



## Welcome to Dragons Abreast ACT & Region!

Dragons Abreast ACT & Region  
PO Box 7191 Yarralumla ACT 2600

Please check out the website [www.dragonsabreast.com.au](http://www.dragonsabreast.com.au)

On it you will find a whole host of information on training, exercises, merchandise, news from DA around the country, newsletters, photos and links to regattas and other DA crews. It is constantly updated and has the latest info.

### 1. Who are we?

We are a group of breast cancer survivors of various ages from a great variety of backgrounds, athletic abilities and interests. We are supported by our "Supporter" members who have made enormous contributions to our club. Our boat, GoAnna, named after our founder, Anna Wellings Booth, was launched in late November 2006.

High on our list of priorities is having fun, trying new things, meeting interesting people and being involved in a challenging physical activity whilst promoting breast cancer awareness.

We are under the umbrella of the Breast Cancer Network, Australia - the national voice of Australians personally affected by breast cancer.

Dragons Abreast provides a "face" for the breast cancer statistics whilst spreading the message of breast cancer awareness through participation in the wonderful and strenuous sport of dragon boat racing. We believe in celebrating life!

*Dragonboat racing originated in China two thousand years ago. It is an aquatic sport in which a 12 meter long canoe-like boat, wide enough to sit 20 people (2 abreast) along with a sweep to steer the boat and a drummer, is paddled over a course of approximately 200, 500 or 1,000 metres in length. During races, a dragonboat will feature the head and tail of a dragon, a mythological creature regarded by the Chinese as having dominion over the waters and exercising control over rainfall (so maybe we can ask our dragons to share some rain with us right over this wide brown land?).*

### 2. Where did we come from?

You might like to know how Dragons Abreast Australia started and how it is linked to Breast Cancer Network Australia.

#### a) How dragon boating for breast cancer women developed:

see <http://www.uoguelph.ca/theportico/backissues/fall06/grad.shtml>

Prof Don McKenzie's Abreast in a Boat drew 1,500 people to Vancouver in 2005 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of what is now a worldwide movement — breast cancer survivor dragon boat racing.

Ten years ago, Dr. Don McKenzie took a standard research study involving breast cancer patients and made a very public splash. With both oars in the water, he took a leap of faith and, in doing so, improved the health and quality of life of breast cancer patients. He encouraged women to test their physical boundaries and invigorate their inner spirits — all while seated in a dragon boat.

McKenzie set out to debunk the medical myth that any sort of upper-body activity would result in lymphoedema in breast cancer patients. Lymphoedema is a condition that results from the removal or radiation of lymph nodes or vessels and causes swelling of the soft tissues of the arm or hand. Often accompanied by numbness, discomfort and decreased mobility, it affects 25 per cent of women with breast cancer.

“Women were terrified to do any sort of exercise for fear of developing lymphoedema,” says McKenzie, who graduated in 1970 with a B.Sc. in physical education. “That was really cutting down on their enjoyment of life and the control they had over their lifestyle.”

But no one had ever studied the connection. That all changed in 1996 when he recruited a group of 24 breast cancer patients who put their health and trust in his work as a scientist. Their first meeting was held at the Allan McGavin Sports Medicine Centre, which McKenzie co-founded at the University of British Columbia. He is still a professor of medicine there.

To test his theory, he got the women involved in paddling as a way to perform strenuous and repetitive upper-body movement.

When McKenzie went looking for a sport that would couple exercise and health, paddling was the natural choice. He was already an expert paddler himself, having been a member of the Canadian National Canoe Team. Since then, he has been the team’s coach and physician at five Olympic Games.

“Dragon boat paddling is the entry level into the sport of canoeing,” he says. “It’s safe, it’s easy to do and it doesn’t tip over. There are lots of positive things about it, and I was comfortable introducing these women to the sport.”

Using dragon boating as a case study, he confirmed what he had believed to be true all along: exercise doesn’t cause or increase the risk of lymphoedema. In fact, his research showed that repetitive upper-body exercise discourages the condition.

“The dragon boat was a vehicle to spread the word about breast cancer — it was sort of a floating support group,” says McKenzie, who lost his mother to breast cancer when he was 10 and has had two aunts diagnosed with the disease. “The women who volunteered to be part of my study were very special people. We were looking in the eye of lymphoedema and saying: ‘We don’t believe all the stuff we were told to do.’ It was a big risk for them to take, and they were the most courageous women I’ve ever met.”

The team of women, named “Abreast in a Boat,” became the first dragon boat crew made up solely of women living with breast cancer. Today, there are 113 similar dragon boat crews around the globe, including 35 crews in Australia.

