



A Statement by the Royal Malta Yacht Club

The 42nd Rolex Middle Sea Race, which started on Saturday 23 October 2021, had the hallmarks of being a spectacular success. The make-up of the fleet and the weather forecast suggested records would fall and that yachts would have wind throughout the course area making for an exciting contest.

Late on Tuesday 26 October the weather situation changed. A severe north-easterly gale was predicted to hit the east coast of Malta some time on Wednesday 27 October. The Royal Malta Yacht Club (RMYC) Race Committee recognised it as a danger to those crews still to complete the race. Crossing the finish line at the entrance to Marsamxett Harbour in such circumstances would be extremely hazardous. An Alternative Finish Line at South Comino Channel is designed to address this possibility and all yachts are required to take their time at this point in the race, irrespective of whether the line is in use. The Sailing Instructions are clear and unequivocal on this point.

When invoking the Alternative Finish Line, the Race Committee acted with the safety and well-being of those still sailing in mind. The decision was not influenced by the possibility that other boats, safe in harbour, might find their result materially affected.

The RMYC is sympathetic to those competitors and followers of race that feel aggrieved by the eventual outcome. It recognises that, in this instance, in writing a sailing instruction related to safety it inadvertently, but seriously, impacted the race results.

The RMYC will take action to make sure that a similar situation does not arise again. It will do its utmost to ensure that the rules and regulations surrounding future editions of the race are fit for purpose. In this regard, the Royal Malta Yacht Club has already sought guidance from appropriate authorities within the sport.

Over the years, the RMYC has prided itself on the hospitality and the welcome it shows to all participants. It has put huge effort into making sure visiting crews become the most effective ambassadors for the race. The last thing the club wanted was the frustration, disappointment and anger provoked by the circumstances of the 2021 race.

The 43rd Rolex Middle Sea Race is scheduled go ahead next October. The club hopes that those who enter will see that changes have been made and will trust it to continue to apply all rules fairly and correctly to all those who participate regardless of size, nationality or ambition.

Further Background

The Royal Malta Yacht Club traces its roots back to 1835. It is a volunteer-run club promoting all aspects of sailing from its junior programme to its pinnacle offshore event, the Rolex Middle Sea Race. The club exists to serve the sailing community of Malta and all visiting sailors including those who participate in its most famous race. It has a membership of 700.

The Middle Sea Race was launched in 1968 to offer a course in the Mediterranean that would match the Newport Bermuda Race, the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and the Fastnet Race in distance and challenge. The time of year was chosen because of the increased likelihood of strong winds ensuring a worthy test of ability and seamanship.

In its early years the race caught the attention of many of the world's most respected crews. Then, from 1984 to 1995 the race dropped out of the calendar following a decline in interest.

In 1996, a group of RMYC members decided to reinstate the race. It was not without difficulty. Some of those involved are still active today and have watched the race grow from a fleet of 20 yachts to consistently over 100 with 25 countries represented.

Although the Race Committee is entirely volunteer, it is regularly reminded that it is running an elite level competition that demands the highest standards. A plan was already in place to review and streamline the race documentation at the end of the 2021 race and to improve the registration experience.

The Race Committee is also aware that its obligation is to the entire fleet, not just the top one or two, or even top ten. Its obligation is to be impartial and to apply the rules as they are written. It accepts that it may be protested by a competitor, and for the rules or their application to be tested. A properly constituted, independent International Jury is in attendance for that purpose.

Once the decision to use the Alternative Finish Line was made, all yachts had to be scored for the purposes of time correction (handicapping) at South Comino Channel. Submitted times, verified by the tracking system, were uploaded to the results programme. It was a very real shock that the reduction in the 606nm course length by 12nm would have such a significant effect on the first two boats – one 30.48m/100ft and one 11.80m/39ft.

Since making the decision, the RMYC has had its conduct and integrity, and the competence of its race management, questioned. It is only too aware that the outcry has damaged the reputation and legacy of its most important race, something it is committed to rectifying.

Sailing instructions may be found here:

<https://www.rolexmiddlesearace.com/race/documents>

Results of all Jury Hearings may be found here:

<https://www.rolexmiddlesearace.com/race/general-notice>