Inverloch, as some readers may be aware, is the birthplace of the Len Morris-designed Inverloch 11-footer, which went on to become famous as the International Moth. Influenced by that history, the philosophy of the regatta is the celebration of the wooden sailing dinghies that were once commonplace on Australian waterways. It emphasises the wooden racing dinghy classes that were so popular in the 1950’s, 1960’s and 1970’s, but which faded away, or were replaced by fibreglass versions, in the 1980’s. The regatta also showcases non-competitive recreational boats built in a traditional style. At this year’s regatta, for example, there were four Iain Oughtred-designed craft and a Whitehall skiff. There is always a range of boats – some in original condition, some restored, and some recently built to original plans and designs.

**ICDWR 2016**

Last year’s regatta, held on Australia Day 2016, unearthed a minor treasure. Andrew Chapman, a member of the organising committee, had been given an old boat which he restored and then relaunched at the 2016 event. This was Australian Sailfish Debonair. A knowledgeable participant at the regatta recognised the name as that often used in the past by Jack Carroll, co-designer of the Australian Sailfish. A few weeks after the regatta, Jack, having been informed about the resurrection of Debonair, rang Andrew and confirmed that it was Sailfish number 2, built by him in 1957. Sailfish number 1, Little Osprey, had been built the previous year by his co-designer Bruce Scott (now deceased).

Reports of the 2016 event, which included details of this discovery, were posted online at [sgyc.inverloch.com.au](http://sgyc.inverloch.com.au) and, perhaps surprisingly, at earwigoagin.blogspot.com the always interesting North American blog dedicated to small boat sailing.

One or other of these reports were read independently by three former Sailfish skippers; Greg Barwick in Melbourne, Ian Milton in Sydney and Chris Cleary in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. They were tragic figures really, still holding on hopelessly to their passion for the little boat they had raced as teenagers and young adults. Each still had a Sailfish. Each began to contemplate attending the 2017 event.
The Australian Sailfish is a single-hand centreboard dinghy designed by Bruce Scott and Jack Carroll in 1956. It is cat-rigged with a Bermudan sail bent to a stayed mast of up to 4.9 m (16').

Length 3.5m (11' 6")
Beam 88.6cm (2' 10 7/8"")
Minimum hull weight 28.6kg (63 lb)
Sail area 6.04m² (65sqft)

The boat is a scow with a fully-enclosed, fully-decked hull. The exterior shell of the boat, made from marine ply for deck and bottom and solid timber for the sides, is built over a skeleton of strongback and keel, frames and stringers.

This design and construction is immensely strong and durable. It is also very easy to build, and build to minimum weight. And it is comparatively inexpensive.

The Sailfish is easily transported. Most are car-topped. They are also easily stored in a garage or carport. Importantly, they are unsinkable and safe. The boat is easily righted after a capsize and bailing is obviously not necessary. It is a single-hander but was designed with sufficient buoyancy to carry two people in safety.

The Sailfish is a strict one-design boat, a feature which provided for uniformity of hull and sail plan among racing boats when the class was active.

Jack was rung and was persuaded to also attend. When that news went up on the website, interest snow-balled and by December 2016 there were 11 Sailfish committed to the 2017 event.

ICDWR 2017
And 11 Australian Sailfish lined up on the beach at Inverloch on Australia Day, day one of the regatta, the first congregation of any Sailfish in 30 years. The Sailfish was by far the largest class. Acquaintances were renewed after 30-40 years, tall-tales and outright lies were told and Jack, enjoyably bemused, was the centre of media attention.

Everyone experienced warm hospitality, faultless organisation, fair winds and enjoyable sailing.

The Sailfish race was won by Steven Floyd sailing his lovely boat, Gargle Blaster. It was a most appropriate result given that he was the last Australian Open Champion (1987-88).
The Australian Sailfish is undeniably and unapologetically a utilitarian design, which is very evident when on the beach beside a pretty Gwen 12 or Cherub. But it is a design which provides excellent performance when sailed well. It skips along in light conditions, accelerating quickly in puffs of breeze. It is able to punch along in heavy conditions that can force the retirement of other dinghies. The hull form produces exhilarating sailing off the wind where, with the sheet eased and the skipper hiking, the boat will plane easily, freely and thrillingly.

The Australian Sailfish was first sailed at Parkdale Yacht Club on Port Phillip, Victoria. Boat numbers expanded rapidly through the 1960’s. A Victorian Class Association was formed in February 1962. The class became very popular in Queensland in the early 1960’s, centred mainly on Sandgate Yacht Club. A Queensland Division of the Class Association was formed in 1964 under the guidance of Colin Guy. Interstate Team Championships were conducted between Victoria and Queensland. A NSW Division was formed in 1967. There was also a division in Papua New Guinea, centred around Rabaul Yacht Club.

National Championships commenced in 1968, and were held annually thereafter at venues alternating between Victoria and NSW. A well-known Queensland wooden boat enthusiast, Martin Kortlucke, learnt to sail on a Sailfish and attended the 1972/73 and 1973/74 national titles. He was accompanied by another Brisbane skipper, Tom Butler, who also attended the 1974/75 titles at Lake Eppalock, Vic. The last National Titles were held in 1987/88. Sadly, like so many of the wooden racing dinghies in Australia, the number of Sailfish competing at club level had declined dramatically in the 1980’s and the Association folded in 1988.

Such is the strength and durability of the Sailfish however, there are likely to be many in garages, carports, sheds or under houses waiting to be dusted down, rigged up and given a splash. There may even be new boats being built, given the plan downloads that have occurred from the website in the four months of its existence.

At Inverloch in 2018 therefore, there will certainly be another school of Australian Sailfish present. As a high performance, relatively inexpensive, easily transported and easily stored sailing dinghy, the Australian Sailfish is worthy of celebration, and is well worth consideration by the amateur builder.