

## Chairperson's Report

### Two Oceans Marathon NPC Annual General Meeting

**Presented by:** Toni Cavanagh

**Reporting period:** October 2024 – 21 July 2025

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#### Introduction

It is my honour to present this Chairperson's Report covering the period October 2024 to 21 July 2025. I assumed the role of Chairperson after serving a full year as a board member and Expo Chair. My tenure as Chair built directly on the work of the 2023–2024 Board, who laid the groundwork for financial recovery and improved governance.

From the outset, I emphasised **ubunye — unity of purpose**. The Two Oceans Marathon is far greater than any individual, any board, or any office bearer. Our responsibility is to safeguard its legacy, strengthen its future, and serve the running community with accountability, vision, and integrity.

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#### Organisational Context

When I assumed the chair, several challenges were immediately apparent:

- The organisation remained under-resourced for the scale of the event.
- The Board continued to play an unusual hands-on role instead of purely governance and fiduciary oversight.
- Decision-making processes, while transparent, were often slow, delaying critical outcomes.
- The NPC had only recently emerged from financial deficit (2023 closed at –R2.8m).

With the commitment of my fellow directors and staff, these challenges were progressively addressed during 2024 and 2025.

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#### Strategic Direction and Reform

In January 2025, I convened a strategic workshop with the full Board. The workshop focused on:

- Understanding the evolving expectations of our running community.
- Addressing historic operational challenges affecting delivery.
- Strengthening sponsorship, stakeholder, and founding member relationships.

The outcome formed the foundation of the organisation's **turnaround strategy**, structured around 14 pillars in reform and output matrices. This strategy addressed short-term challenges while delivering sustainable change over three phases.

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## Design Concept and Event Branding

For the 2025 event, the Board conceptualised the design, building on the approach taken in 2024. The concept celebrated the uniqueness of this prestigious event, showcasing the stunning landscapes and iconic landmarks along the route that have made the Two Oceans Marathon globally renowned as the **“most beautiful marathon in the world.”**

From this vision, the design of the **race t-shirts, trail t-shirts, crew t-shirts, medals, medal ribbons, marketing paraphernalia, and the inaugural TOM event shoe**, produced in partnership with JOMA, was developed.

Due to the compressed production timeline, initial race t-shirt samples were unsatisfactory. The Board made a timely decision to adopt a monotone design in two colours, mitigating the risk of poor colour quality while preserving a premium, cohesive identity.

**Brand identity and protection remain paramount.** Evolving the way we tie together our event assets is both essential and what sets TOM apart from other major global events. The careful integration of design, merchandise, and experiential elements reflects the professionalism and creativity that defines TOM.

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## Sponsorships and Partnerships

Sponsorship growth remained a priority. During my tenure:

- **JOMA** was onboarded as technical partner, covering race t-shirts (road, trail, and crew) and producing the first-ever TOM event shoe.
- **MiWay Life** was secured as sponsor for the reintroduced Trail events, also providing once-off cover for every athlete participating.
- **CSOS** joined as a new sponsor, strengthening the portfolio further.
- Work commenced with DCAS and two additional prospective sponsors for 2026 and beyond.

A specific focus was placed on clarifying **Value-in-Kind (VIK)** within contracts, notably in the PenBev agreement, establishing a clearer framework for measuring and managing VIK input. The commercial model for the Expo was embedded into sponsor and partner contracts, unlocking potential revenue and maximising value.

As in 2024, when a successful stand-alone Two Oceans merchandise store was introduced, the Board built on this concept in 2025. A larger store was positioned in close proximity to registration, facilitating the sale of not only event paraphernalia but also redundant yet sought-after t-shirts from previous years. This initiative not only moved redundant stock but **generated considerable additional revenue for the Expo and ultimately for the event.**

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## Expo 2025

Planning for Expo 2025 was again compressed into four months. With GrandWest unavailable and CTICC financially prohibitive, DHL Stadium was selected. Late changes were required by the City's Disaster Management team, resulting in a reconfigured registration flow. While unorthodox and creating some exhibitor dissatisfaction, post-event reporting reflected positive outcomes, with several exhibitors exceeding prior-year revenue. The title sponsor reported a successful closure on Expo 2025 and shared gratitude with the Board.

