



**FAI Hang Gliding and Paragliding Commission (CIVL)
Report to the 105th General Conference
Belgrade, 14-15 October 2011**

Current situation

Two major events have had a significant impact on CIVL this year.

1. The FAI World Paragliding Championships in Piedrahita in Spain at the end of June, had to be stopped at the end of the second day following a number of incidents and two fatalities. (See Safety section below)
2. Our President, John Aldridge, suffered a mild stroke in mid July, and although he is recovering well, is not yet able to return to his duties. Further, he has informed the Bureau that he will not stand for re-election next year. In John's absence, Bureau Vice President, Agust Gudmundsson, has taken on some of John's duties, as Acting President, assisted by CIVL Secretary, Louise Joselyn. This report has been prepared by Agust and Louise, on John's behalf.

Sporting Activity and Competition Review

We are pleased to report that, in both hang gliding and paragliding, international competition activity continues to grow.

So far in 2011, 297 2nd Category competitions have been sanctioned worldwide. Paragliding cross country competition is by far, the most active discipline with 184 events sanctioned. The next largest number of events is in hang gliding cross country (52), with paragliding accuracy, rigid wings and aerobatics making up the remainder.

The number of pilots in our world ranking database also gives an indication of healthy activity in our sport with almost 6000 in paragliding cross country, just over 1200 in paragliding accuracy and 172 in aerobatics. There are also 1450 Class 1 hang glider pilots registered and 105 Class 5 (rigid wings) pilots.

In 2011 we ran three 1st Category events: World Championships in Hang Gliding, Paragliding and Paragliding Accuracy. There were five Test Events for Continental Championships to be held next year.

Future Championships

For 2012 CIVL will be holding the following Continental championships:

Hang Gliding Class 1 Europeans, Kayseri, Turkey
Paragliding Cross Country Europeans, St André-les-Alpes, France
Paragliding Cross Country Asians, Linzhou, People's Republic of China
Paragliding Accuracy Europeans, Ohrid, FRY Macedonia
Paragliding Accuracy Asians, Wai-Oh, Chinese Taipei
During the CIVL Plenary Meeting in February 2011 in Lausanne the following

Category 1 events for 2013 were awarded:

- The World Hang Gliding (Class 1) Cross Country Championships to Forbes, Australia

*Fédération
Aéronautique
Internationale*

- The World Paragliding Cross Country Championships to Sopot, Bulgaria
- The World Paragliding Accuracy Championships to Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

Test events for these championships, together with the Test Event for the World Games, Cali, Colombia, which includes Paragliding Accuracy, are planned to take place in 2012.

Records

New world records have been set by pilots of various disciplines in the past year and continental records in Europe, North America and South America. Continental records have not yet been set as a first claim for a flight, but automatically recognised for ratified world records. CIVL will try to promote continental records more in the coming year.

Safety

Paragliding safety has been the most important and debated part of CIVL activity in the last year. At the last Plenary it was agreed that in addition to certified paragliders, only Open Class paragliders that complied with agreed test and certification procedures (competition class) could be entered in 1st Category paragliding competitions. These new procedures, which also included registering pilots' experience and information on the competition class paragliders they intended to fly, were in place at the World Paragliding Championships in Piedrahita, Spain in June.

As a result of events at that competition, the paragliding competition scene changed dramatically, and has entered a new era. During the training day and first competition task there were three reserve deployments. During the second day there were five reserve deployments and two fatal accidents. The Championships were immediately stopped by the Jury President, and the organisers announced two days of mourning.

During this time, the CIVL President, in conjunction with the FAI appointed officials at the event, were in communication with the FAI EB for advice and guidance on how to proceed. In particular, it was noted that under the rules in the General Section, the Jury President only has the power to stop the event temporarily. There appeared to be no indisputable grounds by which the JP could authorise or instruct the organisers to halt the championships. No rules had been broken, but clearly there was a safety issue. At that time neither the organisers nor the team leaders/competitors were prepared to take the decision to stop the championships.

The CIVL President and FAI officials in Piedrahita feel that there is a deficiency in the GS on this matter, and that guidance from the EB at this critical time was indeterminate. As a result, the CIVL Bureau decided it had no option but to withdraw the acceptance of Competition Class Paragliders in 1st Category competitions, with immediate effect, even though it was by no means certain that the safety problem lay wholly with that class of paraglider. The Organisers then had no choice but to close the competition prematurely after just two tasks. However, the Championships were declared valid by the Jury President and a subdued closing ceremony and presentation of medals took place the following day.

