

IRF Constitution: Clarification of Main Issues

11 April 2008

Neil Phillips has requested that ARA state the major faults in the current IRF constitution and the benefits of the constitution changes recommended by ARA.

The current body called "IRF" is in many ways a committee of individuals and could more correctly be named "International Rogaining Committee". The existing IRF constitution clearly states that the IRF is a group of individuals (See constitution sections 5A-5G). Compare this with the ARA constitution (Section 4: Membership) which states "Membership is limited to non-profit-making organisations or associations sharing the object of promotion of the sport of Rogaining and recognised by the Council as representing Rogaining in a particular geographical area". The ARA believes that the ARA Constitution provides a suitable model for an IRF Constitution. ARA believes that an IRF should be a federation of national rogaining bodies, whilst those countries without national bodies can remain fully included with Observer status.

At best, the current IRF, with its concept of "National Groups", could be called a virtual federation of virtual rogaining associations. Around the world we do not know of any other federation that has such a structure. A similar case to IRF might be the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Those who know the workings of the IOC would not accept this as a suitable model for international rogaining. The current IRF structure leaves the sport of rogaining exposed to encroachment from other bodies (such as IOF) that could form a rival federation consisting of representative national bodies.

The IRF does not encapsulate the three longest standing rogaining associations in the world. The ARA has for many years argued that it generates the majority of world rogaining activity and therefore should be the core of an international federation. In 2008, with the growth of rogaining in Europe, ARA organises around 40 percent of world rogaining events. Irrespective of how you count the numbers, ARA is the home of rogaining and the view from Australia is that an IRF without Australia is serving itself and the sport poorly. United States Orienteering Federation (USOF) established rogaining in USA in 1989 and has run maybe 200 events. New Zealand Orienteering Federation (NZOF) has been organising rogaines since the early 1990s and has organised more rogaines than anywhere except Australia. Unfortunately, the IRF constitution was established without the buy-in of the established rogaining bodies and hence the IRF fails to effectively represent the sport of rogaining.

It is easy to recruit individuals to form a committee but it takes much effort to form a federation of national bodies. Since the IRF was formally created in 2000, only one new rogaining association has been formed or national group accepted as a member: New Zealand Rogaining Association. A case in point is rogaining in USA. In 2001, the USA representatives were offered three votes on IRF Council as individuals because there was "not enough time to discuss with USOF" [Rod Phillips email to USA representatives]. We understand that USOF would be offered two or three votes and the opportunity to pay annual levies. What incentive is there for USOF to join IRF or for USA rogainers to form an association? Under current arrangements they have a strong voting presence and do not pay hundreds of dollars in annual levies.

Jan Tojnar and Mira Seidl in this forum said: "Czech Rogaining Association (CAR) supports the ARA attitude that the IRF constitution should be established on basis of the national rogaining organizations... More than 10 years ago rogaining in our country started as an initiative of few fools. Almost all of the Pilgrim Fathers have left the motion already (except for Mira Seidl) - the whole CAR presidium team has been completely rebuilt... If there was no CAR I'm afraid it could cause there [to not be] any rogaining in the Czech Republic at all. Or it would have been more weakened than it is now."

Neil Phillips has also stated: "Rogaining associations provide the framework for membership, co-ordination, communication, history, learning, training, volunteering, and representation. They are not-for-profit entities operating under legal systems that may vary between nations. Sustainable rogaining associations can survive through changes of leadership, community and legal environments, funding, and member preferences."

The ARA is a successful model for an international rogaining federation. The ARA is a federation of eight state/territory rogaining bodies. Each state association is a legal entity charged with the purpose of supporting rogaining. Each member of ARA Council is nominated by the state rogaining body itself. The ARA, by virtue of its Constitution's membership structure, has encouraged the development of rogaining associations in Australia.

In 2000, Alan Stradeski announced that he was planning to form a rogaining association in Canada. He was duly given a vote as a Member of the IRF Council. He remained in this position until 2006 even though he was no longer active in the sport and could not therefore represent Canadian rogaining. In the period 2001-2007, Iiro Kakko was given a vote on the IRF representing Finland or Northern Europe (depending on which IRF newsletter you read). But Finland organised its first rogaine event in 2007. According to the current IRF constitution, Iiro should have been nominated by his "National Group" and this process repeated every 2 years, however the evidence contradicts this. If these practices were legal in the period 2000-2007, then they are possible now under the current IRF Constitution. This is not acceptable to the ARA and hence ARA will not join an organisation where individuals are given voting rights alongside formally constituted legal entities.

The current IRF constitution includes votes for commercial groups. The sport of rogaining in Australia has been consistently opposed to commercialisation of rogaining for over 30 years. Although this position has not been filled, it should not have been created in the first place. It is unlikely that any Australian rogaining association could join an IRF that includes in its constitution an opportunity for commercial operators to vote alongside rogaining associations.

The current IRF Constitution currently includes a position for a person nominated by the "Founders of the IRF". This membership category has consistently been opposed by the ARA because it is not democratic and not necessary. An extensive discussion forum conducted by IRF in 2001-2002, which included all IRF representatives, decided that this membership class should be removed.

A two-year phase in period is proposed, during which time the ARA would jointly work with IRF to lead the development of a strategy for international rogaining and creation of international technical regulations and rules of rogaining. The phase-in period provides a transition to implementation of the reforms without disruption. No individual who currently receives a vote should fear these proposed constitution changes.

The ARA recognises that it is a large entity and there may be some fear that ARA could dominate the IRF Council. To overcome this, ARA has proposed that all National Peak Rogaining Bodies including ARA be provided exactly two votes on the IRF Council. This means that all national bodies will be treated equally for the purpose of voting. This should be recognised as a significant gesture by the ARA towards creating a democratic and representative international federation.

The IRF constitution reforms are accompanied by substantial ARA funding that can be used to support development of rogaining associations. The ARA has agreed to pay an annual fee of US\$1 per member (about US\$6000). For emerging national bodies, the ARA supports the current constitution clause whereby the IRF waives the subscription. It is essential that the IRF is financially viable so that it has the resources to develop rogaining internationally. ARA can provide those resources.

The ARA proposes to take a lead role in encouraging the creation of rogaining associations or membership of IRF through existing national bodies. To this end, the ARA Council at its 2007 Annual General Meeting discussed the option of targeted funding grants (for example US\$1000-\$2000 per country) that can be applied as seed funding to ensure establishment of sustainable national bodies. In addition, the ARA has a pool of expertise and knowledge that can be drawn upon to provide an individual assigned to each interested country to guide and assist with the legal and organisational process.

The choice of a suitable national body structure is best made by each country's representatives and will best suit local circumstances. In answer to Sergey Yashchenko, there is no requirement for a national rogaining body to be recognised or accredited by the national government. ARA is not.

There will always be countries in various stages of development. For those that are not yet ready to form a national body, the Observer category will remain. The ARA proposes that the IRF continue to fully involve and consult both voting Members and Observers in all decision making processes.

The ARA encourages the IRF to adopt the proposed amendments to the constitution outlined in the Taylor/Squires motion.

David Rowlands
ARA Secretary
on behalf of the ARA Executive