**British Canoeing Marathon Racing Committee
Minutes of the Committee Meeting held at 9am on 20th November 2021**

*Meeting held at Cropredy Village Hall, with some joining via Zoom.*

***If your initials are down for action please ensure that you follow up the matter concerned and report the outcome back to the Secretary well before our next meeting. Our next meeting is tbc.***

**1. Present**

Stan Missen (SM) (Chair)
James Smythe (JS)
Dyson Pendle (DP)
David Enoch (DE)
Siobhan Urquhart (SU)
Brian Chapman (BrC)
Scott Hynds (SH)
Jim Rossiter (JR)
Bryn Price (BP)
Graham Warland (GW)
Dan Seaford (DMS)
Holly Mobbs (HM)
Evan Shepherd (ES)
Dave Sackman (DJS)
Roland Lawler (RL)
Mick Nadal (MN)
Kat Wilson (KW, by zoom)
Nettie North (NN, by zoom)

These people are referred to by their initial’s hereafter in the Minutes.

**Approval of Minutes of Meeting 20th August 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of 30th August were approved by the Committee with one correction – Brian Chapman being SCA representative, not a co-opted member. They will now be published as final.

**Action: JS**

1. **Matters Arising**

a) The trailer is still for sale, and may need a spring clean or service after laying unused for the last 18 months. KW volunteered to re-advertise it. DE to look at condition and possible service (**Actions: KW, DE)**

b) MN emailed RMAs about the MRC’s offer to purchase changing tents for each region, however those that replied declined the offer due to not wanting to carry them around. The Committee agreed that we should make more of an effort to explain why the tents are needed, and possibly offer them directly to larger clubs instead of via the RMA. **(Action: include in letter to race organisers – GW/MN)**

c) No further progress has been made on the Speed Series, although Norwich CC are still planning an event in 2022. This was intended as at least a joint effort if not a sprint-led initiative, but there has been no progress from the SRC’s side. It was not thought that this is the responsibility of the MRC. **Action: DP to discuss with Tim Scott (SRC Chair)**

d) It was believed that comms sent out about the Racing Levy following the last meeting were well received and understood. Since that time, race organisers have all paid it promptly. It may remain the best way of raising community funds to support marathon, but we should remain open to new approaches. A discussion on the subject will be tabled for the 2022 ACM. (**Action: JS)**

e) The DW Committee are keen to form a joint group with MRC and SRC to grow schools racing. HM has volunteered to liaise, as she is already involved with the National Schools Champs (organised by the DW Committee). A forum for schools coaches is also being organised. **(Action: HM to keep committee informed)**

f) BP has received the MRC’s old stock of Errea kit for use with masters teams.

**4. Governance**

a) JS outlined the need for the MRC to write a document outlining our strategy and plans for the next 4-year period. This is to align with other disciplines, and British Canoeing who do the same for the sport as a whole. This would consist of a review of our previous strategy, and an update to reflect new priorities and deal with things from the last 4 year plan which was cut short due to Covid.

A number of topics have emerged or risen to the top of the agenda, including short-course racing, gender equality, masters, schools and universities, SUP. JS requested and got offers of help from a number of Committee members to draft this, and liaise with Anna Gray who is leading from BC headquarters.
**Action: JS, BRC, SU, ES, BP, SH to meet to work on next draft. JS to circulate a list of headings to start from.**

b) Having agreed that the MRC should participate in the 2022 Racing Handbook, we discussed contents and responsibilities for updating in time for the Christmas deadline. Specifics were:-

