

BRITISH CANOEING WILD WATER RACING 2015 CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

INTRODUCTION

It is good to welcome everyone to our Annual Consultative Meeting at the National Water Sports Centre.

It has been an excellent year with considerable development in a number of areas, ranging from the number of volunteers now involved to the number of paddlers racing and training at different levels.

There continues to be more people taking the initiative and running successful locally based races and club-based training. We also had the British Canoeing event at Lee Valley as part of the run up to this year's Canoe Slalom World Championships and we see a steady growth in our participation figures.

I'm very pleased to say that Scotland's WWR Exec committee has moved on in leaps and bounds over the last twelve months with more WWR development sessions, excellent participation in all their local races and a sound development plan for the sport. Canoe Wales is looking at running a series of Welsh Wild Water races which hopefully will be in next year's calendar and linked with the excellent development in England this is showing good all round improvement.

We have an active and more widely representative Exec Committee able to represent all the regions and interests and have managed to achieve excellent participation at senior and junior international events as well as sorting out the minibuss situation.

Russell Smith is continuing his active role as our British Canoeing professional support and we've actively participated in the review of British Canoeing support for Discipline Committees which has just been completed and will be implemented over the next year. We always need to continue growing our sport and I'm delighted to say that we have considerable more support from British Canoeing.

GENERAL

Developing both performance and participation remain our major aims. Making the sport accessible, family friendly and welcoming to all remains a key area we continue to work on. The focus across the UK is rightly on increasing participation and enjoyment of sport at all levels whilst we are also trying to improve and drive performance. Our participation plan and committee structure continues to reflect this.

2015 has overall been a highly progressive period as we continue with our growth plans for the sport. The various different formats for regional and development racing appear to have continued capturing people's imagination and regional participation has continued to increase. This is great news and a tribute to the dedication of the growing network of race organisers and clubs in

England and Scotland that are pushing forward. Many congratulations to Duddon who were again overall club winners of the Wavehopper championships and to our runners up, Wiltshire Youth for their continuing contributions to the sport.

Participation at National level I'm delighted to say has started to increase with the largest selection race in years and a great level of participation at the Tour of the North. We have races for National and Regional levels of abilities and will be having the annual prize giving and squad training this weekend in Holme Pierrepont as well as the ACM to bring everyone together before Christmas.

We have seen lots of new activity going on throughout the UK, particularly in the Midlands, and considerable development going on in Scotland seeing a complete revival of the sport north of the border with the establishment by the SCA WWR committee of a full Scottish Series and home Championship. This has significantly increased both our participation and our performance, meaning we sent paddlers to the World Championship in MC1, MK1, MC2, LK1 and having teams in MC1, MK1, MC2 and LK1 showing better representation across the classes.

The WWR Calendar is now in its third year in the new format, and we're working with British Canoeing to bring together all the competition calendars to help athletes compete across multiple disciplines. We continue with the National & Regional events with the season starting in September and already we are starting to see a difference with more information being provided about races well in advance. Indeed that selection is already well planned and organised for next year, is a considerable step forward. We have also updated our information for WWR race organisers providing a more comprehensive set of tools for race organisers.

The results and ranking spread-sheet is bedding down and an excellent tool to helping our race organisers' speed up both race entries and results. Huge thanks yet again to Ross Pearton for his hard work developing it further, Phil Brown who has continued in the key role of ranking list compiler collating results throughout the season and Lee Gingell who has kindly volunteered to take on the role this season.

We have continued to work on Wild Water participation with Russell Smith and Paul Anderson reforming the discipline specific coaching module for Wild Water Racing with a second coaching module running at Barrow on Soar in February, sponsored by the East Midlands Region and one running at Duddon in the North West last February.

We have continued to be able to support the development of Canoeing through the Andy Clough Memorial fund having made awards to new canoe paddlers.

Funding continues to be tight and we've managed to sell two of the Minibuses this year and have repaired the existing bus able to support international team

trips and national events throughout the year. We also had tremendous support from athletes, clubs and parents fielding good teams for the World & European senior events and the Junior & Under 23 World Championships which was a massive and very successful exercise in team management and logistics.

