



Congress 2021

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Chair of Board of Directors, Joseph Willis Jones

During the time since our last Congress was held in Tully Australia, the greatest issue we've faced has been the challenges presented by the global pandemic. It's been a very difficult time for all sports. The pandemic has forced the cancellation and postponement of hundreds of sporting events around the globe among responsible International Sports Federations (IFs) mindful of following international health advisories. The IRF was no exception. As you all know, our World Rafting Championship (WRC) event in China was postponed twice and was further threatened to be postponed again in 2022. After consultation with our China hosts, it became clear that the entry restrictions for China were not likely to be lifted in time for the WRC, thus putting the event in jeopardy. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our member from China for allowing our members from Bosnia and from Czech Republic to step up and assist us all by offering alternative venues in their countries so that our 2022 WRC can proceed. After reviewing these options, the Executive Committee decided to award the 2022 WRC to Bosnia, and I look forward to seeing all of you in Baja Luka in a few months' time. It has been a very long time since our last WRC in Europe, so we expect a tremendous turnout for this WRC as has been the case in years past.

The pandemic has also affected several other important programs such as our Guide Training and Education (GTE) program, and the launch of our Recreation Operators Accreditation (ROA) program. The loss of expected income from these programs, along with the loss of expected 2020 and 2021 hosting and competition fees, has put a considerable strain on our ability to meet our budget.

Rafting requires that its participants be able to overcome mental and physical adversity and challenges presented both by nature, and by each other. It brings out the best of people, and I am proud to be a part of such an activity and this Federation. It gives me great pleasure to report that the Directors of the IRF have met the unexpected challenges of the pandemic with courage and conviction, and we have managed to turn the tide and transform many of these difficulties into success stories by reducing expenses, reorganizing tasks, and moving forward with projects in many areas.

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You have all received the reports from the Chairs of the IRF Committees as well as our Secretary General which detail many of these successes. With your permission, I will summarize a few of them.

As directed by the Congress, over the last few years we have made a strong push to become a Member of the Global Association of Sport Federations (GAISF) and to be formally accepted by the World Anti-doping Agency (WADA) as a Code signature. GAISF and WADA recognition are both requirements for any IF to be recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and have the opportunity to participate in the Olympic Games.

I am happy to report that we met the requirements of GAISF and received GAISF Observer Status in October 2019, and had this Status renewed recently in October 2021. With our Observer Status, the IRF has received help from the GAISF Membership team towards fulfilling the remaining GAISF Full Member requirements. The IRF has also been recognized amongst the top sporting organisations as the global governing IF for rafting, as well as received many invitations to join or participate alongside other IFs in many high-profile events. This October, we also were formally accepted by WADA as a Code signatory. Both these achievements took tremendous time and effort, as both organisations have large lists of criteria that must be met before they give their acceptance and/or recognition. Among the many criteria are strict requirements for good governance, transparency, and a solid plan for growing our sport and leading it into the future. We were overjoyed to be accepted, and proud to be the first and only IF to meet these criteria as an applicant recognized as the global governing body for rafting sport.

We were able to launch the IRF's Para Raft Racing's comprehensive policies and procedures which has been on our priority list for a while. With the help of an extraordinary team of experts in this area, we closely followed Olympic protocols and guidelines to create a robust and professionally designed Para Raft program that we can all take pride in. As soon as the pandemic permits, we look forward to having our first Para Raft races. We look forward to working with our member organisations who are interested in hosting these races.

Since our last Congress, our Sustainability sector has grown considerably with tasks being taken on by numerous people to ensure there is sustainability across all sectors of the IRF and rafting. Our deep, historic ties to sustainability will help to leverage our position in the sports world as a leader in the sustainability movement as more IFs step forward to commit to sustainable sports.

This year the IRF's website received a much needed and long overdue rebuild. I'm sure all of you have had an opportunity to visit our website and enjoyed its new modern format and ease of use.