* + 1. Rules (section F) – in good shape following a review by MN, so few updates to make (MN)
		2. Online race entry system – to include the user guide written by JS (JS)
		3. Article about the levy – ditto (JS)
		4. Re-integrate marathon into the Standards for Racing table, including a better explanation of promotion standards (ES)
		5. Calendar and addresses (GW)
		6. Coaching (section D1) – question whether this needs editing (SH)
		7. Trophies (Neil Urquhart via SU)
		8. International Medals update (JS)

c) SM reported that it looks very likely that British Canoeing will disestablish the English Forum, comprising the regional chairs, as these have rarely met and no longer effectively represent non-competition members. It is thought that discipline committees will take over the role of Board nominations. Although the MRC had no objection, JR pointed out that BC do make it difficult for regional volunteers to communicate with members in their area by denying them access to members’ email addresses. The opportunity to communicate via these lists could be of considerable benefit to growing marathon participation at a regional level, or encouraging club membership. **Action: SM to feed back to BC**

**5. Finance**

a) DE presented the final 2020-21 budget. While we had originally expected to collect only around £1k in levy revenues, £8.7k was eventually received as racing resumed. Although the Worlds was expensive, the remaining internationals were cancelled. As a result, we only asked for £27k of the £35k grant offered to us by British Canoeing, leaving a loss at year end of £1.6k and reserves of £59.6k.

The original Leaside Canoe Club, which parted ways with the Leaside Trust in recent years, has been wound up, leaving a sum of money in their racing account. Two clubs in the Essex/London area which received the majority of ex-members received some of the funds, while the ex-members agreed to donate £1,200 to the MRC. This sum has been received from Dave Hallam, now of Barking & District CC. DE suggested a letter of thanks to Dave (**Action: DE/SM)**

As British Canoeing now submit their VAT returns digitally, all transactions on which VAT can be reclaimed need to have gone through BC’s own bank account not the MRC one. Therefore, VAT can no longer be reclaimed on expenses. Major expenditure items from now on require an invoice and for payment to go via BC. BC will still allow us to claim expenses (e.g. for international teams fuel etc), but only in the low hundreds of pounds per year.

* 1. The 2021-22 budget was discussed at the end of the meeting, once other plans requiring investment had been debated. With the additions made and outlined below, we will now approach BC about extending our grant to £40k. **(Action: DE/SM)**

**6. Domestic Racing**

a) DMS reported that the race entry system and results process has improved, and GW agreed that the amount of admin required to turn around a set of race results had come down considerably.

What we have now is a fully-functional race **entry** system, an **offline race-day platform** (RACMAN), and an **automated process for reconciling the rankings list after each race**. The Committee agreed that we should communicate this more widely, as well as the next steps in the development roadmap **(Action: DMS to share with JS/SU for comms)**

There remains some confusion around the options for paying for an entry, with many clubs facing hurdles in using Stripe. However, it has worked well overall and the MRC is extremely happy with the work done by Will. He responds very quickly to individual users requests for support or comments on social media, aided by ES and JS.

We are currently paying £1250 per year for use of Will’s system, plus £250 for hosting. This agreement expires at the end of March 2022. Will and DMS propose to simply roll this into a £1500 annual commitment, which would cover new work required on post-race data transformation and results database storage.

SM pointed out that there is BC support for us to do this well, so Will need not keep costs down unnecessarily as it is more important that we have an efficient software package to support the Marathon discipline, however DMS pointed out that Will’s professional rates would be far in excess of what we could pay, so it is effectively done on a near-voluntary basis, and Will is happy to only charge £1500 for the rights to use his system in the long-term. Will has ambitions to develop the system commercially for other sports, while MRC will retain our rights to use it for a small fee. Dan asked for a copy of the written agreement with Will; covering work to date and until expiry.

There was some debate about whether we “own” the application, and pressure from BC to achieve this. JS pointed out that from his experience in software development, it is effectively impossible to own software outright while making use of the opensource programming languages, and Will’s expertise (i.e. intellectual property) which make it affordable. The Committee agreed that the strength of the current agreement should be sufficient guarantee. When renewed in 2022 such things will again need to be looked at closely.

JS asked some of the Committee for their thoughts on why some popular race series did not use the entry system yet – especially as its use was not tied to raising the levy. The answer was either that those series had an automated process already in place, or simply a lack of knowledge, hence the need for more persistent communications.

