



The Youth SUP Board and Event Formats

Increasing youth participation in stand up paddleboarding in New Zealand is extremely high priority for NZSUP, for the following reasons:

- SUP is a fun and engaging activity for youngsters
- Engaging with youth is a great way to grow the sport at grass-roots level
- It gives an excellent opportunity to drive home vital safety messages
- It gives an opportunity to talent-spot and identify those who might be keen to get involved in competition.
- It fits in with the current emphasis from Sport New Zealand on targeting youth participation in sport.

Because various clubs and organisations around New Zealand are looking to create or expand their own youth paddling programmes, NZSUP has established a specific Youth Board Class and event format, to aid and simplify the development process.

The Youth Board Class

NZ SUP has established a standard board class for the youth program, as follows:

Board: Any 12'6 length standard production inflatable paddleboard, minimum width 25".

Paddle: Fiberglass/composite paddles, with small/medium blades (*see 'other criteria' below*)

Fin: Standard plastic fins. No specialist G10/carbon race fins to be used.

Why a standard board class?

The rationale behind the creation of this class is as follows:

- It simplifies the process for schools, clubs or operators looking to source appropriate gear
- It creates a level playing field, so that everyone is on similar equipment
- It promotes equipment that is robust and well suited to the youth environment
- It ensures value and longevity (no need to upgrade every season)
- It ensures activities are happening on safe, appropriate equipment
- The specified equipment allows for competitive and fun paddling activities
- The specified equipment allows for easy storage and transportation of gear (even overseas)

Why not a one-design class?

A one-design class (using a specific model from one brand or an exact set of measurements) is not practical as a youth board because:

- Youngsters come in different sizes and weights, so it is important to allow for variation in board width so as to ensure that everyone can have a board with sufficient stability.
- Keeping it open to any brand allows any distributor, retailer or agent to get involved, should they wish
- Inflatable boards all have a flat bottom (due to the nature of inflatable board construction) so there is actually very little practical difference between boards from various brands anyway.

Other Criteria

The inflatable board should be a standard production model (ie an off-the-shelf item that anyone could purchase), and capable of being fully deflated and rolled up. Stiffening devices such as battens and rods are permissible, but not additional fittings that fundamentally change the shape of the underside or rails.

Paddles

Ideally for events, everyone should be using a similar design of paddle. The paddle blade should be of a small/medium size so as not to overload young bodies. As guidance, we would suggest blades no wider than 7.5" or larger than around 85 sq.in in area. Aluminium construction should absolutely be avoided.

Board Widths

This will depend on the size of the youngsters that will be using the board. If the board is too wide for their weight and height, it is slower and harder to paddle. However, if the board is too narrow for their weight and height, they will struggle to balance on it, particularly at the start of their paddling experience. Ultimately it is more important to ensure that all riders can use the board, so it is best to err on the side of going too wide rather than too narrow.

We would suggest going no wider than 31" since these boards will be too big for the majority of youth riders, other than those of 110kg or more.

- A 12'6 x 30" board will suit riders of up to around 100kg. This will be a good all-round size for most Year 9s and above.
- A 21'6 x 28" board should suit all riders of up to around 90kg. This would be a good all-round size for most yr 8-13, although some of the heavier beginner riders may struggle a bit.
- A 12'6 x 27" board will suit smaller riders, and more competent paddlers up to around 80-85kg.
- A 12'6 x 26" board will be well suited to smaller riders, and more competent paddlers up to around 70-75kg.

** These figures should be used for guidance only, as other factors such as tail width, rocker profile etc also play a significant role in determining stability.*

There is no requirement that all boards in a club/school fleet should be of the same width.

For more information on the board class check the FAQ section at the end of the document.

The Youth Competition Event Format

Youth SUP events, using the Youth board, can be local, inter-club, inter-school, regional, inter-regional, island (ie North Island champs, South Island Champs), or National.

