

President's Report to the IGC Plenary 2007

Over the past year we have seen some significant changes to our sport and tremendous performances by individuals. We have seen World Champions crowned in every FAI Class for which IGC sanctioned competitions are scheduled. And we have also come under closer public scrutiny about the attitudes to safety and flying discipline that exist in our sport.

Three IGC-sanctioned Championship events were held in 2006: the 29th FAI World Gliding Championships, Eskilstuna, Sweden; and the 4th FAI Club Class and 5th FAI World Class World Gliding Championships, both held at Vinon, France. The IGC congratulates the organisers and the competitors on these successful events.

In addition, eight Sailplane Grand Prix races have been held in New Zealand, Slovakia, Russia, Germany, France, England, South Africa and Australia with a total of 143 pilots flying in these events. At this time 11 Nations will be represented in the Final in New Zealand in December 2007. A significant expectation has been created about our ability to project the SGP race into the public domain from 2006. This is still a challenge and, at the time of writing of this report, work is continuing with the FAI to develop media opportunities. Sponsorship opportunities to support these races are dependent on an agreement being achieved.

The Bureau met in September in Cambridge to continue our valuable mid-year discussions. Again, the willingness of Bureau members to attend these meetings is acknowledged. In addition, I also wish to acknowledge the significant amount of time and energy that they and all the committee chairpersons and committee members put into managing our sport. The workload is ever increasing. We ask a great deal of our volunteers to enable us to continue to move forward. It is frustrating to me that these personal efforts are sometimes not recognised by people within our wider gliding community.

The FAI meeting in Santiago, Chile, saw a number of FAI initiatives announced. Significant amongst these were the ATMOS FAI internet contest product and the on-going discussions with Air Sports Ltd to find a way of creating an FAI media capability. The call for bids for the 2009 World Air Games was also formally made at this meeting.

In my report in 2006 I commented on the need to look seriously at how we manage our World Gliding Championships and take a global view of the Rules and the Scoring. We still need to do this. But we also need to be smarter about how we present our sport. This remains a challenge that we have yet to meet.

I am also concerned that we continue to revisit questions about best performances. I wonder what an external observer would make of our meetings? As a sport in the 21st Century we risk being overtaken by those who do not have the constraints of voluntary administration and lack of funds.

We need to think about how we can better manage our sport so that we can be nimble and react promptly. We need to be looking for opportunities to grow the sport and to create a better and effective public image so that gliding becomes a cool thing to do. We must improve the level of participation in our sport and in all air sports.

For this reason we have planned to spend a significant amount of time at this Plenum discussing how we can develop our sport and what you – the gliding nations – want the IGC to do for you.

We face another challenge as well. This is about the style of flying that we have all permitted to develop around our airfields and at competitions. Flying low and fast on approach to an airfield has become a cultural norm. What we need to do is to impress on our pilots that this is not acceptable when it creates a danger to either them or the general public. In future I will be requiring our Chief Stewards to ensure that gliders are operated safely on final glide. This seems to be our parallel to the doping that occurs in athletic events. The message that must go out to the pilots is that this is not acceptable.

In 2007 we have the first round of our new World Gliding Championships calendar with the 5th FAI Junior World Gliding Championships at Rieti, Italy and the 4th FAI Women's World Gliding Championships at Romorantin, France. The Chief Stewards for both events have already visited the organisers to work with them on preparation for the events and on the Local Procedures. The 14th FAI European Gliding Championships will be held at Pociunai, Lithuania and Issoudun, France in all FAI Classes. Additional Sailplane Grand Prix races are also planned for 2007 and the Final will be at the World Series – Gliding in New Zealand in December 2007.

Our relationships with OSTIV and the EGU continue to be critical to assisting the sport of gliding progress. We also need to foster closer relationships with the other Air Sport Commissions to develop the synergies available between our sports.

I wish to specifically record our thanks to Axel Reich for his work on the Bureau over the past three years. Axel is not available for re-election this year but we anticipate that he will remain closely involved as the Chairman of the Annex A Committee.

My sincere thanks to all the members of the Bureau, to our Committee Chairpersons and the members of all IGC committees for their dedicated work in the past year. In particular my thanks go to the support that our 1st Vice President, Eric Mozer, and our Secretary Peter Eriksen, have provided.

Finally, we are all indebted to Secretary General Max Bishop and his staff at the FAI Office. Their support and assistance is tremendous and greatly appreciated.

Bob Henderson
President, IGC