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### Australia news

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## Jessica Watson, the girl who sailed round the world, comes home to cheers

Seven-month voyage said to make Watson, 16, the youngest sailor to circle the globe solo, non-stop and unassisted



Teenage sailor Jessica Watson waves as she arrives in Sydney after her solo round-the-world voyage. Photograph: Mark Kolbe/Getty Images

A teenage girl who sailed around the world unaided was greeted by thousands of cheering supporters on her return home to Sydney today after her seven-month voyage.

In her 30ft yacht, Ella's Pink Lady, Jessica Watson, 16, crossed the finish line of her round-the-world journey, which supporters claim makes her the youngest sailor to circle the globe solo, non-stop and unassisted.

"I'm completely overwhelmed. I just don't know what to think and what to say at the moment," Watson said in an interview broadcast live on a screen outside the Sydney Opera House. "It's all a bit much but absolutely amazing."

"She said she'd sail around the world, and she has," her mother, Julie, said as she watched her daughter cruise past the finish line from a nearby boat. "She's home."

The teenager's feat will not be considered an official world record because the World Speed Sailing Record Council discontinued its "youngest" category, which was held by another Australian, Jesse Martin, after he completed the journey in 1999 at the age of 18.

Although Watson sailed nearly 23,000 nautical miles, some sailing enthusiasts have argued that she did not venture far enough north of the equator for her journey to count as a true round-the-world sail as defined by the record council's rules. Watson's managers have dismissed those claims and argued she doesn't need to adhere to the council's rules since they will not be recognising her voyage.

Watson, from Buderim, north of Brisbane, in Queensland, sailed out of Sydney on 18 October amid fierce criticism of her parents for allowing her to attempt such a feat. Throughout her journey they stuck to the view that she was well prepared, noting that she has been sailing since she was eight.

"I don't think any of us would ever doubt Jessica Watson again," said the premier of New South Wales, Kristina Keneally, who greeted her on her return home.

Watson traveled north-east through the South Pacific and across the equator, south to Cape Horn at the tip of South America, across the Atlantic Ocean to South Africa, through the Indian Ocean and around southern Australia.

The route took her through some of the world's most treacherous waters, and she battled through huge storms and suffered seven knockdowns.

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But her journey was peppered with moments of beauty. **On her blog**, she described stunning sunrises over glassy seas, the excitement of spotting a blue whale and the dazzling, eerie sight of a shooting star racing across the night sky above her boat.

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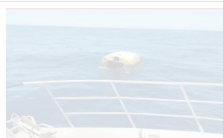
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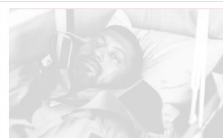
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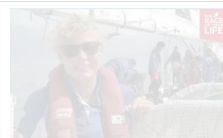
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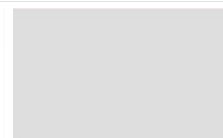
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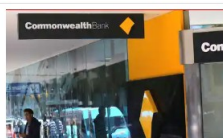
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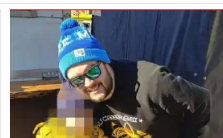
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