Competition is within age group only, other than one-off championships races etc. Age groups are as follows:

- Year 7-8
- U14
- U16
- U19

Age as of 1 January of that year.

Boys and girls will be separate fleets for prizes. (ie 1st boy U14, 2nd boy U14, 3rd boy U14, 1st girl U14, etc).

Boards are supplied for the event, either by a local operator or SUP school, or operators from further afield contracted to bring their fleet in for the event. Schools that have their own fleets of recognised youth boards can bring these to the event. (There is no problem if the various board fleets are of different widths, each fleet can simply be matched to the most appropriate age group for their size. So a fleet of 12'6 x 26s would be used for the Year 7-8 age group, for example, whereas a fleet of 12'6 x 31s would better suit the U19 age group).

The event format for inter-club and inter-school events (where the average ability and fitness levels will be relatively low) sees each gender and age group completing a number (ideally 3) short course races around a square or triangle course for each age group, with a line start on the beach and a sprint finish.

The reasons for this format are:

- Short races mean more racing, the aim being that everyone gets several races.
- Short races means that the finishing difference between the fastest and slowest participants is not too disheartening
- More corners mean more fun and more interaction
- The line start is fair and easy to manage
- The sprint finish is fun and entertaining
- Short course legs mean that the participants are never too far from shore, thus maximising safety.
- All the action remains within good view of the spectators and other competitors awaiting their next race, thus creating a good spectacle.

Other activities and options that can be included in events could be:

- Coaching sessions in between rounds of races, to increase the learning value of the events
- Team relays
- Celebrity races/teacher races
- Obstacle races/problem solving challenges, to mix it up a bit
- A 'pro race' for the most experienced competitors, in which they can use their own paddles, over a bit more distance
- An open class race for the most experienced competitors who want to bring their own board and paddle.

(These last two items then present a progression ladder for paddlers who want to step it up, and showcase to the other entrants how the sport can look at a more advanced level)

FAQ

The Youth Board Class

Why does it have to be inflatables - they are low performance!

The board class has been chosen to allow for development from complete beginner through to enjoyable and competitive racing. Boards do not have to offer ultimate performance - the success of non high tech OD classes in other watersports shows that they can work (Optimists, Lasers etc in sailing being the perfect example). The fact is that good inflatable boards can perform pretty well, and if courses are biased more towards corners than long distances, can really come into their own & provide excellent - and safe - racing. Plus which, using inflatables vastly reduces the risk of injury, which is of paramount importance in any youth activity. Inflatables are also far more durable than high-performance boards, which is a major consideration for any school, group or organisation looking to invest in equipment. And of course inflatables make storage and transportation infinitely easier, particularly where longer distances are involved.

Our racers won't find them challenging enough

The short course races will ensure plenty of action at the corners and lots of excitement. Just as P Class or Laser sailing dinghies are by no means the most high performance sailing craft, yet still have an incredibly active and well supported racing scene right up to Olympic level. Indeed, there is no reason why even elite youngsters should not enjoy racing the youth SUP class. It will require a slightly different skill-set, but will still deliver challenging and exciting racing. However, it is important to understand that there is no compulsion to use these boards. If a promising young racer wants to invest in more advanced gear and race in the open class, they are welcome to do so. There will always be youth classes in NZSUP Open Fleet racing.

What about Primary School children - a 12'6 board will be too big for them!

If we want to look younger than secondary school sport (and why not?!) then we can also introduce a Junior Board Class if the demand is there. The two-board approach has worked very well in windsurfing (the Tiga Aloha and Bic Techno Formula), creating a pathway into performance racing.

But some primary school children can be really big!

It is important to appreciate that these classes are there to act as a *pathway*. When someone outgrows a board they can progress on to the next level - **there is no requirement to stay with the smaller board until they have reached a certain age**. Any youth can engage in elite open class racing at any time - open class competitions will still have youth divisions. **The aim is NOT to force youngsters to race only these classes.** It is to present an affordable, practical, efficient and exciting pathway into performance racing.