

02 December 2020

By email

Dear ICF Board Member,

ICF DECISION – PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CANOEING PROGRAMME FOR THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN PARIS 2024

1. We write on behalf of the undersigned athletes and National Federations (“**NFs**”) regarding the ICF’s recent decision to remove two Canoe Sprint medal events from the Paris 2024 Olympic program, and to add two Extreme Slalom events in their place (“**Decision**”).
2. To be clear, we do not necessarily object to Extreme Slalom as a future Olympic event. Rather, we are concerned with the timing and the way in which this decision has been made, and the negative impact this late change will have on athletes, coaches, NFs and in some cases, their funding partners and NOCs as well as on the community’s trust in the ICF as a governing body.
3. This letter focuses on three areas of concern:
 - a. The impact of this decision:
 - i. Athletes’ and coaches’ wellbeing;
 - ii. NFs’ planning and funding;
 - b. The legality of the ICF’s decision-making process;
 - c. The ICF as a competent governing body for the sport of canoeing.
4. At the end of the letter, we set out what we believe are the appropriate next steps.

The Impact on Athletes, Coaches and NFs

Athlete and Coach Wellbeing

5. Athletes are the major stakeholders in NFs, and in the ICF. Athletes, in turn, rely on their coaches. Many athletes and coaches around the World build their careers and support their families through paddling. Others paddle for love of the sport, and invest countless hours training and planning their future.
6. We are already in the Paris Olympic cycle. Many athletes, coaches and teams are already preparing for Paris 2024. Many will now be told that their events will no longer take place. There will be fewer athlete places within teams, some events will disappear altogether and not all athletes will be able to transition to other distances.
7. Some athletes and coaches may lose their livelihoods and their ability to support their families.
8. The Decision, and its timing, will have a serious and negative impact on the well-being of athletes and coaches all over the World.
9. The ICF Board will be aware of the strength of feeling of athletes from across the world, through the huge support for the petition launched by Tom Liebscher.

<https://www.change.org/p/international-canoe-federation-revoke-the-vote-9cbf3db3-7f8f-44d3-8e8d-8ed17961539f?redirect=false>

NF Planning and Funding

10. Most NFs are funded based on their opportunities for success in the current Olympic cycle. The Decision will affect NF funding, which will have an impact on jobs, and on their ability to support athletes and coaches.
11. Some changes which will take place as a result of the Decision will reverse changes made for 2012 and 2016. NFs, their funding partners and NOCs have invested enormous resources in adjusting to the ICF's direction. Much of this would now be wasted.
12. NFs plan a number of years ahead. Strategic plans are based in part on NFs' understanding of the Olympic program, and strategic decisions are made with a long-term view. The Decision undermines this planning process for many NFs.

Legality of the ICF Board's Decision-making Process

The Decision

13. Our understanding of the ICF's decision-making process in this case is as follows:
 - a. The decision to include Extreme Slalom as a proposed event for Paris 2024, and to remove two Canoe Sprint events, was made at an ICF Board meeting on 24 November 2020;
 - b. No formal consultation took place with NFs;
 - c. The Board then discussed which Canoe Sprint events should be included in Paris 2024. It was agreed that there should be events over at least two distances per gender, and that a final decision will be made at a specially scheduled Board meeting on 3 December 2020.

ICF Procedural Rules

14. The ICF Statutes 2019 ("**Statutes**") set out the ICF's decision-making powers.
15. Article 21 of the Statutes determine the process for changing "Principle Rules" ("**PR**") and "Sport Rules" ("**SR**").
16. PR may be changed:
 - a. By Congress, every 2 years (Art 21[2]); or
 - b. By the ICF Board (Art 21[5]), if:
 - i. The ICF President has decided that the circumstances at the time the PR was decided by Congress have changed "significantly to a material extent;" and
 - ii. The decision is taken by **at least 80%** of the members present.
17. SR may be changed as follows (Art 21[3]):
 - a. By the ICF Board, every 2 years in the first Board meeting of the year of the Congress; or
 - b. At the first Board meeting of a given year, in exceptional circumstances where clearly SR need to be amended in order for the sport to function efficiently (Byelaw to Art 21).

