

Minutes of the Pilots Meeting held during the South Island Regional Gliding Championships in Omarama, 22nd November 2008.

The meeting commenced at 10:28 am.

Those present:

D Dickinson (SRC representative & meeting chair), K Morgan (acting secretary) and 30 other contest pilots / organisers.

Prior Minutes:

Not presented, as meetings were not held the previous two South Island Championship. No objections.

Discussion Items:

1. Penalties for airspace infringements

D Dickinson reported that many pilots and members felt the current penalty system for unauthorized entry into controlled airspace was too stringent (for a violation of 500' vertically and >2 km horizontally, the pilot loses day points). Also pointed out that the penalty scheme is ambiguous and conflicts with accepted competition practice. Said that the current rules allow for flight in controlled airspace with clearance from ATC, but this rarely occurs and would be somewhat against "competition spirit". Additionally, as pilots and organisers are not issued with "official" electronic versions of NZ airspaces, there are questions over the accuracy, reliability, and justification in applying penalties. Suggested that airspace penalties were revised to fit more suitably with VNC navigation and extend the no-penalty tolerance to 3 km, with the pilot being "landed out" for horizontal violations beyond 6 km.

K Bethwaite, from the viewpoint as an air traffic controller, was unconcerned with a 3 km tolerance to infringement as ATC utilize far greater horizontal separations. However the 500' vertical buffer is concerning as controllers will clear traffic to 500' above uncontrolled airspace.

G Harrison suggested that a 5 km / 500' tolerance was more appropriate, and would send a clear message to Airways and the CAA that the current NZ airspace is excessive.

T Mollard was concerned that softening airspace penalties would be viewed as condoning airspace violations. Emphasised that all political aspects needed to be considered to best manage GNZ's ongoing case regarding airspace with Airways & CAA. Specifically, at no time should the rules promote a pilot to deliberately infringe airspace.

An informal poll of those present found that less than half of pilots present currently had the equipment to use GPS to accurately locate themselves with respect to virtual airspace boundaries (ie PDA software or similar).

G Dale expressed concern that because GPS traces were available in a public setting, that as a movement, pilots should not be “allowed” to infringe. Also, because tasking requires pilots to navigate to 0.5 km for turnpoints and a 200’ for start heights, precise airspace navigation is clearly possible. Felt that the GNZ Airspace committee should be left to proceed uninhibited.

L Tanner commented that if FAI sporting badges were disallowed for airspace infringements, then the same should apply to contests.

W Bethwaite felt that contests should be fair to all competitors and suggested that airspace boundaries are the line at which penalties should begin.

K Bethwaite added that two issues were at play. One issue is where the boundaries lie and the second about obeying the boundaries. Felt that the Airspace committee were working hard for better airspace. And that pilots should stick to the boundaries, and penalties needed to reflect this.

G Wills suggested a compromised arrangement of modest penalties for all infringements, which are graduated until the pilot is landed out or loses day points for violations past 3 km horizontal / 500’ vertically.

T Mollard supported G Wills suggestion, with a no-penalty buffer of 200’ vertically, then graduated penalties from 200’ – 500’.

Motion: That the SRC revise the penalty system for airspace infringements with the airspace boundaries acting as the start of soft penalties and beyond 3 km / 500’ the full penalty is applied
G Wills / I Evans
CARRIED

[N.B. The consensus was that for infringements after 3 km / 500’, a pilot should be scored as landed out, rather than losing all day points]

2. Tasman Trophy

D Dickinson reported that the SRC felt the Tasman Trophy is not currently meeting its original objectives. Currently the committee was considering ideas to rejuvenate the competition in collaboration with Australian counter-parts. A popular idea is to create an under 30 or under 25 years age limit. Another suggestion was an annual defence style competition, whereby the TT would stay in the holder’s country until a visiting pilot successfully contests it.

K Morgan noted that a defence style competition would be a big change and that the trophy might get “stuck” in one country.

G Wills agreed that the TT needed to encourage regular flying in both NZ and Australia. Further explained that the family of Bill Iggulden donated the trophy. The original idea was to encourage trans-Tasman competition and to encourage young pilots without international experience.

Thought the Iggulden family would be supportive of encouraging younger pilots by creating an age limit.

3. 2010 National Championship dates

D Dickinson explained that Taupo was the likely location and that the contest organisers had asked that any South Island pilot preferences regarding contest dates be communicated. Organisers are currently considering the beginning of January.

C Richards suggested that the first two weeks of January would be the best soaring period.

4. Club Class Nationals

D Dickinson explained that the SRC was considering running the club class as a separate contest from the normal national championships as a way of promoting the class. Felt that many pilots would like the opportunity to fly two nationals. Idea will be further discussed over the season.

T Jones added that the Australian club/sports class competition is run separately and is very successful, but is open to any sailplane.

G Harrison supported the concept.

5. Airborne tasking

T Newfield suggested that it would be very advantageous to task setters in uncertain weather or short weather windows to be able to declare a task whilst pilots are airborne. The practice is used successfully in the US where 2-3 tasks are set on the ground and given to pilots. Then the actual task is called over the radio once the class is airborne. Currently NZ operates on the principle that once launch commences the set task is the task and there is no way to change it. The only proviso is that the CD may cancel a task due to weather or safety.

D Dickinson commented that there is nothing in the rules that specifically prevents airborne tasking.

T Newfield stressed that pilots should not be loading tasks in mid-flight, but that the tasks should be pre-loaded.

