



Congress 2021

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS REPORT

Chair of International Relations Committee - Peter Micheler

Since the last IRF Congress in May 2019 in Tully/Australia, the International Relations (IR) Committee has been focused on our application for GAISF Membership. In October 2019, we were able to achieve a huge step in this process by being granted GAISF Observer Status which gives us additional valuable help from GAISF to progress towards becoming a GAISF Full Member. Since then we have continued to work hard to achieve the requirements to maintain our GAISF Observer Status and continue working towards becoming a Full Member. In October 2021, our Observer Status was renewed for an additional two years.

Prior to the IRF being granted GAISF Observer Status, in July 2018 IR Com member Jakob Faerch met with the GAISF membership team at the GAISF headquarters in Lausanne/Switzerland to discuss the GAISF Observer and GAISF Member requirements. Also, in 2018 I met with the President of AIMS Stephan Fox, and other stakeholders within GAISF, who clearly stated there is no shortcut to the Olympic Games for any sport and GAISF membership is a necessary step towards that goal. In 2019 President Jones attended SportAccord in Queensland, Australia, and met with several GAISF officials and Council members as well as gathering support from other paddle sport federation leaders for our GAISF application.

Among the standard requirements of all GAISF Observers, the GAISF Council added the additional requirement to our Observer Status, that we find a path forward towards reuniting rafting sport in response to the WRF decision to create a second world body. The GAISF membership management team has assisted us in this effort by hosting several online meetings and bringing WRF officials to the negotiation table to discuss drawing up a basic Statement Of Intent (SOI) for the reunification of rafting. The key propositions agreed with WRF are that 1) reunification of rafting is essential for the sport of Rafting and the benefit of Athletes, 2) and the IRF and WRF will undertake to create a Joint Commission to lead the process of reunification. It was further agreed that the Joint Commission be composed of three representatives of IRF, three representatives of WRF and one representative of GAISF acting as Observer, and that the Joint Commission will work to find the most suitable solution for the governance of the sport, including but not limited to the determination of the Organisational structure, its regulations as well as criteria for inclusion and representation of Members.

The IR Committee and the IRF BOD voted to move forward with these key propositions, and a SOI was signed by the IRF President and presented to GAISF and WRF in January 2021. WRF rejected this SOI and added additional clauses concerning the restriction of voting rights that had not been previously agreed.

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After a second meeting, GAISF lawyers created a SOI based on the outcome of this meeting, and the IRF President signed and returned this SOI. Unfortunately, WRF did not sign this SOI, and created a new SOI that included several unagreed propositions. These propositions would strictly limit membership and voting rights, effectively preventing several prominent IRF NF's from participating in decisions about the future of Rafting. GAISF used the WRF SOI to draw up a second version to include some of the WRF's proposals. The IRF replied with a letter to GAISF and WRF, stating that WRF's controversial proposals would be better left to the Joint Commission tasked with solving differences in governance and structure. WRF did not respond to the IRF letter and did not sign the second SOI.

In November 2021 another meeting was hosted by GAISF between IRF and WRF on the subject of finalising the SOI. WRF officials insisted that they would not sign an SOI that did not include all of their specific voting rights and governance clauses, and that these details should not be delegated to a Joint Commission. They also stated their surprise and disappointment that the IRF had its Observer Status renewed by GAISF, as their understanding was that without a signed SOI from WRF, the IRF would lose its Observer Status. They asked GAISF for an explanation and why their own application for Observer Status was not accepted. GAISF officials replied that the GAISF Council reviewed all relevant data regarding Observers and candidates made their decisions based on that data.

WRF's refusal to sign a basic Statement of Intent agreement continues to be problematic for us to satisfy our goal to re-unite the sport. A comprehensive agreement with WRF is not possible during the relatively short meeting sessions hosted by GAISF, which are not designed to provide the months of discussion necessary to find solutions for complex or contentious subjects. The IR Committee continues to work with GAISF on resolving this stalled process and is hopeful that a solution can be found.

Our most difficult requirement to become a GAISF Full Member, is that a successful applicant (summer sports International Federation) must prove that at least 40 of their National Federations are recognised by their highest National Sports Authority (NSA) or National Olympic Committee (NOC). We are still short of reaching this number and need to work hard on this as it is essential for taking the sport of rafting and the IRF forward.

With our recently renewed Observer Status, we have until November 2023 to reach this goal. As this time will pass quickly, this is an urgent task to complete. There are two ways to get the confirmations from the relevant NOC or NSA:

1. Approaching them directly, asking for the relevant paperwork to get this done
2. Joining an already recognised sports federation, preferably in waters sport, like the Dragonboat National Federation, surfing, rowing, or canoeing

Either way, the IRF will support the application with all the means we have, and the support letters provided by GAISF, so we can encourage the relevant decision makers in each different country.

After obtaining Observer Status in October 2019, in 2020 and 2021 three delegates from the IRF (President, Secretary General, and myself as IR Com Chair) attended virtual SportAccord and IF Forums, the most recent being held on November 5th, 2021

Just recently the IRF has completed another key GAISF Member requirement by completing the arduous application and review process to become accepted as a WADA Code signatory. This was a long-term goal since the first anti-doping seminar at WRC 2013 in New Zealand, and the first tests at the ERC in Slovakia in 2014. Finally we are there but this also means a big financial and management commitment from now on.

Report by Peter Micheler (International Relations Committee Chair), November 2021