To try to clarify the situation after Piedrahita, the CIVL Bureau encouraged NACs to review their own acceptance of open class or competition class paragliders in 2nd Category events involving racing tasks. Many NACs have since decided to disallow Open Class Paragliders in competitions in their territory, however a number of NACs have allowed them to continue.

CIVL has since formed an independent Paragliding Competitions Safety Task Force, to investigate the Safety matters in competitions. Its remit is to review incident/accident reports, interview pilots, manufacturers and organizers, with the aim of better understanding the underlying cause(s) of the incidents that led up to the tragedy in Piedrahita. The Task Force is also tasked with providing safety guidelines for competition organisers, including a review of competition formats, task setting strategies and scoring methods. Manufacturers and test experts will consider the feasibility of establishing a more formal and stringent 'competition class' certification, and the need to establish minimum pilot experience/qualifications for flying high performance wings is also under review. The Task Force is to work during the autumn and prepare proposals for the CIVL Plenary in February 2012. Interim plans and recommendations for the 2012 season will be presented, while work will continue, longer term on aspects such as future standards.

The 2012 CIVL Plenary (in Chinese Taipei) could be controversial, if the Bureau decision on suspending Competition Class paragliders in Category 1 events is not ratified, for example, or an alternative proposal is successful. Much will depend on the preliminary results and recommendations of the Task Force.

In Hang gliding the continuing programme of informing pilots and checking correct pitch stability settings for hang gliders (mandatory in Category 1 events) has good acceptance and the safety record in Category 1 events is improving.

Also not mentioned before, CIVL mandated helmets in all 1st Category competitions to be EN966 certified and paragliding harnesses and back protectors to be LTF certified. This has been working fairly well. However, the harness rule has proved to be difficult to enforce completely in some events. Meanwhile the helmet rule is causing some controversy among hang glider pilots. Part of the problem is that EN966 appears to be the only declared standard for hang gliding and paragliding.

CIVL/FAI Organisation

Last year at this time, John commented on the difficulty in finding and retaining good volunteers prepared to devote their time to CIVL. This is an ongoing problem that will be emphasised when CIVL comes to nominating and voting for a new President, together with Bureau members and chairs for our various subcommittees and working groups.

John further noted that there is an increasing perception that our Commission is remote and, to some degree, irrelevant to actual competitions, and the FAI Secretariat and Executive Board even more so. This has been further emphasised since the decision taken at Piedrahita to suspend competition class paragliders. We are hoping the new Task Force, which includes world-class competition pilots, will improve the perception of CIVL within the free flying community, but unfortunately, this group too is suffering as they are finding that the best people for the job have the least time to contribute on a voluntary basis and in a timely manner.

A year ago, John expressed grave concerns about the changes being wrought by the FAI Executive Board and the (then) Secretary General. Despite the airing of some welcome new ideas and innovative thinking for the future development of our sports, the lack of meaningful consultation in a number of areas, was regarded as a serious shortcoming. Unfortunately, we should also say, we have yet to see any significant improvement in the service provided to CIVL from the expanded secretariat. The web site crash earlier this year, and not having proper website for half a year, has had a detrimental impact on CIVL PR and communications. Hopefully, the new website will be a tool for improved information to the public and flying community.

Of course, we greatly appreciate, as always, the efforts of the key hard-working staff members in the secretariat and thank them for their continuing, valuable assistance.

On a positive note, we welcome the appointment of Jean-Marc Badan, and we will endeavour to be as cooperative as possible as he finds his feet in this important FAI role. We trust he will not take long to communicate with us his vision of the FAI's future, especially how this might be different from his predecessor's, and we are confident that he will consult with us on changes that may affect our existing activities.

We look forward to an improvement in the relationship between the FAI EB and the ASCs. We appreciate there is much work to be done not only to reunite the FAI 'family' but also to strengthen the FAI brand. We recognise that CIVL has a significant role to play, and we would like to emphasise that we are open to new ideas; indeed we welcome them.

Summary

In summary, we would like to emphasise that CIVL is going through difficult times while effectively leaderless. We do not anticipate the situation improving as we approach the next Plenary, as there is no obvious successor to John. Our reliance on volunteers is a serious weakness in the present climate. The way forward is not clear to us.

Yet, the air sports that CIVL represents are healthy and the competition 'business' is thriving. We have much potential for development, particularly in the areas of paragliding accuracy and aerobatics, which are excellent spectator sports, and increasingly in traditional cross country events, with the technical advances and affordability today of Live Tracker devices.

There are safety issues to address, particularly in the paragliding arena: one aspect under consideration is a major change to the format/structure of Category 1 events, and we would like to explore some of the ideas previously put forward by the FAI EB in this area.

Agust Gudmundsson
Acting CIVL President

Louise Joselyn
CIVL Secretary