

Minutes of the Pilots Meeting held during the Multi-Class National Gliding Championships in Omarama, 16th January 2009.

The meeting commenced at 8:07 am.

Those present:

R Gaddes (SRC chair), D Dickinson (meeting secretary & SRC member), B Flewett (SRC member), V Ruddick (SRC member) and 20 other contest pilots / organisers.

Apologies:

None.

Prior Minutes:

B Flewett read the minutes from the pilots meeting held at the 2008 GNZ annual general meeting. No issues were raised; confirmation was deferred until the pilots meeting at the 2009 AGM.

Discussion Items:

1. Airspace rules & penalties

R Edwards spoke of a protest lodged during the contest regarding the application of penalties for airspace infringements on day one. Suggested it was time for a review of the rules and penalties relevant to competition flights in controlled airspace.

B Flewett said that the SRC was currently working on the matter. Explained that airspace problems were generally caused by two issues:

- i) How access to controlled airspace is managed during competitions.
- ii) The penalties for infringements.

Regarding (i), discussions within the SRC and with contest organisers had determined that many problems could be resolved through appropriate use of maps and controlled airspace data files. By examining the procedures used at world championships, Flewett explained that rule amendments had been prepared by the SRC as follows:

As an additional section to rule 3.9:

‘At least two weeks before the contest begins the Organisers shall publish on the G.N.Z. internet web site an airspace data file that will be used for scoring purposes. The Organisers may update and re-issue this file during the course of the contest.’

And the creation of new rules reading:

‘The Organisers shall publish on a daily basis, details of controlled airspace available to contest pilots together with any conditions of entry, including whether clearances must be sought.’

And:

‘Airspace penalties will only be applied for infringements of controlled airspace contained in the published airspace data file. This does not relieve pilots of their responsibility to comply with CAA airspace regulations at all times.’

B Walker asked what airspace file would be used.

R Edwards said that airspace data files were generated from CAA published data.

B Flewett explained that many of the electronic airspace data files currently in use by pilots contained numerous errors ranging from variations in borders on the scale of a few hundred meters to entire sections of airspace being misnamed, misplaced or otherwise incorrect. Said that requiring the organisers to publish an airspace file that would be used for scoring purposes would ensure consistency and competition fairness.

M Oakley suggested that organisers should provide a map to competitors that included the relevant airspace.

R Edwards explained that the current rules require organisers to display maps of the contest area and felt the current requirement was reasonable.

B Walker asked whether pilots were required to carry current aeronautical charts.

B Flewett replied that the rules made it clear that charts must be carried and that the displayed charts were the definitive source of competition airspace information. Thought the current situation led to much confusion. Said that clarity regarding airspace was required and that the issue had been resolved at world championships by issuing airspace files.

M Oakley said that not all pilots could afford the PDA equipment needed to graphically display the virtual airspace boundaries.

T Passmore said that many problems were caused by new sections of controlled airspace encroaching on historical turnpoints.

R Gaddes noted that turnpoints did cause problems – the SRC will advise the OSC that some turnpoints were in need of review.

M Cook thought that turnpoints were the business of the gliding movement but that airspace was not for organisers to decide. Said that airspace traceability rested with Airways, and therefore that the charts should be definitive.

T Mollard said that the published national register of airspace was a text file and that the Airways charts were based upon this register. Thought that issue of airspace files was a step in the right direction.

E Gosse explained that there were several formats for airspace files and that each had advantages as well as vices. Gave an example where a river was the physical landmark to an airspace boundary. The airspace files were incapable of capturing this detail and therefore were inherently inaccurate.

G Dale felt the PDA price issue was not significant, and agreed that issue of an airspace file was step towards solving the situation.

B Flewett said that pilots still needed to carry charts and that although all airspace data files were based on the national register, thought that there needed to be one definitive source (the scorers file). Emphasized that the proposed rule change for issue of an airspace data file would not relieve PIC of their duty to comply with the MOAP and CAA regulations.

R Edwards reminded those present that not all airspace associated with gliding competitions was included on charts. Examples include glide sectors and cloud flying areas.

B Martin asked about pre-start airspace infringements.

B Flewett replied that many penalties apply for piloting behaviour before a start has been made. Said infringement of controlled airspace was not different and therefore penalties would still apply pre-start. Felt that issuing one airspace data file would ensure a level playing field.