With the continuing focus on participation and performance we will be continuing to work hard on balancing development and performance for athletes and coaches for the GB Team. We as a committee reviewed the selection policy thoroughly and I'm pleased to say sent a significantly larger team to Senior, Under 23 and Junior World and European Championships. We also gave a greater number of talented individuals the chance to experience their first taste of international competition during the world cup series. This approach has been successful and one we're repeating for 2016. This policy provided a number of paddlers the opportunity to gain valuable experience.

We had a good year's international competition with the Senior Team's excellent results at the Europeans at Banja Luka in Bosnia Herzegovina and another creditable performance by our Junior and Under 23 Team at the World Championships in America. At the European Championships on the River Vrbas at Banja Luka in Bosnia we sent a team of men's K1 and C1 paddlers and good experience was gained by all in very difficult conditions due to the river levels being considerably higher than normal. Nicky Cresser had an excellent 16th place in the individual sprint event at the World Championships. This was a brilliant result for Nicky and for the sport in the UK showing that we maintain our ability to take on the very best athletes in the world on some of the most challenging and exciting courses!

Many thanks to Grant Anderson and Nicky Cresser as Senior and Junior Team Managers and all their helpers for their dedication and hard work. In particular to Ross Pearton and Nigel Stevenson who stepped into the breach and helped with the minibus driving – another epic drive much more than half-way across Europe!

Personally I was delighted with Johnnie's World qualification of a quota place for the Rio Olympics as well as former wild water racers Hannah Brown and Matt Bowley's excellent performances at the Canoe Sprint World Championships in Milan

A number of our races now have classes for just about every age and boat possible, helping us to promote the fun of the sport at all levels and helping those in more stable boats aspire to progress to wild water racing boats. A new Matlock series has been started in the Midlands with great success providing excellent progression from the Barrow series as paddlers become more confident. The Barrow, Burrs, and Matlock races attract significant support from people many miles away which is excellent to see.

The first national race of the current season was held last week at the Tyne and Tees, and despite somewhat difficult weather conditions it was fantastic

to see an entry of over 30 paddlers in MC1, MC2, LK1 and MK1 attend the two days, not put off by the appalling weather. It is a while since we saw such a competitive ladies start line and the compliments received about the weekend were a tribute to all parents, helpers, organisers and paddlers that all chipped in to make it such a great weekend. All paddlers also pre entered making life much easier for the organisers.

The Alva race in Scotland organised by Paul Anderson and Fraser Gormal still holds the record for the most entries, ran as a true development event with over 70 entries with paddlers aged from 7 – 75!. The idea of partnering less confident youngsters with an experienced paddler in C2s was an excellent one and many thanks to Ryan Hunt who completed over 15 runs to enable newcomers to experience a C2, the youngest of which was a tiny 7 year old who was so proud to be paddling with a GB paddler that he asked for a photograph to take to his teacher at school. What a great way of promoting the sport. Paddlers were also encouraged to try different disciplines so K1 paddlers were seen in C1s and vice versa.

As a result of this we have developed a template for others to follow and have started a boat amnesty to get old, unloved and unused wwr boats back into circulation. So far we have had offers of wavehoppers, C1s and K1s. but please pass details of our boat amnesty on to relevant people.

Neil Stamps continues to do a tremendous job in keeping the website up to date and the new British Canoeing website is now live and you are seeing our introduction of the British Canoeing Branding – one message for the whole sport. The Facebook Site has continued to grow with membership now up a further 30% from last year at 587 members in the UK and across the world. Again I'd like to express a huge thanks to Neil for keeping this essential service going as well as looking fresh and new and performing well on internet searches!

We also have the recent report on British Canoeing support for the competition disciplines which will help ensure we can support both the International Canoe Federation and European Canoe Association for the long term health of the sport.

As always I'd like to give a special thank you to all the coaches, team management, parents and other helpers who made this all happen. For me this continues to be one of the great strengths and joys of our sport. Particular thanks goes to Julie Lewis as Hon. Secretary, Grant Anderson, Nicky Cresser and Paul Anderson for their help with the squads and teams, Mackon Singh and Russ Smith for development. I'd also like to thank Simon Wright for his continuing work as treasurer, now in his seventh year abroad based in Abu Dhabi and to Ross Pearton for his help and assistance with the race entry system and canoeing generally.