We've revised and updating the Judge's Handbook, workbooks and materials for judges' workshops and are soon launching an online system for Judge training and certification.

We've redesigning the GTE IRF Instructor Certification process and provided more Instructor aids.

We've also introduced new GTE certificates for recreational and individual Whitewater river-users and a Level 1 classification for Whitewater Guides.

We are building a plan to put into place a registration system/fee for all IRF athletes that would be accessible online using a professional platform. If accepted during today's vote on Bylaw changes, this

system will be put into motion to radically improve our ability to interact with athletes and their National Federations quickly and effectively.

We've set up an online auction plan to get rafting industry leaders to donate products for us to sell on an online auction to generate new income.

Of course, not all our work has been successful and difficulties in our sport still exist. We've experienced disappointments and heartbreaks, chief among them being the loss of Rafael Gallo, who succumbed to his battle with pancreatic cancer this year. Rafa was a founding member of the IRF and served on its board of directors in several positions, including as my predecessor as IRF President. His wisdom, humour, and dedication to rafting and river protection was second to none and his presence among us will be deeply missed. I would like to ask all of you to join me in a minute of silence, in memory of our friend Rafa, and to offer him our posthumous thanks for the tremendous legacy that he has left us.

Our world is growing more politically polarized and constantly struggles to remain peaceful. Political polarization has also infiltrated sports, including our sport of rafting.

As all of you are aware, a faction of members and former members of the IRF joined together to create a second international body called the World Rafting Federation (WRF). The IRF, along with all world sport bodies have long opposed the idea of fractions within sports believing it to be harmful to growth. One of the mandates of GAISF is to work to prevent such divisions and to help to bring fractions back together. Since the moment the WRF was created, the IRF has sought to get WRF leaders to discuss our differences and negotiate a solution to reunite. Over the past year, the GAISF management team and the GAISF President has assisted us in this effort by hosting several online meetings and bringing WRF officials to the negotiation table with us to discuss drawing up a basic Statement Of Intent (SOI) for the reunification of rafting. The IRF has signed the SOI created by GAISF and proposed compromises after WRF refused to sign. We understand that disagreement occurs in all families and believe that diplomacy rather than defeatism, and compromise rather than division are always the better choice for resolving family disagreements.

Rafting athletes from all cultures, races, religions and political systems have no problem working, playing and competing with each other. Whatever personal differences we may have, they fall away and become insignificant when we compete. Lifelong friendships grow from these events, and help to form bonds of understanding and tolerance. With the help of GAISF, we hope to use the power of sport to bring rafting back together under one organisation. We remain hopeful that fruitful discussions will soon begin between us.

Too little attention is given to the fact that as humans, we share a common past and are destined to share a common future. Things which negatively affects one of us, negatively affects all of all. This has become especially apparent during the last two years as the world has struggled under the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. If only political leaders could follow the examples of cooperation that I see daily in our rafting events, the world would be a safer, happier, and better place for all of us. We are all in this together.

I am the chief representative of the IRF, but I am not the IRF. The IRF is a rafting family made from many nations and people from around the world, with the desire to work together towards common goals. The

IRF is all of us combined, working to take our sport to the highest levels, to protect our rivers and their ecosystems, to teach each other and learn from each other – to make this activity we call ‘Rafting’ everything it can be.

I want to thank you for trusting me to lead our organisation forward and ask that all of you continue do your part to contribute towards our success. For more than two decades, we have made steady, measurable progress. We are more than an organisation; we are a movement. The IRF is the sum of its members, driven by an emotional heart filled with a love for rivers and for our sport, capable of making sweeping changes whenever necessary to reach our highest aspirations. No one, and no effort is too small to count.

I salute all of you for your dedication and loyalty to the IRF and to our common goals and dreams. I offer you my best wishes for your continued success in your respective countries, as we lay down a solid foundation for our youth and a pathway for the future of our sport. Step-by-step we move forward, together.

Report by Joseph Willis Jones (President & Board of Directors Chair), November 2021