



## LIGHT WINDS FORCE PADDLERS TO DIG DEEP FOR GBROC 2023

The relief was as palpable as the sense of achievement for competitors arriving at Four Mile Beach on Saturday to finish Australia's longest and toughest iron ocean race, the *Great Barrier Reef Ocean Challenge* (GBROC).

The trademark South-Easterly tradewinds checked out and left paddlers to dig deep within their own mental and physical reserves to get the gruelling 45-kilometre job done with a little assistance from the residual ocean swell.

It was over in 3 ½ hour or less for the frontrunners – the barnstorming Bayside Unlimited open men's crew, super SUP foilers Craig Campbell and Tim Fitzsimmons, double ski Robert Godbolt/Brad Hagan and Daintree Coast's dynamic Alex Pawlow.

Mooloolaba open women's crew continued to set the benchmark in changeover format, finishing in 3:43:41 with Australian Outrigger open men's crew, paddling iron format, hot on their heels (3:44:26) after a sprint finish and Gold Coast open mixed (3:49:11) third OC6 across the line.

Adrian Horsfield from Brisbane OCC (3:53:41) showed grit to hold off North Queensland veteran Darrell Thoroughgood (4:00:13) in his 12<sup>th</sup> GBROC outing, with Hekili's Beal Beal third in single craft.

Coral Sea's Hannah Stokes (4:25:11) edged out Sam Price-Rees from Capricorn Coast (4:26:59) in an epic dual, with Hekili's Marta-alena Krecji gaining a medal in her first-ever OC1 iron race. Clare James from Mission Beach earned every ounce of her Senior Master Women's gold as did Bill Jarvis from Bundaberg in Golden Master Men's division.

The sole women ocean ski competitor Rachael Symington (4:43:37) and another debutant Fiona Hanson (5:10:09) from Coral Sea won the hearts of the crowd with their courageous efforts.

Hekili OCC president Ross Watson paid tribute to the volunteers working hard behind the scenes, as well as the Volunteer Coast Guard Cairns and Port Douglas VMR and other safety boat operators for keeping the fleet of 55 craft safe on the water.

"Paddlers from around Australia have been able to enjoy the challenge and beauty of the tropical waters we are so lucky to call our backyard," Mr Watson said.

“Hekili OCC is proud to have been able to present another safe, successful Great Barrier Reef Ocean Challenge which over the past 12 years has established itself as a premier, national event on the Australian racing calendar.”

Mr Watson also thanked sponsors who made it possible to provide every paddler with a specially designed, bright-orange GBROC race rashie in tribute of Brisbane-based outrigger paddling and outrigger champion, coach and mentor Danny Topfer, who died in March.

“Hekili OCC will never forget the logistical support and encouragement Danny Topfer has given to our event over many years and the competitive spirit and sportsmanship for which Topyy will always be remembered in our sport and region,” Watson said.

*\*Go to [Hekil GBROC 45km Iron and Changeover | Webscorer](#) for complete results.*

**Media contact: Charlie McKillop 0406 699 506 or Ross Watson 0459 819 647**

PHOTO CREDIT – JUSTYNA POLANSKA: