

British Canoeing Marathon Racing Committee

Minutes of the Annual Consultative Meeting held on 11th July 2020 via Zoom online meeting

Present at the meeting:

Alan Laws (Lincoln)
Brian Chapman (Kirkaldy)
Evan Shephard (Reading)
Graham Simpkin (Gloucester)
Bethany Goodlad (Leighton Buzzard)
Kevin Lack (Lincoln)
Mick Nadal (Nottingham)
Siobhan Urquhart (Banbury)
Stan Missen (Bradford on Avon)
Kat Wilson (Reading)
Dan Seaford (Reading)
James Treadgold (Newbury)
James Smythe (Bishops Cleeve)
Ray Simmons (Lincoln)
Dyson Pendle (Norwich)
Tim Scott (Norwich)
Dave Enoch (Nottingham)
Bryn Price (Maidstone)
Bob Mawson (Manvers)

Alice Murphy (Banbury)
Richard Gilbert-Johns (So'ton)
David Martyn (Wey)
Emma Riley (Fowey)
Ian Kershaw (Gloucester)
Jo Bates (Falcon)
David Millar (Exeter)
Julia Lawley (Solihull)
Kevin Hipkins (Longridge)
Mark Pearce (Longridge)
Matt Thomas (Truro)
Robyn Smith (Lincoln)
Roland Lawler (Elmbridge)
Tony Perry (Viking)
Ivan Lawler (Elmbridge)
Greg Spencer (Pennine)
Sarah Cooke (Devizes)
Louise Clive (Gailey)
Ian Tomlinson (Manvers)
Paul Dimmock (Wey)

Due to the difficulty of running a one club, one vote process online, no votes were held at this meeting.

1. Apologies for absence

Graham Warland (Banbury)
Scott Hynds (Elmbridge)

Nettie North (Cambridge)

2. Approval of 2019 ACM Minutes

The minutes of the 2019 Annual Consultative Meeting were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matter Arising from the 2019 Minutes

- a. The Chair confirmed that the earliest that the MRC might seek to organise a major international marathon event in the UK would be 2026, due to British Canoeing commitments and ICF calendar availability.

The MRC is organising a sub-committee to take this idea forward, although with a project of this size there will be considerable hurdles in terms of funding, venue and volunteer availability.

- b. James Smythe, Chair of the Selection Committee confirmed that the selection policy was reviewed again in late 2019, with the aim of ensuring confidence from the paddling community in our processes. In addition to simplifying the selection events for most internationals to a single race, more information on the comparability of performances between classes has been published. There were also plans to include two non-voting observers on the Selection Committee for 2020, this will be implemented on the resumption of the international calendar hopefully in 2021.

4. Report from the Chair, Stan Missen

The Chairman, Stan Missen, delivered the following report:

The principle reason for our ACM is to allow clubs and members to raise questions and highlight ideas or opportunities that they wish the MRC to consider. Our aim, as well as yours, being to improve and extend the breadth and depth of our sport.

In addition, The ACM allows me to outline some of the events and issues that have occupied your committee.

The later period of 2019 progressed well with a successful National Championships hosted by Norwich and an equally competitive Hasler final hosted by Southampton.

We selected teams for major internationals, The World Championships in China and French Nationals. In addition, we were one again luckily enough to have an invitation to Sanabria in Spain.

As normal I will refer you to the reports and results issued after these events rather than go into detail now.

With a healthy uptake, there continued to see a number of paddlers apply for our bursary toward the Race Coach course and qualification. This is designed to get more appropriately qualified race coaches into regions and clubs and is having good success.

We were pleased to see our call for volunteers, for staffing our planned international trips, well received; as it is only with these volunteers giving their free time that lets us fully support an international programme.

And then along came 2020. Initially, despite some early season cancellations due to water and weather conditions, the start of the year planning progressed, with a busy domestic calendar and sights on some major internationals.

However, no sooner than we had launched the plans for the Junior development squad, than concerns over all aspects of normal life, and certainly sporting events, arose.

The early season 'clubs consultation survey' by BC saw the planned regional workshops postponed until later in the year.

Our National Training Squad day was subsequently cancelled and other events and competitions followed as a near blanket ban, became just that! We were heading into unprecedented times.

Even in 2001, when Foot & Mouth disease was spreading across the country, paddling on local water was possible, even when racing was stopped but not this time, as we became immersed by Covid – 19.

BC's cancellation of all events quickly took hold and was extended, and then extended again – currently until at least 31st July. There were concerns that BC's 'no paddling' policy was a step too far but behind the scenes they were working hard to get us back training and resume paddling, whilst tactically working with the other bodies that fund our sport and those that look after our waterways. BC certainly had their own financial interests in getting us back on the water!

With no races likely for some time – but no idea how long – it was obvious that some unwelcome but necessary decisions were to be made. Early cancellation of the Nationals at Reading could not be avoided. The cancellation of the hotly contested Hasler final, planned at Richmond, was inevitable as without races and the ability for qualification the final simply could not proceed. It was necessary to try and forward guess what might – or might not happen – next but with the inevitability of no quick solutions to change gear and head in the right direction all we could do is assume that the resumption of racing would possibly not be – in the form we knew it – before September at best. Even later at worst. We were faced with a possibly of no further competition in 2020!

There has been business to deal with. A severe swing downwards - in our funding from both BC and through the race levy necessitated a completely new budget. Our saving grace being that our reduced income was matched by our reduced expenditure on events both at home and abroad.

Internationals were cancelled and BC confirmed the difficulties in sending any teams abroad even if restrictions were partially relaxed. Consequently, as with other disciplines, we agreed that no athletes would be selected for internationals during the 2020 season.

But progress we must. Marathon has returned as a section in its own right in the Racing Handbook, with rule changes or important notices, during the year, on line via the MRC website.

We have at long last implemented the higher 50 points per seat for a win, rather than the previous 20, a change that some have been asking for, for some time.

Excellent resources have been compiled on our behalf by Scott Hynds and Ivan Lawler and which are now available on our website to help all abilities. If you have not checked this out please follow the links provided there.

The committee have been following with interest representations from some clubs to bring together Sprint and Marathon, as well as other racing disciplines into a wider ranging 'Race' discipline. We have of course been following the Sprint Performance review especially considering how more short course events could be brought into the already crowded annual calendar.

We have offered the MRC regional structure that operates with Marathon as a possible catalyst to gain clubs support in broadening the possibility and number of short course events run, especially regionally.

Our current focus revolves around our planned Festival of paddling on 4th October 2020 (all being well !). Hosted at Reading this event will provide individual and interclub competition for all levels and we hope will bring back together our paddling community over varying course lengths.

We also are recruiting additional volunteers to further enhance our Racman programme, as well as invest in an online entry programme, that we hope will provide a future proof system, as we all try and further expand the numbers taking up our sport; building upon the variety of events we see held with the the extensive work done, within regions and so importantly within our clubs.

There are some retirements by rotation from the committee this year and sadly we will see Tom Sharpe step down due to a need to reduce his commitments. For all those who have contributed during the year thank you.

Especially a big Thank you to James, who despite having to deal with some serious illness during the year has continued, with only a short period of absence, in the demanding role of Secretary.

5. Election of Committee Posts

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HELPING & INSPIRING PEOPLE TO GO CANOEING

a. The MRC elects committee places on a rolling basis, for a period of two years with the election of the Chair taking place annually. Seven ordinary places were up for election, with seven candidates. The MRC would still ordinarily still run a voting process to ensure that all candidates had the support of at least 50% of the clubs present, but in light of the complexities of doing this fairly and properly online, it was agreed that these candidates would be adopted.

b. Stan Missen was re-elected unopposed as Chair of the MRC for the forthcoming year.

c. David Sackman (Reading), Bryn Price (Maidstone), Roland Lawler (Elmbridge), Mick Nadal (Nottingham), Kat Wilson (Reading), Siobhan Urquhart (Banbury) and James Smythe (Bishops Stortford) were elected to stand as members of the MRC for the next two years.

6. Finance

a. David Enoch (MRC Treasurer) presented the committee's audited accounts and the following report:-

Please find attached (see meeting papers) the latest set of audited accounts for the MRC. These are up to 31 Oct. 2019, the end of our financial year. You will see that they follow a similar pattern to recent years with our main income being the B.C. grant (£35k), race levies (£30k) and athlete contributions (£14k). Our main expenditure was on major internationals and development internationals (£56.5k). We made a surplus in 2019 of £6k leaving us with reserves of £56k. The committee consider that £50k of reserves is a sensible minimum.

In Oct. 2019 we submitted a budget to B.C. for 2020 which was broadly similar to that for 2019. We were advised that this was approved and our grant would be £35k again. Then the virus struck. This resulted in the cancellation of all domestic races for probably the rest of the financial year, to Oct. 2020 and the cancellation of all internationals for 2020.

We agreed with B.C. that with the cancellation of all internationals, which are our main expenditure, the MRC did not need the full grant of £35k which had been allocated and we agreed a reduced grant of £8.7k. Race levies for the period before the virus, Nov. 2019 – March 2020, totalled £4k. With some continuing expenditure, such as vehicle maintenance and insurance and further development of the Hasler race management system we anticipate a loss for the year to Oct. 2020 of £3k. This will leave us with £53k of reserves going forward into 2020/21 which we hope will be a full domestic and international season.

Ivan Lawler (Elmbridge) asked whether, following British Canoeing's very successful year in terms of membership, the MRC could have its loss covered by BC. **Stan Missen agreed to raise this in his next meeting with BC.**

Richard Gilbert-Johns (Southampton) asked about the MRC's projections in case racing did not resume in September as hoped. Stan Missen replied that this was hard to predict, although with regular expenditure under good control, the MRC's budget and reserves could cope if domestic racing did not resume as soon as hoped. This will continue to be reviewed by the MRC, whose next meeting is on 15th August.

