to proceed in Lyttelton. The costs from those unrequired services total approximately 300k. In addition to that, there are 11 so-called expert dolphin observers that are being paid NZD \$600 per day each, plus their expenses in a program that totals \$78,000

It was demanded that those dolphin observers be onsite from Thursday onwards, despite the harbourmaster reducing practice on that day to around 11 minutes of sailing. These are costs and services that SailGP doesn't face anywhere else in the world. In conducting this event, SailGP alone is spending approximately NZD \$5.5million the local economy.

Of course our international teams also go to considerable effort and expense to send their teams to New Zealand to compete and it's fair to say that they are also not happy with the way this program is being managed.

SailGP distributes live broadcast to 212 territories worldwide and many of those broadcasters including CBS in the US turned the feed off well before the conclusion of the live broadcast window.

There are a lot of considerations in managing an event like this yet almost none of those are not being properly considered by the environmental and harbour authorities here in Christchurch.

The fact is almost all of the people here in Christchurch are incredibly supportive and positive. I'd like to thank all of those people who have made us feel so welcome. I feel sorry for the fans, local businesses and all those people that are so proud of this incredible city that the event has been so disrupted. Let's hope we finish with some great racing today.