SM raised the question of whether we should make using the entry system compulsory for ranking races, to avoid the admin problems that ensue from poor race data. This was not felt to be necessary yet, DMS pointed out it would be preferable to get to the point where race organisers could not consider using an alternative system.

JS asked if we needed to set up more checks before a race organiser can set up a race on the entry system. In terms of event liability and our visibility of organisers’ plans and risk assessments, this is covered by the process of getting listed in the calendar, however we needed to add BC club affiliation to this checklist (**action: GW)**

DJS asked if we would eventually roll our system into the one developed by British Canoeing. While this may happen one day, the Committee agreed that this would be a backward step for the time being, as the BC system does not contain all the support processes for our competition structure, such as rankings, regions etc.

Finally, DJS and JR proposed a reminder to clubs to get their associate memberships renewed every time their BC affiliation renews, as otherwise these can expire and cause chaos when it is time to enter races. **Action: JS/SU for comms**

b) MN presented a short list of proposed rule amendments for 2022. This included the request by Rob Passmore to allow American-style Canoe specifications, which was agreed by the Committee. MN will amend the rules as simply as possible, most probably by including these canoes along with surf skis as named exceptions to any conflicting rules, in the same way as WWR racers are.

MN also suggested that the current 5k rules be amended to rules for the ICF short-course marathon format (**Action: DP/JS to support)**

Additional rules will include the use of megaphones for starting, and an overhaul of the best practice recommendations for starters. **Action: ES/HM/KW**

SU requested an amendment to how points for the Spanish Galleon trophy are allocated at the National Championships. It was agreed that this should now incorporate all junior classes. **Action: MN**

Following the first few races of the new Geoff Sanders trophy, the team leading this proposed some tweaks to the rules, which were agreed by the Committee. **Action: ES to send changes to MN; KW to draft comms for the website**

ICF’s recent congress approved a number of rule changes for marathon internationally, so MN will wait to see these amendments before aligning our rules where necessary (**Action: MN)**

c) The Committee considered a paper by Nigel Jones of Nottingham KC to require athletes training at a club to race for that club. This had previously been rejected by NKC themselves, and was also rejected by the MRC on the basis that it is entirely outside the MRC’s authority to say which club a paddler must join or race for. Policing such a move would also be impossible.

We can also not interfere with Services paddlers who are sometimes obliged to paddle for their service in key competitions, while being free to race for a club in others. It was suggested that our rules on racing for only one club in a season be clarified to exclude Services. **Action: MN**

DP suggested that clubs in a similar predicament can charge different membership rates for paddlers who race for the club.

d) The Committee discussed a letter from James Treadgold of Newbury CC, observing that course rules are sometimes not policed by race organisers at all or as well as they should be. Where these rules are a safety measure, or imposed by an external authority, ignoring rule-breaking is a serious risk and concern.

The MRC agreed that if there is a requirement for safety, or imposed by an outside authority, it must be treated as rule and policed as a priority. While we don’t want to make it harder for race organisers to run races, if they fail to enforce such rules the MRC would ultimately have the right to take away a Hasler race status for example, or not list the event in our calendar. Delivering a fair event to all competitors is important.

This will be communicated to race organisers for the 2022 season. The corollary is that race organisers be discouraged from arbitrary rules that are not going to be enforced, as this develops bad habits among racers who see no risk to ignoring them. It was noted that the Watersides are very good at all this and have also led the way on clarity of pre-race briefing - with COVID many races have followed their example. **Action: JS to respond to James Treadgold; MN to include in 2022 race organisers letter.**

It was finally suggested as a good idea that past information letters to race organisers, be collated as a resource on the website **(action: MN to send to JS for publication)**

e) SM updated briefly on the status of South Cerney as a potential race venue. Marsport is relocating its business there and will be keen to develop the venue, so this may finally come to fruition in the years ahead.