T Mollard asked if these rule amendments would require that all airspace information be included on task sheets. Thought this would cause problems for organisers.

B Flewett replied that the rule simply would require the organisers to publish the information on a daily basis and that this could be achieved with a notice board or by a clipboard for griding situations.

G Dale asked about which format the airspace data files would be provided in. Felt that the rule should require a specific format, or at minimum, that the format to be used is published well in advance.

Motion: That the proposed rule amendments read by B Flewett were adopted subject to incorporation of additional details to solve the aforementioned airspace data file formatting concerns.

B Walker / D Speight

UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED

B Flewett said the next airspace issue (ii) was to review the penalties for infringements. Relayed experiences from world championships where serious breaches of controlled airspace boundaries resulted in landing-out at the point of infringement. Said this rule was introduced to allow pilots to make a safe landing inside controlled airspace without being unnecessarily penalised.

D Dickinson spoke about the discussion regarding penalties for airspace infringements that occurred during the pilots meeting at the 2008 SI Regional Championships. Said the resulting motion from that meeting was for the penalties to be revised to allow for a "buffer zone" of "soft penalties" for infringements less than 3 km / 500 ft. For infringements greater than this, the pilot would be considered landed-out at the point of breaching controlled airspace. Reported that the SRC was still considering penalties for infringements in the buffer zone: had proposed a time penalty, but discovered this would be rather laborious for scorers.

A general discussion ensued regarding the size of a buffer, the accuracy and uncertainty of instrumentation, the size of "soft penalties", navigation by VNC maps versus GPS enabled PDAs, and CAA prosecution for infringements.

R Gaddes established that those present were all agreed that the most appropriate penalty for infringements beyond any buffer zone was for the pilot to be considered landed-out.

G Dale said a buffer zone on the outside of the airspace boundaries was impractical.

B Flewett added that commercial scoring software was not compatible with “buffer zones” outside airspace boundaries, only inside.

M Wilson thought that penalties should not be applied for infringements within the buffer, as this was the area of uncertainty in equipment.

G Dale held that pilots were able to graphically watch the raw output of navigational equipment, and that this output became the data points contained in IGC files. Therefore uncertainty is of less concern. Despite this, agreed that there should be no penalty for flight in the buffers.

B Flewett surmised that everyone present was essentially in agreement regarding a buffer to airspace penalties, and that it would be best for the details to be decided by the SRC.

Motion: That the meeting resolved that airspace penalties should be revised, that there should be a “buffer zone” for airspace penalties, that the SRC investigate the size of such a buffer and relevant penalties and take a recommendation to the pilots meeting at the next AGM.

B Flewett / R Edwards
CARRIED (15 – 1)

Motion: That for infringements into airspace beyond the buffer, the penalty is that the pilot is considered landed-out.

B Walker / D Speight
UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED

2. Multiple pilot entries

R Edwards explained that during the nationals, there had been mid-contest entries for various reasons. One particular instance was where a pilot could not fly for health reasons and another competition pilot then took his place. This became a contentious issue for some pilots, however the entry was completely acceptable under the current rules.

B Flewett and B Hunter both felt it was unfair for pilots to substitute into different gliders at convenience. Also were concerned that expert specialist pilots could be entered late in a contest.

G Dale thought such instances should be considered hors concours entries, as is the case in the UK, where the pilot is entered before the competition starts, flies off the back of the grid, has their flights scored, but is not eligible for prizes.

R Edwards said that in the context of NZ rules “hor concours” was applied differently. Specifically, for entries in a sailplane that does not conform to the competition class.

D Speight thought that it was the sailplane that was entered into a contest, and that pilots were free to substitute at leisure.

G Deans suggested that entries should be required prior to the competition start.

B Flewett emphasized that the goal should be to have as many people flying as possible, and that the rules should not impede pilots from entering.

A Cable asked how often these controversial cases occurred.

No answer could be provided and discussion on the matter resumed. Importantly, the main issue of contention was late entry of specialist pilots and substitution of pilots for injury. Eventually it was generally agreed that requiring entries to be finalised pre-contest would solve the problem. The majority in attendance felt this was not too onerous on pilots, as they were free to enter a contest and later withdraw.

Motion: That a rule be made requiring pilots-in-command competing at contests to be entered before the commencement of the contest.

B Walker / B Hunter

CARRIED (12 – 4)

3. 5 mile calls

R Edwards explained that some pilots thought the 5 mile call should be changed to a 5 minute call.

