

## **Discussion Paper on the Adaptive Rowing Racing Distance From the Events Commission**

Adaptive rowing events officially joined our World Rowing Championships programme in 2002. This was followed by rowing's first appearance as a Paralympic sport in the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games.

From the beginning, an important goal has been that adaptive rowing is fully integrated into our sport at all levels and that adaptive rowers are fully integrated into their national teams. It was envisioned that adaptive races would be staged in the programme of our World Championships, even though the racing distance for adaptive events was different from our main stream events. This integration is different from many other sports where competitions for athletes with a disability are most often held as a separate event on different days or in different locations. One of the many positives about the FISA approach to Adaptive Rowing with the International Paralympic Committee was that it was fully integrated into our sport and our competitions.

In 2001, the race distance for the four adaptive events at that time was standardised in anticipation of our attempts to join the programme of the Paralympic Games. The agreed distance was 1,000 metres compared with 2,000 metres for all other events.

Depending on the geographical layout and infrastructure of the various courses for our World Championships, FISA has had to accept a number of compromises resulting from these two different race distances within the same programme -

- lower standard of start installations;
- poor spectator visibility of adaptive races;
- the scheduling of adaptive racing with very long gaps between adaptive and other events causing them to lose the "main stream" spectator interest and television coverage

There have been several examples and solutions over the past few years:

- Seville in 2002, Milan in 2003, Banyoles in 2004, Gifu in 2005 and Eton in 2006 with some very inaccurate floating starts;
- Munich in 2007 - temporary start boats attached with cables,
- Poznan in 2009 - finish at 1,000m due to the alternative of very inaccurate start boats at the 1'000 metre mark attached with cables,
- Lake Karapiro in 2010 - full start bridge which took up to 45 minutes to install and cost over \$100'000.

It is realistic to say that none of these arrangements have met the high standards we expect for our athletes racing to become World Champions.

The solution appears simple – install a start bridge at the 1,000 metre point which can be installed and removed quickly and will provide a start line with the same accuracy as the finish line. However, for many reasons this is not possible at the majority of venues where our Championships are likely to be held, even if significant amounts of money are invested to solve the problem. The constraints for FISA and for Organising Committees are:

- very deep water in courses on some natural lakes where it is technically not possible to meet the required accuracy for a start bridge;
- a lack of space for the on-water temporary storage of start bridge on some artificial courses;
- the time taken to install a start bridge in between races, impacting on training times and on spectator interest;
- the very high relative cost of some solutions at some venues.

It has been demonstrated that a light-framed temporary start bridge which, in theory, could provide a good solution will not do so. This would still require significant compromises in standards for adaptive rowers from venue to venue, either in accuracy of the start line or in time for installation. An additional consequence is that, if it is attached to the Albano cabling system, it might cause damage to the system in severe weather conditions.

As a result of these challenges, it is clear that the current difference in course length between adaptive events (1,000m) and other events (2,000m) creates a conflict for FISA's commitment to

1. a fully integrated approach to adaptive rowing;
2. high standards for accuracy of start and finish lines; and
3. good training and racing conditions and fair competition for all competitors.

Given the size of the World Championships, the stated goals of integration and the need to deliver accuracy to the rowers, we soon face the situation whereby we might have to:

1. remove adaptive events to a separate date and separate venue which should be one capable of providing a fixed and accurate 1,000m start bridge; OR
2. standardise the race distance of adaptive events with the other events.

The FISA Council would like to hear the views of the delegates to the Congress on this issue.

Events Commission  
11 August 2011