

Cruising Yachts Pacific Crossing 2020 - COVID Ocean Cruising Club Update

The below information has been provided by Guy Chester, Roving Rear Commodore of the [Ocean Cruising Club](#) (OCC) on the 19th May 2020

PACIFIC CROSSING – Ocean Cruising Club UPDATE

Please see a detailed update below. Frustratingly there is little good news, but efforts continue and we remain hopeful.

The OCC has continued to liaise with various governments, diplomats, marine trade associations, rally organisers and OCC port officers in the hope of facilitating at a minimum transit under quarantine and/or ports of refuge for the forthcoming South Pacific cyclone season. We have approximately 150 yachts on our "list", but are aware there are many more in limbo in anchorages throughout the Pacific Ocean during these tumultuous times.

Fundamentally, the OCC recognises that small island communities value their own health as paramount and are very worried about disease introduction.

The OCC has written to Government Ministers in New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and Tonga. We have put the situation as that many of the yachts are the owners' homes and sailing to their country of origin or leaving their yacht and flying to their home country is not practical. Yachts in Panama, Galapagos, French Polynesia, Fiji and other Pacific nations are currently in local isolation. Yachts are not "cruising the Pacific", they are in limbo. However, as the seasons progress yachts will need to leave the cyclone belt of the South Pacific. Whilst we presented the then current list of 120 yachts in limbo in the Pacific and hoping for safe refuge in the forthcoming cyclone season, we noted that the list is only indicative, we estimate that there are likely to be at least 300 and up to 500 yachts wishing to spend the 2020/21 summer in Australia or New Zealand.

The Ocean Cruising Club recognises the concerns of virus introduction held by each country. Whilst, in normal times the Pacific crossing sees yachts cruising through hundreds of Pacific paradise anchorages, this year, whilst the Coronavirus is prevalent, OCC has written that it is accepted yachts will face quarantine at destination and transit ports. Importantly, until nations fully open their borders and internal waters, the OCC has not sought open cruising throughout the Pacific Islands, rather the ability for yachts to make safe passage to ports of refuge.

We have reinforced that the concern is for yachts seeking refuge before the South Pacific cyclone season. We have stated that for prudent navigation and/or insurance requirements most yachts need to move from their current locations to be well outside of the cyclone belt prior to 1 November. Whilst the need for Pacific countries to maintain strict measures to stop the introduction and spread of the Coronavirus is recognised, the OCC is trying to find suitable arrangements for yachts currently in the Pacific Ocean who need to escape the cyclone season. The OCC has said that yachts understand the needs for strict quarantine, and are understanding and prepared to take preventative measures prior to making passage, record crew health while on passage, make relevant pre-arrival notifications and if needed stay aboard for a quarantine period. OCC hopes that for small crews aboard yachts that a 14 day quarantine period would be considered acceptable, ideally time at sea on passage prior to arrival may be considered a part of the quarantine period.

The OCC has reinforced in the letters to governments that the focus is to ensure the safety of small crews on small vessels needing safe refuge and not about promoting the cruising yacht community's economic contribution. That said, we have noted the substantial economic benefit from the yachts' stay which support a significant marina, boatyard, marine retail and marine services industry. The crews' long stay presence as tourists has further economic benefits.

To avoid any doubt, the Ocean Cruising Club has sought to resolve suitable access for the yachts and entry by the crews, the OCC has not requested any special immigration status, we assume yacht crews have or will have suitable visas, visa exemptions etc. prior to arrival. Unfortunately OCC does note some current catch 22 situations where online visa application processes may currently be disabled. The OCC notes that as time goes by and yachts are still in limbo, visas expiry dates/renewals may become an issue.

There is no official process, OCC is liaising and lobbying but unfortunately we report no success to date. Please see Noonsite for the current situation, we will endeavour to post news of changes to the OCC Pacific Crossing group. In summary of the status/process is:

Australia, the border remains closed to all but Australians, there is an exemption process but this has limited applicability and requires a valid visa. The OCC has written to the Ministers for Home Affairs, Immigration, Health and Customs. No reply has been received to date. There is ongoing liaison with Australian diplomats, however no direct liaison with Border Force or other relevant agency has been established as yet. The organiser of the [Down Under Rally](#), John Hembrow has been working on the issue as well, through industry bodies and government agencies. There is at least one potential port of entry that is being considered which has confirmed that it is prepared to provide the logistics for a quarantine aboard on arrival situation. The OCC & the Down Under Rally are continuing to lobby for this port to be conditionally open to international small craft and their crew however there is no indication, at this stage, that this is something that is being considered by the relevant government authorities