B Flewett thought this was a local topic but also asked the floor if anyone had a problem with the status quo. No issues were raised.

4. Club Class

M Wilson believed the club class was in serious trouble and that it was only a matter of time before insufficient interest would make it disappear. Added that the expensive cost of flying at Omarama was a stifling factor in attracting club class entries.

M Oakley said that the club class would be reinvigorated in the future due to upcoming pilots from YouthGlide.

G Dale observed that the club class in NZ was an inherently different concept than the club class overseas. In NZ it is considered an entry-level or training class for beginner competition pilots, whereas overseas the class is seriously competitive with experienced pilots flying more affordable gliders.

R Edwards suggested that to bolster numbers, the club class could be held as a separate event or combined with the sports class.

R Gaddes agreed with the idea of separating the club class. Added that tasking should be aligned with the performance capabilities of sailplanes and pilots.

W Dickinson felt that there still needed to be an entry-level class at the nationals.

G Dale agreed and further stressed that it was especially important for new pilots to have adequate training for a venue like Omarama.

B Flewett thought that it was socially important for new pilots that the club class to be run in conjunction with the other classes (open / 18m / 15m / std).

M Wilson emphasized that the costs of competing at Omarama are prohibitive, and there would be more club class entrants if the event were held elsewhere.

T Passmore suggested that if the standard class (or a 15m performance class) were scored unhandicapped then more people would fly the club class.

G Dale felt that NZ needed to decide whether to become aligned internationally and run a competitive club class, or to continue using it as a training ground.

B Walker was concerned that separating the club class would mean another competition had to be organised and this would further burden the few volunteers that currently run the events.

R Gaddes recounted that at a previous pilots meeting he had suggested that the club class be run with the sports class (or combined) and that a motion to that effect was not carried, for similar reasons as previously mentioned by B Flewett.

N McPhee suggested a \$3000 prize would encourage more pilots to compete in the club class.

R Gaddes and B Hunter described the Australian model of handicapped sports & club classes where any sailplane could be entered. Both said it was very successful and felt it should be considered in NZ.

B Flewett stressed that performance limitations were imposed on competition classes to enable appropriate tasking.

M Wilson felt that performance limitations were excluding potential competitors.

R Gaddes thought that over time the club class would become re-established. Suggested that sponsorship and prizes would help attract pilots.

G Dale suggested that up-coming pilots should be actively encouraged and that sponsorship could be sought to their pay entry fees.

M Oakley challenged all clubs to bring a two-seater to the next Nationals held in Omarama.

5. SPOT

B Walker asked those present for opinions on the SPOT tracking devices, especially if everyone agreed that the tracking should be publicly displayed.

R Edwards said that from an administrator's standpoint the SPOT devices functioned well for operations normal reports. Said the tracking function could be circumvented by strategically sending only one position each hour.

A Cable asked whether the SPOT devices were more appropriate during competitions or outside of competitions.

B Walker thought that SPOT could be an important tool for advertising the sport. Suggested that if SPOT were made compulsory, the tracking could be presented on the internet for spectators.

B Flewett felt the technology was in infancy and that it was too soon for devices to be made compulsory. Importantly the SPOTs did not convey altitude information. Thought the technology should be allowed to mature for a period, by which time, there might be a perfect device for gliding competitions.

E Gosse described an alternative brand of tracking device. Felt the TrackPlus was an all-round better unit, featured altitude data, and could be configured with a variable delay. Said the only disadvantage was a slightly unfriendly the viewing platform. Asked what the movement was trying to achieve by using such tracking technology. Concerned about competitors being able to use the information whilst racing.

M Oakley agreed that the SPOT devices were good for operations normal reports, but that the technology needed to mature. Felt that in years to come a perfect solution would be found.

D Speight said the technology and equipment was currently available and could be implemented.

R Gaddes asked the floor whether pilots were happy with tracking information being publicly displayed, and if there were concerns about the how the technology was developing.

Motion: That pilots generally accept they are happy with the real-time data from tracking devices being displayed at the airfield.

B Flewett / W Dickinson

E Gosse spoke on the motion, emphasizing that real-time presentation of the data was of concern and that the information could be unfairly relayed to pilots on task. Suggested a time delay was required.

CARRIED (20 – 1)

The meeting closed at 9:40 am.