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For immediate release

Media release

Special Olympics athletes go head to head in the water and on the track

Hamilton is playing host to hundreds of athletes with intellectual disabilities from throughout New Zealand and Australia for the third Special Olympics Trans Tasman Tournament.

Nearly 300 New Zealand and 120 Australian athletes of all ages and abilities are competing in swimming and athletics. The tournament was created to give athletes more opportunity to compete, particularly those with higher needs that may not otherwise get the opportunity to compete internationally.

Day one of the Tournament kicked off at Waterworld with an Opening Ceremony that included a Powhiri from Waikato Ngati Maahanga, official welcome of VIP's, athletes, team management and families, raising of the Special Olympics New Zealand, Australian and New Zealand flag and then the arrival of the Flame of Hope. A similar ceremony was also held at the athletics venue, Porritt Stadium, where the cauldron was lit and will remain so for the duration of the Tournament.

Day one of competition saw many heats take place in the pool and on the track with many finals being held today, day two of the three day event.

Many personal bests have been achieved by athletes from both sides of the Tasman, Special Olympics is all about participation and doing one's best and the athletes have certainly shown they can achieve that today. We are not about elite sport but about everyone have the opportunity to compete, and to be included", says Kathy Gibson, CEO of Special Olympics New Zealand.

Wilson Stock of Special Olympics Mana is an example of how being a part of Special Olympics can change lives. Only a few years ago he was afraid of the water, yesterday he achieved a personal best in the 50 gmetre freestyle and his relay team won silver in the 25m Freestyle.

Andrew Heyward of Special Olympics Manawatu is blind and autistic, he has been swimming since before he could walk however and has always had a fascination with the water. Andrew's coach Carla L'Huillier came up with an idea to create a 'tapper' for Andrew so he could tell when the end of the pool is approaching. Today Andrew swam an impressive 25m freestyle race, completing the distance in his own unique style.

The Trans Tasman Tournament is also being supported by nearly 150 volunteer coaches and management staff, over 500 family members and a stong contingent of local volunteers.

Ellena Morris, Head Coach for New South Wales has a team of 35 athletes and eight volunteers, for many of their athletes it is their first time travelling to a large event. "It is just so satisfying seeing the athletes enjoy themselves, the trip was long and they are tired but they are doing so well. We are enjoying our time in New Zealand, we only ish we had more time to sightsee!"

Special Olympics New Zealand

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Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation. Authorised and accredited by Special Olympics, Inc for the benefit of persons with intellectual disabilities.

The athletics programme finished up today (all results can be found on the [website](#)), final swimming events are being held at Waterworld, Garnett Avenue, Forest Lake.

To find out more about the Trans Tasman tournament and view the full list of competing athletes visit www.specialolympics.org.nz/transtasman

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Notes to the editor:

The Closing Ceremony will be held at Waterworld at 3.15 pm on Sunday 27 November.

We welcome your photographers at the Trans Tasman Tournament. There will be many opportunities for photography during the Tournament, particularly action photography. Special Olympics New Zealand will also be photographing the event and is happy to supply images to media as requested.

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About Special Olympics New Zealand

Special Olympics New Zealand is a year-round programme of sports training and competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. More than 7000 athletes throughout the country train and compete in 13 different Olympic-type summer and winter sports.

Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Special Olympics provides athletes continuing opportunities to develop fitness, demonstrate courage and experience joy as they participate in the sharing of gifts and friendship with other athletes, their families and the community.

[Words Matter—Special Olympics Language Guidelines for media](#)

Special Olympics New Zealand: www.specialolympics.org.nz