



Secretary General's Report - Congress 2019 by Sue Liell-Cock

13 & 15 May, Tully, Queensland, Australia

It is a pleasure to at last be running a World Rafting Championship on the Tully River because it played a small and little known part in the history of the IRF. In late 1992, while backpacking around the region, I did a rafting trip down the Tully River, with non-other than Johnny McCrossin, the WRC 2019 Safety Director. It was there that I first heard of Project Raft as he and his team (which had a very young Graham Maifredi on it) were raising money to get themselves to Project Raft in Turkey. I returned home and spoke to my good friend Tony Hansen, who was Event Director of the Zambezi Festival. We then headed to Project Raft in Turkey and the rest is firmly set in the history books of the IRF.

Looking back over the year and a half since the last Congress in Japan it is evident that the IRF has faced some challenges in being the legitimate international representative of world rafting, but the IRF has come out stronger for it.

From the last Congress and following BOD and Executive Committee meetings we set down a number of goals:

GAISF:

- Our key goal that came out of Congress 2017 was to take the first key steps towards GAISF membership. This was an extraordinary amount of work but was achieved and the application presented to them on the 6 April 2018. Since then there have been many emails between ourselves and GAISF, and we expect to receive Observer Status recognition in due course.
- There will be time set aside at this year's Congress to discuss our application where we can discuss it in greater depth then.

Increase income through:

- GTE: The IRF's Guide Training & Education section saw a 34% growth in the number of workshops run from 2017 to 2018, and 2019 is looking very good too. The standard of the GTE system has been lifted up hugely by the Instructors Conferences now being run every 12 to 18 months. We've increased the quality and quantity of the Instructor resources (and have some great material coming out this year) and also increased the standards and reporting required of our Instructors. We've also been showcasing many of our Assessors and Instructors in our social

media to thank them for their great work, and to present them to our broader IRF family, to bring our rafting community closer together.

- Increase membership: This is a slower process as it is a long, time consuming path for organisations to get their NSA or NOC recognition in their country. We do have quite a number of countries working on this and hope these are finalised this year.
- IRF branded kit is now being sold through an online store – this will grow as it gets better known, and will bring a small income to us while increasing our brand exposure.
- Our Recreational Operators Certificate is moving forward and the first assessments will be completed this year.
- Sponsors: this is related to the topic immediately below.

Increasing visibility:

- Rafting reaching a broader audience: One of our objectives has been to ensure rafting is seen by a broader audience. To do this we decided to contract with a single TV production/distribution house that has the reach we need, and who is familiar with our sport and our objectives. We are pleased to be working with 1080 Media who has a history of collaboration with us on past productions going back to the CWWC. 1080 Media is handling the distribution for WRC 2018 and will be fully handling WRC 2019 and 2020, as well as the production of a monthly TV magazine show. The latter will be focussing on our Euro Cup Series as well as on other events around the world.
- We have been using more methods to raise the visibility of rafting and the rafting community by introducing more of our rafting personalities to the broader public.
- We created an IRF Brand and established it across all aspects of the IRF
- Increased the number of events approved and promoted by the IRF. There has been a marked increase in event organisers and their sponsors coming to us for assistance with their events as they recognise us as the representatives of rafting world-wide and the only legitimate organisation with the experience, knowledge, and the ears of the teams to ensure their events are well run, well attended by top teams, and promoted successfully worldwide.
- Established better and more media contacts within our member federations

Better racing events:

- We are continuing to make great steps to improve the judging at IRF events. This includes:
 - o Ensuring that we get our best Judges to each event
 - o Hold compulsory refresher Judge workshops at each A and B level event
 - o Continually seek out and train Judges to increase their certification levels so as to have a greater depth of choice of good Judges
 - o Continually assess Judges where possible so as to give constructive feedback
- We are making great strides in reducing the costs for teams to attend our events. From the Olympics down, bids for major sport events have reduced in number and the money available to

finance these events has tightened, creating challenges as we are limited by the bids we receive. The negotiations for the 2020 WRC in China was focussing on making it as affordable as possible for teams, and we are pleased with our success and the willingness of our China hosts to work with us on this. Teams will only have to cover their flight costs, and there is prize money allocated! The 2018 and 2019 ERC have both been affordable and central for the European teams. WRC 2018 and 2019, although both more expensive to attend than we preferred, have been on excellent rivers and in awe inspiring locations, an important factor in our sport.

- Invitational and subsidised events: we have managed to increase these and are very delighted by the 1st IRF Futaleufu Invitational World Cup event scheduled for next year. The invites being based on the top teams from WRC 2019. Pre-Worlds in China also has subsidies available as well as prize money. We expect to have more of these events in the future.
- General standards of our Euro Cup Series events has also improved – better safety standards, better judging and greater social media reach, some new events and better organisers.

Sustainability:

- Working with our A and B level event organisers we have set out some practical steps that they are now keeping to – they supply drinking water tanks and participants use their own bottles to refill; and a big one has been to not use throw away plastic crockery and cutlery. Discussions about river clean ups, planting trees, getting school kids involved in these activities so as to educate and inspire them are also taking place.

Race coaching:

- A small core group are working on developing this aspect and this should be presented later on this year.

Improved communications:

- A concerted effort has been made to ensure all IRF committee members are more active in their roles and responsive in the management roles they have taken on. This has had positive results.
- Effort has also been made in keeping members up to date through newsletters and announcements of key information.

Increase in hands-on:

- There have been a pleasing number of people stepping forward to offer their assistance to the IRF and taking on great projects for us. From translating GTE or racing documents into their own languages, to promoting the IRF to key persons in their regions, to seeing opportunities to improve something and working to do it, to many other things. Thank you to all of you. And if any of you have ideas or projects you feel you can take on then please let us know.
- One person I must single out – Sean Clarke took over the IRF Media Representative role less than a year ago – this task focusses on social media and event media. Sean has gone far beyond those tasks. To list all that he has done in that time would take far too long! The list of key things have been: IRF branding, where he set it all out and has been overseeing it gets adhered to; creating a far slicker and more professional look for the IRF, from documents, to communications, to social media and more; setting up IRF branded gear to sell on Spreadshirt; securing the **oneworld** alliance; and so much more. Sean has put in time far and above what has

been expected of him. His friendly and helpful presence has been welcomed at many of our events and greatly appreciated by the organisers of those events. A massive thank you needs to go to him from all of us.

The IRF's members have clearly shown that strength is in unity. We can achieve so much when we work together. Seeing our members pull together and take more ownership of rafting has been very uplifting for me. Stronger together!

Thank you to all who take rafting forward, and do so with such positive attitudes.

Report by Sue Liell-Cock (IRF Secretary General)