G Wills supported the idea, but that a set task should be only modified in a simple manner (ie AAT task time or AAT circle sizes). In the US, up to 4 tasks were provided pre-launch and not all could be loaded into the flight computer. Suggested a clear procedure was needed for setting or switching tasks whilst airborne. Opposed to pilots having to load a new task while flying.

G Dale was opposed to the concept because while it is practiced in the US, a change of task, however small, meant pilots would be distracted from lookout during pre-start gaggles increasing the risk of a mid-air collision.

J Wilkinson added that not all loggers and computers are capable of holding more than one task.

G Dale further added that the preparation for AATs at a site like Omarama was quite involved. And that setting numerous tasks will invariably mean pilots are launched under-prepared, which is a safety concern.

G Wills understood that airborne tasking could be exercised under the current rules but that there was no precedence. Felt that as long as the change is simple (ie an AAT task time reducing from 3 hours to 2.5 hours) it could be workable. Would be especially useful for weather changes. Thought that the idea should be trailed and feedback from pilots considered.

D Dickinson suggested that airborne tasking required a specific protocol from the task setters and contest director as the competition needed to be fair. If the task is not communicated correctly then there is a risk of deeming the day a “no contest” because it wasn’t fair game.

G Wills thought that if a pilot had a radio failure and could not hear the task, he would in the same position under the status-quo with respect to hearing start height and start time, meaning that the pilot is obliged to land and fix the problem.

6. FLARM

R Sparks encouraged the use of FLARM and added that although there had been many technical problems (especially with aeriels) these were largely fixed and that all gliders should be FLARM equipped.

G Wills suggested that FLARM should be made compulsory equipment during competitions.

D Dickinson reminded those present that a motion of compulsory carriage of FLARM was not carried at the 2007 Annual Pilots Meeting. Commented that not carrying a FLARM forces pilots to lookout and that FLARM might actually increase the risk of mid-air collisions in some situations due to pilot complacency and eyes “inside the cockpit”.

G Harrison and K Morgan remarked that the reason for the said motion losing was due to lack of SI representation at the meeting.

D Dickinson mentioned that the SRC was reluctant to create rules that were site specific. Explained that the issue of compulsory FLARM carriage at Omarama contests was left to organisers and could be incorporated into local rules. One option was perhaps pilots without FLARM would be required to rent a unit, and those with FLARM would receive a discounted entry.

K Morgan suggested the entry fee for those without FLARM could be made \$1000 with inclusion of a free FLARM.

G Wills thought FLARM was a very important technology and that it would save lives, but that everyone needed to support the use of FLARM or they would slowly disappear and the

technology wouldn't be developed. Further explained that Omarama was a high-risk site for mid-air collisions due to head-to-head traffic on ridges and wave lines. Suggested a rental pool would be created if made compulsory in contests.

T Newfield thought that although FLARM cannot stop all mid-air collisions, it would prevent some accidents and therefore it was worthwhile.

D Dickinson commented that many pilots from around NZ (esp. North Island) do not believe there to be an undue risk of mid-air collision between gliders. Suggested that by far the greatest risk of collision during competitions was in start gaggles, and that FLARM was not only useless in these situations but could actually be very distracting and spurious.

G Wills accepted that gaggles presented the greatest risk, but Omarama presented other risks that might be somewhat mitigated by FLARM.

G Dale added that if pilots only use FLARM during competitions, then they are inexperienced with the technology and needed to use it outside of competitions. Felt that NI pilots needed to use them to experience the benefits.

G Harrison asked whether carriage of FLARM would be compulsory at the upcoming Nationals under local rules.

M Stevens responded that the OSC had decided to not make FLARM compulsory, but made strong recommendation of using the devices.

T Mollard relayed his experiences with installing and flying with FLARM in OGC gliders. Considered the technology to be unreliable and problematic. Opposed compulsory carriage until the technical issues are resolved (if ever).

7. SPOT et al.

G Wills spoke of the recent development of personal SPOT tracking devices. The advantage over 406 MHz PLB's was that they could be used as a substitute for ops-normal calls. Thought they could also be superior as an emergency beacon. Suggested SPOT was the largest firm of tracking devices, and have cornered the market, meaning glider pilots would be making a safe purchase with SPOT.

L McPhail explained that 2 SPOT and 1 Trackplus units were trailed over these SI Championships and were quite successful for tracking and had therefore not required ops-normal calls from the tracked gliders. One drawback was that the SPOT units required the pilot to push a button to activate them periodically and the tracking website had some problems.

B Walker questioned the operation of the SPOT regarding periodic activation.

G Wills and P Plane replied that the web interface wasn't perfect and SPOT required a ground station (for full operation) that was not currently available. However the units were cheap and as

the interfaces were still very new, it is reasonable to assume that they will be developed to operate smoothly in the near future. Thought that SPOT would eventually provide a continuous trace. Another advantage of SPOT is that it doesn't use phone connections to transmit data and therefore is inherently cheaper than similar products.

8. Ring finishes

G Wills described an alternate procedure to the status quo line finishes. Explained that by using a circle around the airfield with a designated radius and minimum height, tasks could be completed more efficiently. Currently, high-speed finishes at 100' through a line meant up to 30-40 points were wasted in excess energy that could be used by a pilot to finish the task faster. Said that many pilots therefore deliberately made zero feet final glides to always approach and finish with a straight-in landing. Felt that these finishes could lead to very dangerous situations and highlighted accidents overseas. Suggested that a properly designed circle and minimum height would mitigate these issues. Also gives the task setters greater flexibility as finishes can be made from any direction. Ring finishes are currently successfully used in the US and Australia, and there are currently provisions for them in our rules. G Wills hoped to trial ring finishes at future regional contests.

The meeting closed at 11:29 am.