For the first time, a fully integrated **VOC (Venue Operating Centre)** was implemented, ensuring live oversight by traffic, safety, medical, SAPS, and City Disaster Management. This proved critical when the half marathon permit breach was identified.

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### The Half Marathon Permit Breach

During registration, 19,025 athletes had registered for the half marathon, exceeding the City permit limit of 17,000. Although raised at the Board meeting on 10 March 2025, the race manager failed to formally escalate the breach to the City.

On 5 April, the City advised that the race could not proceed. As Chairperson, I took responsibility and, with factual data from our timing partner FinishTime, presented historic data showing drop-off rates arriving at the expected mean average of drop off for the event. Based on this evidence, the City permitted the race to continue with additional conditions:

- An added water point at Southern Cross.
- Increased medical and security coverage.
- Minor route shortening.

The event proceeded safely, with 17,935 athletes recorded crossing the start line, 18 082 athletes recorded during the event and 17 957 finishers. The increased number during the event initiated an investigation into race cheaters — an ongoing concern. It is important to note that event data as provided by Finish Time plays a pivotal role in understanding participant trends; this data provides crucial insights for managing athlete numbers and forms part of a key pillar in the Turnaround Strategy. Medal shortages occurred but were rectified immediately post-race. Sadly, one athlete passed away due to natural causes, and we worked closely with service providers and the athlete's spouse to ensure all relevant information was shared sensitively.

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### Trail and Training Runs

The TOM Trail was reintroduced in 2025, supported by MiWay Life. While permitting was managed effectively, logistical delivery by the service provider was inconsistent, highlighting the need for professional staging partners for all TOM events.

Training runs were enhanced through JOMA's race shoe trials, with additional support from PenBev and Heart 104.5, fostering strong community engagement.

## Governance and City Engagement

Following the 2025 event, the City convened urgent meetings regarding the half marathon permit breach. On **28 May 2025**, the Board presented the **turnaround strategy**, structured into reform and output matrices. On the same day and the day after, however, all Celtic Harriers representatives resigned en masse, rendering the Board non-quorate.

On **18 June 2025**, the City formally acknowledged receipt of the turnaround strategy in writing and confirmed that preparation for the 2026 event could proceed, subject to strict compliance conditions and monthly reporting.

The strategy was therefore both drafted and conditionally accepted before the Board became non-quorate. Implementation, however, could only resume once the Board was reconstituted on **21 July 2025**.

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## Legal Matter

The Board faced sustained public criticism affecting TOM's reputation and sponsor confidence. After repeated incidents, the Board resolved to seek legal intervention to protect the organisation's integrity. The case was dismissed on technical grounds, not merit. The decision was made in good faith and in response to legitimate stakeholder concerns.

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## Financial Performance

The audited financials confirm that the organisation closed the 2025 financial year on a **surplus of R4.2m**, an improvement from the R1.8m surplus in 2024 and a complete reversal of the R2.8m deficit in 2023.

This improvement was achieved through:

- Careful financial management and cost containment.
- Improved sponsorship structuring.
- Commercial restructuring of Expo.
- Management of VIK input from sponsors.
- Continued commitment to build on 2023–2024 initiatives.

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## Conclusion

The period from 2024 to 2025 represents a decisive turning point in the history of the Two Oceans Marathon. During this time, the organisation achieved financial recovery, strengthened its sponsorship base, enhanced its brand identity, and secured City approval for a strategic plan that charts the event's future.

Despite immense challenges following the 2025 event — including mass resignations and the Board becoming non-quorate at a critical juncture — the organisation was successfully steered forward. By the time of handover on 21 July 2025, the audit process was underway, the turnaround strategy had

been finalised and acknowledged by the City, and the organisation closed financially stronger than it began in October 2024.

As I have said before, the Two Oceans Marathon is far greater than any individual, any board, or any office bearer. Its success relies on **ubunye — unity of purpose, unity of effort, and unity in service of the running community.**

I extend my immense gratitude to the Members of the Board who served with me during my tenure, who brought valuable insight and support during one of the most challenging periods in the history of the Two Oceans Marathon. I am equally grateful to the Management and Staff who passionately carried out their tasks with commitment and integrity.

I look forward to seeing the implementation of the turnaround strategy, and the collective support and growth of this iconic event — an event for the people.