

## Investec Loyal skipper defends radio interview at Sydney to Hobart protest hearing

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### **THE protest hearing against provisional Sydney to Hobart yacht race winner Investec Loyal has begun at the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania in Hobart.**

The case will be heard by a jury of five International Sailing Federation judges, chaired by Australian John Kirkjian, who are appointed by the Cruising yacht Club of Australia to oversee the 2011 Sydney to Hobart yacht race.

Investec Loyal skipper Anthony Bell has made his opening address to the judges.

Witnesses to be called by Investec Loyal include tactician Michael Coxon, whose conversation with an ABC helicopter pilot about the sails being used by arch rival and race leader Wild Oats caused the protest, and navigator Stan Honey.

The jury will also hear from Tim Cox, a retired navy captain and chair of the official race committee of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia which runs the Sydney to Hobart race, who lodged the protest against Investec Loyal.

The 100-foot winning yacht was informed of the protest on its arrival in Hobart last night, dampening the usual joyful dockside celebration and delaying the announcement of the race's line honours winner until after this morning's protest hearing.

The protest centred on a conversation between the ABC's race helicopter pilot and Loyal tactician Michael Coxon off the south coast of NSW on the first morning of the race, less than one day after the 88 yachts left Sydney Harbour.

According to the protest form, at 6.30am on Tuesday, Coxon a highly experienced professional racing yachtsman and sailmaker with 28 Sydney to Hobart races under his belt "sought information from the helicopter (pilot) about the sail plan in use on (race leader) Wild Oats XI."

"In particular, information was sought as to whether Wild Oats was flying a try-sail ( a very small replacement mainsail)," the protest form details.

"This is assessed to breach rule 41 (of the international Racing Rules of Sailing) by soliciting help from an outside source."

The conversation between Coxon and the ABC helicopter, was recorded as a "live pooled feed" supplied under agreement to all commercial TV stations as well as to the ABC, and widely broadcast.

In the conversation, Coxon directly asks the helicopter pilot if Wild Oats XI is flying a try-sail. When the pilot replies he doesn't know much about sailing, Coxon then asks a second question asking what colour is Wild Oats' mainsail.

When the pilot replies that both sails up on Wild Oats are grey, Coxon responds with "that's great news."

The small try-sail, which would be run up the mast if the vast mainsail had ripped during the previous night's storm, is orange. Wild Oats was leading the race, just ahead of Investec Loyal, at the time of the conversation.

After the race was finished and Loyal informed of the protest Mr Bell defended Coxon and said his inquiry had been innocent, and never affected the outcome of the race.

Mr Bell said Coxon had asked about the state of Wild Oats's sails, as he had heard the mainsail might have torn during the storm.

Mr Coxon is the head of North Sails, the prestigious Sydney-based sail company that made all of Wild Oats's sails, as well as those on many other yachts racing in the Sydney-to-Hobart fleet.

Mr Bell said Coxon had been concerned in his professional capacity as a sailmaker that his reputation might be questioned if Wild Oats had blown its main sail.

"But we did everything by the book (to win this race)," Mr Bell said last night.

The hearing is expected to last two hours.