

# Waka Ama Aotearoa NZ Sprint Nationals - Important Event Updates for 2027 and beyond

Tēnā tātou

Following an outstanding 2026 Sprint Nationals that exceeded growth expectations, and to ensure we continue creating space within both the participant experience, event schedule and venue capacity, please see below a number of important updates that will be introduced moving forward for our National Sprint Event.

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## 2027 Sprint Nationals - Update 1: Raised Taitamariki Minimum Age

From 2027, the minimum age for Taitamariki competitors at the Waka Ama Sprint Nationals will be **7 years old (turning 8 within the year of competition)**.

### Rationale

This change has been made with the safety, wellbeing, and confidence of our tamariki in mind. The ability for 5 and 6 year olds to safely control the waka - particularly in windy conditions - can be very challenging and often places unnecessary pressure and stress on our youngest paddlers. There is a significant difference in capability and development between a 5 year old and a 10 year old, and this update aims to create a more balanced and positive racing environment for all tamariki which aligns with the principles of [Balance is Better](#).

By increasing the minimum age to 7 years old, we allow for:

- Greater physical development and confidence on the water
  - Improved waka control and safety
  - A smaller age and development gap within the Taitamariki grade
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## 2027 Sprint Nationals - Update 2: Event Schedule Extension

Beginning in 2027, the event will commence one day earlier on **Saturday the 16th January** with the pōwhiri followed by Taitamariki racing.

### Rationale

This change will help us better spread out junior racing events and reduce pressure around parking, logistics, and scheduling across the week. It will also support the continued growth of the event into the future. This updated structure will provide more space for racing

divisions, improve event flow, and allow the kaupapa to continue growing sustainably in 2027 and beyond.

The proposed format may look like the following - **please note this is dependent on entries:**

Date	Day	Events
Saturday 16 Jan	Day 1 (from 11am)	Pōwhiri, Taitamariki Events, Intermediate Events (TBC)
Sunday 17 Jan	Day 2	Taitamariki Events, Intermediate Events
Monday 18 Jan	Day 3	Intermediate Events, J16 Events
Tuesday 19 Jan	Day 4	J16 Events, Int W1s (TBC)
Wednesday 20 Jan	Day 5	All W1s
Thursday 21 Jan	Day 6	Seniors W6/W12, Dash, Regional W12
Friday 22 Jan	Day 7	Seniors W6/W12, Corporate Race
Saturday 23 Jan	Day 8	Seniors Finals Day

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### 2027 Sprint Nationals - Update 3: Intermediate W1 Support Paddlers

The intermediate division is intended for paddlers who are able to race independently, therefore support paddlers will no longer be permitted. This approach aligns with the expectation that paddlers competing at a National level have the experience and capability to manage race conditions safely and independently. Support paddlers will still remain in place for Taitamariki W12 and W6 divisions. Where support paddlers are required, consideration also needs to be given to whether conditions are suitable for participation.

In order to ensure a high level of safety, WAANZ will increase the number of safety craft on the water during the Intermediate and Taitamariki events.

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### 2027 Sprint Nationals - Update 4: Entries Closing Earlier

All W6 and W12 team entries will close on **November 22, 2026**. This will allow WAANZ to better understand entry numbers earlier and assist with confirming schedules and event planning well in advance. This change will not impact W1 entries or Regional qualification events. Provisions will remain in place to allow W1 qualifiers to be entered after this date where required.

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## 2028 Sprint Nationals (and beyond)

As participation continues to increase, some W6 regional qualification events will become necessary for Sprint Nationals 2028.

A quota system will also be established, meaning only regions with divisions exceeding their allocated quota would need to hold regional qualification events prior to Nationals. WAANZ will work alongside regions to implement this.

This will also provide paddlers with more opportunities to race locally leading into Nationals.

WAANZ will work closely with regions as we plan for the continued growth of Sprint Nationals and support the implementation of any qualification processes.

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## Questions or more information

If you have any questions regarding the above updates, please speak with your club in the first instance. Clubs can then liaise directly with WAANZ as required.

All event information can be found here: [2027 Sprint Nationals](#)

Ngā mihi