Greg Spencer asked about clubs in financial difficulty due to COVID 19. The MRC had discussed earlier in the year whether it might be able to use some of its reserves to help clubs who had lost race organisation income, although the reserves would not provide much support if spread across many clubs. However BC informed us of a Government plan to support sports clubs in this situation, and that this scheme had been "popular", although without further detail, and no clubs have approached MRC about this. **Stan Missen will request details of the success of this scheme among racing canoe clubs in his next meeting with BC.**

7. Domestic Racing

a. Proposals for new U14 racing rules

Following the changes debated at the 2019 ACM, Mick Nadal, Kat Wilson and Evan Shephard worked with clubs to develop the MRC's plans for a three-division structure for Under 14s, to be implemented from September 2020.

Divisions C, B and A will progress young paddlers who are not yet ready for full divisional racing, from Lightnings to full racing boats and up to Division 9.

Divisions C and B would be for under 12s only, with Lightnings only used in Div C for the coming season and phased out entirely after that. Division A would be for Under 14s, and there will be no gender-specific classes.

Kat Wilson reported that elements of the new format are still under some discussion, including how the Geoff Sanders trophy standings will be calculated, the award of prizes, and fine-tuning the performances required for promotional into the full divisional system.

Evan Shephard has requested details of race organisers' current Lightning courses so that he can calculate the appropriate criteria for promotions up through the new divisions and into Div 9. Until this has been established and trialled with real races, promotions will only be implemented with the agreement of team leaders. The required standard for promotion into Div 9 will be

that the promoted paddler would be fast enough to finish in the top half of Div 9.

Julia ? pointed out that smaller clubs may struggle to find mini K1s to replace Lightnings for paddlers not yet big enough for normal K1s; Bob ? also pointed out that some clubs in the North are developing and would also struggle with this. Kat pointed out that the requirement to use Lightnings in Div C would not be axed immediately, and the boats could still be used after this point even if usually uncompetitive against a racing K1.

Ivan Lawler (Elmbridge) who is also the UK's official Nelo boats distributor, offered to sell Nelo mini K1s to clubs at cost price.

Richard Gilbert-Johns also voiced concerns about the quick transition; and asked if the MRC would consider aligning the racing year with the calendar year, to help young paddlers moving up through the age classes to remain in the new system and Geoff Sanders competition for the full season. **This will be discussed by the MRC at a forthcoming meeting.**

b. BC plans for the Youth Membership scheme

Stan Missen reported that BC were pursuing their plans to abolish the Youth membership scheme which currently allows paddlers aged under 17 to race with a club Youth membership as far as Div 7. This change was due to be discussed in club workshops scheduled before COVID-19. These should resume in October hopefully. Stan encouraged clubs to go to their local meetings and have their say, if they believe this change will be detrimental developing junior racing.

c. The 2020-21 Hasler season

Given that we do not know when it will be possible to resume normal Hasler racing, or when race organisers will feel confident in organising adapted races that meet the BC requirements of the moment, it is too early to say how points should be accrued towards the 2021 Hasler Final. The MRC will keep the situation under review.

d. "Return to racing" event

The MRC has been working on a plan with Reading Canoe Club for an inclusive, club-based return to racing event on 4th October, assuming that the public health situation improves.

This event would include trialling competition formats not usually seen in Hasler or National Championship racing such as short-course or team racing. The idea is that, because of the disruption caused to training and competition,

and the difficulty of organising a normal National Championships at this stage, the most important thing is to get clubs and paddlers back racing together and enjoying it.

Brian Chapman asked when it would be certain that the event would go ahead or not. Kat Wilson replied that the MRC were looking to the example of the London Marathon, due to take place on the same date, to see if the Government would be happy for major public events to run. A decision on this is due to be taken on 28th July. The organisers only need a couple of weeks definitive notice, although they and the MRC would need to be extremely confident to organise an event with potentially hundreds of participants.

10. Questions

The floor was opened for questions to be discussed at forthcoming MRC meetings.

a. Evan Shepherd (Reading) who is working on promotion formulas for the new U14 races asked all race organisers to email their Lightning course distances to him. **Graham Warland to send this request on to race organisers.**

b. Tim Scott (Norwich) reported that he is co-ordinating a group of passionate coaches and volunteers to provide feedback to BC's review of sprint racing. One idea being discussed is whether a single Racing Committee could better co-ordinate racing opportunities and the calendar, helping to support more balanced athlete development, broaden racing skills and avoid pressure on all but the most exceptional athletes to specialise in one discipline.

Following the meeting, David Joy of British Canoeing has approached the MRC about forming a joint working group with the SRC, to help the SRC develop a local and regional programme of sprint events.

The meeting ended at 6.45pm, with the Chairman thanking all those who joined.

The next meetings of the MRC are on Saturday 15th August, and Saturday 21st November. Clubs are welcome to submit items for discussion to the Secretary James Smythe two weeks in advance of these meetings.