McKenzie continues to conduct research related to the science of exercise in patients with chronic illnesses such as cancer. At UBC, he’s developed a gym to monitor the exercise programs of cancer patients and recently completed a study that shows physical activity is beneficial to those undergoing chemotherapy. One of his next studies will examine the effects of standardized exercise on the hearts of patients taking a newly developed cancer drug.

“It’s taken 20 years to convince the medical profession that exercise is really valuable intervention and more valuable than a lot of the drugs we give people,” he says. “The benefit of a properly prescribed health regimen is crucial, and we’re starting to be able to prove that.”

b) As a Dragons Abreast member it will help you to know what the three national peak bodies in Australia, for breast cancer, do:

- **Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) [www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au) 1800 500 258 **THE PINK LADY****

Breast Cancer Network Australia is the voice of ordinary Australians personally affected by breast cancer. Formed in 1998 by a core group of survivors, it works to make sure that women and their families are given the best possible treatment and care. Based in Melbourne, BCNA produces the *My Journey Kit* for those newly diagnosed with breast cancer and the *Beacon Magazine* for anyone interested in breast cancer issues. Breast Cancer Network Australia conducts the Field of Women annually to raise awareness of breast cancer.

BCNA was launched in Canberra in October 1998 following the first Field of Women in front of Parliament House. The Field of Women was made up of 10,000 pink silhouettes representing the number of women diagnosed in Australia at that time and 2,500 white silhouettes representing those who had died from breast cancer that year.

You will see that the BCNA logo of the Pink Lady is incorporated into the Dragons Abreast logo. Dragon-boating for breast cancer survivors was referred to by one of the keynote speakers at the first national breast cancer conference held prior to the launch of BCNA in 1998. The idea of dragon boats inspired Michelle Hanton from the Northern Territory and Anna Wellings Booth from the ACT to investigate and, as you know, Australia's waterways have never been the same since! The initial teams were set up by BCNA State coordinators, and when some funding became available, Dragons Abreast became a project of the Network for a year. Due to the unprecedented growth of both organisations, Dragons Abreast Australia moved on to become a Company in its own right in 2003.

Dragons Abreast Australia enjoys an excellent relationship with BCNA and each team is a member group of BCNA. We proudly display the pink silhouette in our logo and on our boat, and we support BCNA, particularly during the month of October. We encourage you to purchase a pink lady silhouette, join in the Silent Walk at the mini Field of Women, spread the word about the *My Journey Kit* (Kerrie Griffin is the custodian of the DAA copy in ACT). You are also welcome to join our action group BCNACTION

***Elspeith Humphries and Kerrie Griffin are the ACT reps for BCNA***

- **National Breast Cancer Centre (NBCC) [www.nbcc.org.au](http://www.nbcc.org.au) 1800 624 973**

The National Breast Cancer Centre, based in Sydney, was established by the Federal Government in 1995. The Centre aims to improve breast cancer control through analyzing, developing, disseminating and encouraging the adoption of clinical guidelines to improve the diagnosis, treatment and support of women with breast cancer

- **National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF) [www.nbcf.org.au](http://www.nbcf.org.au) 1800 000 118 B **THE PINK RIBBON****

The National Breast Cancer Foundation (formerly known as the Kathleen Cunningham Foundation) funds peer reviewed research in the pursuit of new knowledge into the prevention, detection and treatment for breast cancer. Since its formation in 1994 the Foundation has provided over \$14 million to research projects across Australia. NBCF is based in Sydney.

### **3. Fees, paddling, training & regattas**

#### **Fees**

The fees for the season : for 2007-08 fees are \$150 for members. These fees are based on:

- **CDBA membership** - which provides equipment, boat and goods storage, insurance, free local regatta entry, representation to AusDBF (Australian Dragon Boat Federation) etc. Currently \$95 pp goes to CDBA and \$5 pp to AusDBF.

- **DA ACT membership** this is an additional amount (\$50 pp) on top of the CDBA /Aus DBF membership fees, to support DAA and run DA ACT. A portion of this money goes to DA Australia (approx \$20 pp) to provide services and manage DA Australia wide. \$30 pp is for DAACT.

The Dragon boat season runs from 1 September to 31 August. Fees are normally due 1 September.

**Warm up** - Please be at paddling 30 minutes prior to on water time to do some warm up work, and to help to get the boat into the water. Warming-up is important for your well being; to prevent injuries and this time is also needed to organise boat seating arrangements and discussions with sweep and coach.

If this is a new sport, please be aware that your body and muscles will be learning new things and will not have been used in the same manner before. You use your whole body in the paddling action.

Please put your name on everything so we know who owns it, in the event of it being left behind or picked up in error by someone else.