18. The ICF Sprint Rules 2019 state at Article 4 (“Olympic Programme”) that the “Olympic Events” are PR. Later, at Article 12, the “Competition Programme” is described as a SR. The definitions on page 7 do not clarify whether Art 4 or 12 applies to this decision.
19. In our view, this decision should be made following the process for PR, because:
 - a. Art 4 of the Sprint Rules contains major structural rules regarding sprint competition;
 - b. Art 12 contains rules regarding minor, operational aspects of sprint competition (entries, division and progression, boat control etc);
 - c. A major decision such as this fits more logically within Art 4, notably due to the nature of the decision, but also because it clearly does not fit within Art 12 as a minor, operational aspect of a sprint competition; and
 - d. If it is unclear, the more onerous decision-making process should be used because of the serious impact of the decision on athletes, NFs and the sport generally
20. In this case, the ICF has not followed the correct process for changing a PR:
 - a. The decision was not made by Congress;
 - b. Even if the Board was entitled to make the decision, it was not passed by an 80% majority.
21. Even if this matter is a SR, the correct process has not been followed:
 - a. The Board meeting on 24 November was not the first Board meeting of 2020; and
 - b. It is not clear that we are facing “exceptional circumstances where clearly SR need to be amended in order for the sport to function efficiently.”

The Olympic Charter

22. Rule 45 of the IOC’s Olympic Charter sets out the IOC’s process for deciding which sports and events are included in each Olympic Games. The IOC claims to be the ultimate decision-maker as to the sports and events included. However, clause 2 of the byelaw to Rule 45 requires the IOC to consult with the relevant IF.
23. Anticipating an argument that the IOC is the ultimate decision-maker in this matter, we believe that the ICF must still follow its own Statutes and Rules in making its recommendation to the IOC.

The ICF as a Governing Body for the Sport of Canoeing

Engagement and Trust

24. The ICF is a member federation. Its members are the NFs. The level of consultation and engagement with members in this matter has been very disappointing. We find it very concerning that the ICF could reach a decision as significant as this without an extensive and proper engagement with the athletes and the NFs.
25. We request respectfully that the Board of the ICF reflects on the impact of a lack of engagement and consultation with athletes and national federations which has resulted in the ICF community throughout the world being divided.

Next Steps – the Way Forward

The Decision

26. We urge the ICF to ensure that it has exhausted all possibilities in exploring whether Extreme Slalom can be added to the Paris 2024 programme as extra medal events.
27. Notwithstanding that, given the Decision was not made within the ICF's powers, it should be reversed immediately. This reversal should be communicated to stakeholders, including athletes and NFs. This is an urgent matter, both because of the damage that the Decision is causing to NFs and athletes, and because of the domino effect of the Decision on IOC decision-making, and Paris 2024 planning.
28. We do not rule out supporting Extreme Slalom as an Olympic event, either in 2024 (as an additional Olympic medal event or demonstration) or in the future.
29. We reserve the right to challenge the Decision through the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

The Future – Olympic Canoeing Events

30. In general, we propose that the ICF takes a new approach to considering the canoeing events for the 2028 and 2032 cycles. This approach should be based on a long-term vision for the sport and its place in the Olympic Games. In setting this vision, the ICF should engage athletes and the member national federations. This work should be completed before the end of 2023.
31. We also encourage the ICF to ensure that future decision-making is managed through the appropriate ICF governance structures.