New Zealand: The OCC has written to the New Zealand Ministers for Immigration, Biosecurity, Health, Customs, Sport, Recreation and Tourism. New Zealand has many folk working hard to facilitate yacht arrivals. That said the border remains closed to all but New Zealanders, there is a humanitarian exemption able to be applied for, but its applicability to yachts is unknown. Encouragingly, the NZ Ministry of Health briefly published a protocol for assessment of yacht crews on arrival. This was removed from the website after a few days, but it looks like there is a health/quarantine protocol for yachts once the wider decision of opening borders is resolved. John Martin ([Sail South Pacific](#)), NZ Marine, marinas and other key stakeholders are still working on this and it would appear that there is at least one potential port of entry that could provide the logistics for a quarantine aboard on arrival situation.

Tonga: The Tongan border remains closed to all. The OCC has written to the Prime Minister. The OCC's port officer, Greg Just is involved in re-invigorating the Vava'u Tourism Association and is liaising with local stakeholders. Greg is developing and promoting a quarantine on arrival approach for Tonga, including both policy and local logistics. However, there is no interactive process with government at present. Greg and the OCC continue efforts.

Fiji: The Fiji border remains closed. The OCC has written to the Prime Minister and Ministers for Health and Tourism. The OCC is attempting ongoing liaison with Fiji government agencies and local stakeholders.

The concept of a Australia/New Zealand "bubble" and this also being extended to some nearby South Pacific nations such as Tonga and Fiji has been discussed in the media. How this affects yachts crossing the Pacific is unknown.

The situation in French Polynesia has been changing over the months, currently it is understood that yachts (after pre-arrival approval) are required to clear in at Papeete and some yachts have been given pre-arrival approval to transit Nuku Hiva for fuel/repairs/provisions. The OCC did provide some advocacy for one yacht being required to move from the Gambiers with rig damage, they were permitted to stay until repairs effected. The OCC is very grateful to the French Polynesian authorities for providing refuge and transit to yachts mid Pacific.

The OCC has not undertaken any communication with the Cook Islands, New Caledonia or Vanuatu. Unfortunately some Vanuatu islands were badly affected by Cyclone Harold and the country is focusing on recovery.

In summary, there has been much activity by the OCC and key stakeholders. The efforts are ongoing but there are no known processes in place with time frames for decisions yet.

Recognising that the Coronavirus is not going to disappear and a vaccine appears at least a year away, and in order to protect small island communities, the OCC accepts that yachts may need to undertake quarantine upon arrival. The following protocol on page 3 of this document is being considered for promotion to governments to offer a practical mechanism to allow yachts to transit or enter and to protect local communities.

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Sanctuary

LOA 15.m | Beam 7.3m | Draft 1.4m | 16 Tonnes

Australian Registered Ship 850528 | Call

Sign VJQ2010 | MMSI 50325850 |

Satphone +87 0773202084

Summary Protocol COVID 19 Yacht Quarantine for Transit/Refuge

Predeparture

- All Yachts' crew must have visa's, exemptions or be eligible for visa on arrival.
- Pre-departure notification to border officials at next port made as required.
- Ensure knowledge of biosecurity requirements and prohibitions (COVID, biofouling and animal/plant material/food).
- All crew healthy no COVID symptoms.
- Ensure Zarpe/Clearance from port dated. Maintain strict social isolation from this date onwards.

At Sea

- Log kept of crew health (temperature < or > 38.0 C, symptoms etc.).
- Log or track of route since last declared departure.
- Strict isolation.

Pre-Arrival

- Pre-arrival notification with ETA, health declaration as required.
- Clear holding tanks at sea.

Arrival

- Contact Port/Border officials as required.
- Maintain strict quarantine isolation (Q flag hoisted).

Quarantine Aboard

- Strict isolation, no socialisation with other yachts/ashore.
- At anchor, mooring or marina berth.
- Use holding tank.
- Provisions/fuel/parts by contact less delivery.

NOTE: OCC hopes that the passage time from the last Port can be included in the time of quarantine. The OCC recommends yachts be allowed to quarantine aboard, as the crew can look after the yacht etc., only where the crew prefers to, is quarantine ashore (e.g. in a hotel) recommended.

Transit

- If allowed ashore, honor agreed transit/stay period.
- Comply with all local social distancing/isolation rules.

Refuge

- Ensure Visa held and conditions complied with.