**Paddling times** – please come at the following times:

**Tues mornings\_ from 1 August through to approx end of May– 6.30 am at Lotus Bay, returning by 7.45 am**

**Wed evenings from 30 October through to end of daylight saving – 5.30 pm – 7 pm**

**Sat – 8 am for return approx 9.45 am - followed by coffee**

**Sun – 8 am for return approx 9.45 am - followed by coffee at the Southern Cross Yacht Club, Lotus Bay, Yarralumla –our paddling base.**

Winter paddling times tba.

**Regattas** - Dragons Abreast has a 'participation' policy so there are no selection criteria for crews competing in a regatta. If you wish to be included in a crew you need only put your name down on the crew list, when expressions of interest are sought 10-14 days before the event. You must register in advance to paddle in regattas. You are responsible for all your own costs relating to the regatta. This includes and is not limited to, regatta fees, accommodation, transport, food.

Local CDBA (Canberra Dragon Boat Association) regattas are run from October through to May and are free to CDBA members. You must be a member of CDBA to compete in regattas- temporary or Associate members cannot compete.

Race distances are 200mtrs, 500mtrs and 10000mtrs. It is advisable that if you are intending to compete at a regatta that you **do** attend training sessions prior to racing. Also that you nominate for race distances for which you have done some preparation. This is to help prevent injuries.

## **4. What we wear & use**

**Dragons Abreast clothing** - This can be ordered via the website or through our merchandise person, Patti Pye, who has a small selection here, and can order items for you. Items include shirts, rashies, gloves, hats, anoraks etc. DA ACT has its own "GoAnna" regatta shirts, these can be ordered. There are a few options available for style and sleeve length. Generally these are ordered through a club member and then made to order. Approx cost is \$52.

**Paddles** - DA ACT keeps a stock of Grey Owl Wooden T-Bar Racing Paddles - they are \$80 each. The Carbon Fibre paddles can be ordered on request and are priced around \$225.

**Clothing and shoes** - Please wear clothing that you don't mind getting wet and in which you are also able to swim 50 metres, in case we capsize. In winter wear thermal clothing rather than polar fleece or other fabrics that become heavy when wet. Shoes must be worn in the boat. Sneakers, crocs, beach sandals, aqua socks etc are all good examples of suitable footwear. Please bring additional clothing to wear after paddling, as paddling gear may get wet. A towel is also handy.

**Life Jackets (PFD'S)** are available for you if you wish to wear one at any time. Over the colder months you are required to wear a pfd, as the water temperature is quite cold. They will also need to be worn if the sweep determines that they are necessary for crew safety, as determined by the water/weather conditions on the day.

**Water and Sunscreen** - Always bring water with you even when it is not hot. Sunscreen and hats/caps are recommended in summer.

**Sit-upons** - as a new member they are provided in your welcome pack. They are a small piece of matting, to give some grip and cushioning on the bench. If you lose yours or you need a new one, they are available for \$2 each.

## **5. Participation**

Everyone is welcome to participate as part of our Dragons Abreast dragon boat crew regardless of fitness and age. Our philosophy is one of inclusion and we have a space on our boat for every breast cancer survivor who would like to paddle with us.

We have members who want to be recreational paddlers and members who are interested in being a more serious competitive sports paddler. The level of participation is entirely up to you.

Everyone starts as a beginner and where you go to from that first paddle is up to you. There is no selection criteria for Dragons Abreast crews and if you wish to be part of a regatta you just need to nominate your interest and you are part of the crew.

If you are looking at improving your fitness it is wise to attend a few regular sessions rather than being spasmodic. Dragon boat is a very good all body activity and a true team sport. There are no stars on a dragon boat, it is all about team effort. Training for dragon boat involves aspects of strength, endurance, aerobic development, coordination and team interaction. Some of our members also participate in training with some of the five sport dragon boat clubs in the ACT. Check the CDBA website for training details.

When starting a new sport it is wise to ease into it rather than going full bore and causing an injury; you can stop and start as you wish. Just do a little more each time to *try* and increase your ability. The dragon boat paddle stroke is not a thing you do naturally so you will be using your body in a new way and will find you have dragon boat muscles you didn't know you had. The most important aspect of dragon boat is the timing. If we don't work together it just doesn't work

Being on the water in such beautiful surroundings is just wonderful for your soul and it is *very* therapeutic, no matter what the weather or the type of paddling/ training you are doing. Being there and participating at the level you are happy with, or aiming for, is what it is about. There is a place for *everyone*, even if you just want to sit and not paddle for some reason.

Paddles Up!

Marion Blake  
Coordinator  
Dragons Abreast ACT & Region

E: [canberra@dragonsabreast.com.au](mailto:canberra@dragonsabreast.com.au)

[www.dragonsabreast.com.au](http://www.dragonsabreast.com.au)

*compiled by Judy Richmond (Coordinator at the time of writing)*

28 October 2007