Yours faithfully

The undersigned

National Federations	Olympic and World Champion Athletes
Australia (Paddle Australia) Phil Jones, Chief Executive Officer phil.jones@paddle.org.au	Tim Brabants (GBR) Gold medal K1 1000, Beijing 2008 Bronze medal K1 500, Beijing 2008 Bronze medal K1 1000, Sydney 2000
Austria (Oesterreichischer Kanuverband) Prof. Helmar Steindl, President helmarsteindl@hotmail.com	Caroline Brunet (CAN) Silver medal K1 500, Atlanta (1996) Silver medal K1 500, Sydney (2000) Bronze medal K1 500, Athens 2004
Royal Belgian Canoe Federation Peter Van Lishout Secr. Gen. KBKV/FRBC vanlishout.peter@scarlet.be	Lisa Carrington (NZL) Gold medal K1 200, London 2012 Gold medal K1 200, Rio 2016 Bronze medal K1 500, Rio 2016
Canada (Canoe Kayak Canada) Casey Wade, CEO	

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Czech Canoe Union

Jan Bohac, President

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Denmark (Dansk Kano og Kajak Forbund)

Tom B. Faurschou, President

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British Canoeing

Professor John Coyne CBE, Chair

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Canoeing Ireland

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Estonian Canoeing Federation

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Finnish Canoeing and Rowing Federation

Jussi Järventaus, President

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Hungarian Canoe Federation

Gábor Schmidt, President,

gabor.schmidt@mkksz.hu

Lithuanian Canoe Federation

Aleksandras Alekrinskis, President

petrukanecas@gmail.com

New Zealand (Canoe Racing New Zealand)

Tom Ashley, CEO

Tom.ashley@canoeracing.org.nz

Norwegian Canoe Association

Geir Kvillum, President

Sven.Anderssen@padling.no

Polish Canoe Federation

Tadeusz Wróblewski, President

tadeusz.wroblewski@pzkaj.pl

Krisztina Fazekas Zur (HUN)

Gold medal K4 500, London 2012

Gold Medal K4 500, Rio 2016

Tom Hall (CAN)

Bronze medal C1 1000, Beijing 2008

Liam Heath (GBR)

Bronze medal K2 200, London 2012

Silver medal K2 200, Rio 2016

Gold medal K1 200, Rio 2016

Emma Aastrand Jørgensen (DEN)

Silver medal K1 500, Rio 2016

Danuta Kozák (HUN)

Gold medal K1 500, London 2012

Gold medal K4 500, London 2012

Gold medal K1 500, Rio 2016

Gold medal K2 500, Rio 2016

Gold medal K4 500, Rio 2016

Mark Oldershaw (CAN)

Bronze medal C1 1000, London 2012

René Holten Poulsen (DEN)

Silver K2 1000 Beijing, 2008

Jon Schofield (GBR)

Bronze medal K2 200, London 2012

Silver medal K2 200, Rio 2016

Gabriella Szabo (HUN)

Silver Medal K4 500, Beijing 2008

Gold Medal K4 500, London 2012

Gold Medal K4 500, Rio 2016

Gold Medal K2 500, Rio 2016

Laurence Vincent-Lapointe (CAN)

13-time World Champion C1 200m and C2 500m

Caitlin Ryan (NZL)

Portugal

Federação Portuguesa de Canoagem

Vitor Félix, President

presidente@fpcanoagem.pt

Romanian Canoe Federation

Ioan Birladeanu, President

romanian.canoe@gmail.com

Russian Canoe Federation

President, Evgenii Arkhipov

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Swedish Canoe Federation

Lars Martinsson, President

Dag.Johansson@kanot.com

South Africa (Canoeing South Africa)

Kim Pople, President

President@canoesa.org.za

Olympian WR K1 500, Rio 2016

Kayla Imrie (NZL)

Olympian Rio 2016

Teneale Hatton (NZL)

Olympian WR K1 1000, London 2012

Katie Vincent (CAN)

Junior U23 2 times Senior World Champion WC

Steve Giles (CAN)

Bronze medal C1 1000, Sydney 2000