

### 'Silly' end to super battle of the Sydney-to-Hobart yacht race

David Benlik | Herald Sun | December 30, 2011 12:00AM | 30 comments

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**THE Loyal crewman cleared of asking a helicopter pilot for help during the Sydney-to-Hobart race has described the episode as "silly".**

Loyal tactician Michael Coxon was the subject of a protest lodged by the race committee on Wednesday after the supermaxi upset rival *Wild Oats XI* to cross the line first in a thrilling finish.

Coxon was heard asking an ABC pilot about *Wild Oats*' sails after being woken to do a radio interview with the broadcaster on Tuesday morning.

An international jury accepted that Coxon was genuinely concerned about how the sails had fared after a night of 30-knot wind because his company, North Sails, had supplied them.

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"I would hope perhaps there's a lesson to be learned here; a simple phone call (would have cleared it up)," he said after *Loyal* was belatedly presented with the JH Illingworth Trophy.

"Really, it was silly. It was very, very silly and I'm just pleased that it was found that way.

"Although we're competitors, they're very, very good clients of mine and very good friends."

*Wild Oats* was using a new \$200,000 sail product known as 3Di and originally developed by the America's Cup syndicate Alinghi.

Coxon says he was mystified when *Loyal* skipper Anthony Bell handed the protest documents at the finish.

The boat remained in the Denwerf for an hour after finishing before Bell emerged with Coxon's side of the story.

"I'm a professional in this industry for 35 years and normally if you're a bit close to the wind you'll know and have a feeling of it," Coxon said.

"I was completely dumbfounded and surprised by it.

"I had no knowledge of any incident."

The 54-year-old admitted to some nerves as the *Loyal* hierarchy headed to the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania for the hearing, and plenty of relief at the outcome.

"I had no problems in myself because I knew in my heart there was no wrongdoing," Coxon said.

"You never want to be involved in a protest because a protest is a 50-50 chance which way it's going to go."

Bell credited his tactician with getting *Loyal* into a position to challenge for line honours.

"We got to where we did in this race because of Michael Coxon," the skipper said.

"Win, lose or draw, Michael had a hundred per cent of my support, he had a hundred per cent of the team's support."

Hundreds of spectator boats and thousands on the shoreline created a buzz after the fourth closest finish in race history, only for it to be short-circuited by the protest.

Commodore of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, Garry Linacre, said changes to the process were unlikely because teams needed time to overcome fatigue.

"I don't see any need for a change (to the rules)," he said.

"Possibly we can find better ways of handling this governance requirement in the future that is more timely."

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