**7. Coaching & Development**

a) NN was reported that the collaboration between MRC, SRC and the BC Talent Dept on “racing skills days” has now been re-branded back to JDS again. Two days have been organised so far. Two more planned for this winter, and a training camp, possibly at Longridge again, this summer. Some MRC budget was requested to support this.

The Committee agreed to under-write the Longridge camp on the basis that this should largely pay for itself after athlete contributions. **Action: JDS team to book Longridge**

b) SH reported that the SRC have now stopped their support for the race coach bursary, but that the chair Tim Scott is trying to resurrect this.

BC announced a bursary of their own to pay for race coach courses, which has been inundated with applications from people hoping to secure a free course as opposed to a subsidised one via the MRC bursary. The online Core module has proved to be a bottleneck, so discipline-specific modules have yet to start, and in the meantime this opportunity has brought an end to the courses being organised by independent race coach course providers. The unsatisfactory outcome has been a sudden stop in the supply of courses. **Action: SM to raise with BC**

SH gave feedback on British Canoeing’s request for more information on near misses. Some in the community fear being judged for events and the repercussions for being seen to have taken too many risks. Lee Pooley at BC has proposed to get the ball rolling by publicising known cases, as well the past tragedies which have taken place. Subsequent to the meeting, BC shared a near miss case study from racing which has been shared on the MRC website.

The Passionate Coaches group now has a coach mentoring programme to promote. The MRC agreed to promote this. **Action: SH to send details to JS**

JS mentioned that it is difficult for individuals in smaller clubs to find out details of a coaching course. The usual method is for a club to get six or eight candidates together and approach a provider, but it is not viable for a provider to advertise an open course when there may not be enough candidates to cover costs. JS suggested an online form to collect contacts for individual candidates **(Action: SH to share with JS a list of criteria for clubs, regions or the MRC to propose a course)**

c) JS made a proposal to invest in training opportunities for our top paddlers, to help them gain more experience of racing at world level than they can get by simply racing a couple of internationals each year. This included the following proposals:-

* Training camp in the South of France in February, scheduled in order to be able to train with the French and Danish teams.
* Inviting a handful of top internationals to the Short-Course Nationals.
* Entries for the Waterlands Marathon for a senior men’s team.
* Domestic training days organised for those close to worlds team standard to train with our top paddlers.

The MRC agreed to support these activities up to £3k for the forthcoming season. Subsequent to the meeting, JS has found that he is likely to need new medical treatment in the spring, making it highly unlikely that he will be able to lead this. **Action: Committee to decide on viability, and seek volunteer(s) to lead if still supported.**

**8. Major Events**

a) JS put forward plans to run a short-course national championships on 30th April at Gunwade Lake in Peterborough.

The lake and accompanying centre offer a high quality venue, which will help the new event to make a good impression with the racing community . The recent experience of SRC in awarding national championships for 10k and 5k to clubs has produced relatively small events, so we are keen to make sure that this event is a success, and in particular heavily marketed.

JS proposes to organise the event with MRC staff, and invite clubs with an interest in organising the event in future to contribute volunteers. A number of Committee members volunteered to help with organisation.

The Committee gave the go-ahead and agreed to under-write the event by up to £5,000. **Action: JS to form event committee and proceed with organisation**

b) DMS reported that the suggested 2022 Nationals to be organised by Falcon CC and Banbury has not come to fruition, leaving us without a host for the coming season. Falcon have indicated their willingness to host in 2023.

DP said that Norwich CC would be willing to consider stepping in to host, and DMS said that an alternative, entirely MRC-staffed event could be run at Reading. The Committee also re-iterated that the MRC can manage entries and results on behalf of any hosts, and DMS is authoring a set of guidelines on how to run national events/ (**Action: DMS to finish)**

Worcester CC was also mentioned, and BP tasked with approaching them. Following the meeting, Worcester indicated their willingness, although as yet no details have been established **(Action: DMS to follow up)**

c) HM reported that Wey KC, supported by Addlestone, will run the 2022 Hasler Final on 25th September at Runnymede Pleasure Ground. The local Council are supportive and offering reduced hire fees. Plans are currently being reviewed by their Safety Advisory Group.