Having such an experienced team, with all the support they get from across the sport has been essential to delivering the great results we have achieved.

I would also like to again thank all the Race Organisers – without them we would not have a sport!

1) Participation - To manage and run an enjoyable programme of events that meets the needs of the whole WWR paddling community. Deliver a race programme that attracts and stretches all our paddlers

We are now in our third year of the new National & Regional Series with a September – August Race calendar. We have also retained a number of events as Open Championships and Open Events alternating – as the Tour d’Ecosse will be running next year. There is an increased focus on Regional Events with the focus on a limited number of National Series races that will move venues each year to ensure variety.

This follows the French model with club based regionally-run races and a small number of national events. The aim is to recover participation so that people need to qualify at a couple of regional events. We are not at that situation so anyone with the appropriate skill levels is welcome to take part in the national series races and we’ll review progress at each ACM.

Areas we have concentrated on during the year have been:

- Contacting WWR participants as well as all British Canoeing Top Clubs to see what they want from WWR races and how we can improve
- Providing a better service for race organisers.
- Providing stronger alignment with regions and clubs

The coaching pathway, syllabus and course material for the discipline specific module for Wild Water Canoeing is now in its second year. This provides a practical easy to teach course for individuals and clubs to qualify them to take part in Regional Series races. I would like to see regions taking up this course and running it for their local clubs. This has currently been reviewed by Paul Anderson and Russ Smith to make it more user friendly.

British Canoeing’s English council is now in its sixth year. This brings together all the regions and all the different canoeing disciplines in one forum. For me it provides a useful communications role but the matrix of disciplines and regions is simply too complex for those who want to go paddling or racing. The British Canoeing review of support for Discipline Committees has now completed so we’ll see real progress. I’m also delighted that Dee Paterson has been elected Chair of the freestyle committee which starts to broaden the reach of WWR across the different competitions – providing more options for our athletes.

2) Performance - To help paddlers realise their full potential in International competition.

I’m yet again absolutely delighted to see our performance and participation at international competition as well as Nicky Cresser’s 16th place in the World Championships. Fielding a larger GB Team at the World Championships and World Cups with competitors in all canoeing and kayak categories I hope shows our long-term intent to continue supporting International Competition. Many thanks to Grant Anderson for taking on the Senior Team Management role for the Worlds and to Julie Lewis for taking on the Team Management for the World Cup Series. I’m delighted to say that Jamie Christie is continuing in

the role of Performance Director with Grant Anderson as Team Manager and Paul Anderson as head coach. This really helped in 2015 and we already have the plans in place for our 2016 international competitions which will I'm sure really help as we start preparing for the World Championships on the River Vrbas in Banja Luka from 1st – 5th June followed by the World Cup Series,.

Our Junior Worlds results demonstrated some strong potential and I was delighted that Nicky Cresser has volunteered to take on the role of Junior Team Manager which really helped us to both bring through new talent and for the Junior and Under 23 World Championships in the USA. Our thoughts now turn to preparations for the Junior Europeans.

I personally remain absolutely committed to supporting all our athletes at all levels and aspirations involved in the sport, not only at the elite level. My personal focus has always been more in participation – I continue to enjoy running the Irwell Regional Race at the Burrs Activity Centre just as much in sharing the excitements and disappointments of World Championship events. The successes of all of our athletes and their individual journeys to achieve their hopes and potentials continue to make me very proud indeed.

We have a great sport that appeals to many people at all levels. To make this a reality it is not a question of spreading the existing elite coaching staff more thinly but of bringing in many more people in at club and regional level. This can only be done by reaching out to many of the “friends of WWR” across the country and enlisting their help. Please contact me if I can help in this. We already have our top national coaches and athletes taking youngsters down on the Saturday's before races. Having elite athletes helping our new entrants is one of the things that helps keep me going!

Sue Hornby, Andy Goodsell and Howard Blackman continue to provide invaluable links with coaching and competition to ensure we remain aligned with British Canoeing's overall direction.

So to conclude I would again like to thank everyone for coming to the ACM and again wish you all the very best for the coming season. Happy Paddling!

Peter Schofield

Holme Pierrepont 5th December 2015