**9. Internationals**

a) KW reported that the Selection Committee had chosen Nettie North to act as Chair for 2022, and had appointed Paul Dimmock as a voting member, and Fay Lamph as a non-voting athlete representative. Mark Wilkes who had acted as athlete rep in 2021 has withdrawn as he may seek selection next year; JS who was chair in 2021 had not put himself forward for the selection committee next year.

The policy is currently in draft form and has been sent to the Committee for review. The plans include a full set of development and full international trips in 2022. Dates for assessment races are waiting on a date for the Nationals, and the selection committee is fine-tuning team composition criteria for each event.

One proposal, supported by the Committee, is that we carry forward the team selected for the 2021 French Nationals to the 2022 German Nationals, as they were un-invited at the last minute. The proviso requested by the Committee was that these athletes should race to demonstrate that they are still actively training, and so that any released places may be transferred.

**Action: KW to publish final version by Christmas, and forward for inclusion in the Handbook.**

b) JS reported back on the World Championships in Romania, which was a great success in the face of serious complications, and a testament to the efforts of many people. Notably Dave Sackman and Graham Warland who organised the logistics, Bryn Price and Chris Sze who drove the minibus, and JS, Dyson and Ali Pendle, and Fay Lamph who accompanied the team. Our efforts were recognised in a letter of congratulations from British Canoeing Chair John Coyne, and paddlesport director Keir Worth.

DJS and GW mentioned the need for better pre-event details from athletes, given the increased workload caused by both COVID and post-Brexit customs rules. The requirement to submit paperwork **on time** will become a selection requirement **(Action: KW to incorporate in 2022 Selection Policy)**

c) ICF International Technical Official renewals for JR, Melvin and Sarah Swallow, and BRC were all approved and passed onto British Canoeing (**Action: JS)**

d) BRC reported back on the ICF Congress, which included the first ever contested election for Chair of the ICF Marathon Committee. This was won by acting Chair Ruud Heijselaar, ahead of Spanish candidate Begona Rodriguez. Begona was a very strong candidate and a friend to many on the MRC, so it is a pity that she will no longer be part of the organising team for ICF events. It was noted that although a marathon world championships only attracts 30 nations, over 90 delegate federations voted in the election.

BRC was also chosen as part of Ruud’s new committee, which is a great boost for our profile in the ICF and our hopes of organising internationals in the UK in future. The new ICF Committee are also keen to explore a wider range of possible venues, following years of relatively sanitised championship venues.

e) BRC outlined progress on planning for a potential major international in the UK in 2027. The first step had been for BRC and Gemma at British Canoeing to identify likely budget requirements. Based on recent World Championship budgets, a ballpark figure of £500-600k was identified. After team contributions, and British Canoeing support capped at £50k, this would leave a £200-300k shortfall which would need to be funded from elsewhere. As a comparison, the Worlds at Stockton, many years ago, had an overall budget of £800k.

This figure, combined with the difficulty of securing local authority funding in England, mean that our greatest chance of success would lie in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, where devolved Government funds may be accessible. **Action: BRC to discuss approaching home nations through British Canoeing**

**10. AOB**

* GW reported that race organisers have been slow this year to secure their calendar dates, probably due to COVID concerns.
* SU requested a debate on the question of re-merging Div 3 & 4 K2 at the next meeting.
* A decision is needed on whether to hold the 2022 ACM online or face to face. Separating it from the Nationals was felt to be a necessary step in COVID times, so online may remain the best option for 2022 also. **Action: JS to organise**

**12. Meeting Dates 2022**

* **Action: SM and JS to discuss and propose meetings,** likely to be April, ACM around July, September and an all-day meeting in November

The meeting closed at 3pm