

Commodores Update to the Fireball Council 2015-05-01

Hello Fireballers

I have been in the Commodores job for 3 months now and you deserve to know what I've been doing. My intention is to write some sort of update for you every quarter from now on. Please also use email, Facebook and Skype to communicate with me and the rest of the Executive, we are committed to changing Fireball International into a bottom up organization instead of a top down one.

My first impression upon starting the job was that the class was suffering from a sort of shell shock after the Joe vs Pat election, there was a lot of hurt and frustration. It quickly became apparent that the real issue between the two sides was the personality of the Secretary. Nobody that I spoke to was neutral; everybody had strong views one way or another. Andrew's intervention in the election was a tragic mistake and the UKFA viewed his apology to them as too little, too late, a view shared by some other NCAs. However others felt that his support to them over the years merited his staying on as secretary, despite these actions.

Taking a broader view of how the organization could evolve to be more suited to the World of the 21st century I decided that we should break the secretary job up by task areas and use more volunteers. This will save money and allow to us spread function and responsibilities around the World. This will make FI a truly worldwide organization. As a first step in this direction I decided to split the Secretary's job into 2 parts. The class secretary and the executive secretary. The division would be as follows:

Existing Secretarial Role	New arrangement
Send out notices of committee meetings as per constitution requirements	New role Secretary to the Executive
Send out notices of AGM as per constitution requirements	New role Secretary to the Executive
Take minutes at meetings and circulate to committee	New role Secretary to the Executive
Act as the first point of call for any enquiries about the class. Receive and address all incoming correspondence including passing relevant information on to other committee members to address	Existing role Class Secretary
Report to the committee any incoming and outgoing correspondence	Existing role Class Secretary Basically this means CC'ing all email replies to the Executive and keeping a simple log of phone, Skype calls etc, just one liners. Sensitive financial and personal communications will only be copied to the Commodore.
Report to the committee any issues that have arisen from correspondence	Existing role Class Secretary As above.
Promote the Fireball class at the ISAF	Existing role Class Secretary. The Commodore will share this role as far as is practical.

Represent the Fireball class at ISAF	Existing role Class Secretary. The Commodore will share this role as far as is practical. FI Technical Officer will deal directly with ISAF for rule changes.
Issue out notices of committee positions becoming vacant as per constitution	New role Secretary to the Executive
Oversee the election of officers	New role Secretary to the Executive
Issue all new sail numbers, plaques and plans	Existing role Class Secretary
Prepare a report of events and activities for AGM	Existing role Class Secretary I envisage this task as a co-operative effort with the Commodore.
Investigation/ liaison with venues and NCAs for international events.	Not strictly a Secretaries job but one that Andrew has performed.

By splitting the job up initially in this way my intention was to allow Andrew to continue doing the class secretaries job whilst moving the activities for which he had been criticized into the new executive secretary function. I discussed this with Andrew on the phone and during a 2 hour meeting with him at the London Dinghy show on March 2nd. I formally proposed this solution to Andrew in an email on 18th March. I still believe that had Andrew accepted this plan promptly that I could have sold it to the “Joe” camp. But it was not to be.

Andrew procrastinated and also decided to involve his supporters in making his decision. I received a call from the Shetland NCA demanding that the Swiss NCA be given a seat on the Executive because they believed that they had the same number of votes as the UKFA. Interestingly Shetland did not make a similar demand on behalf of France whose membership fell into the same category. I advised Shetland that I considered this to be a matter for the Swiss to pursue. Shortly thereafter I received an email from Maja Suter asking that the Swiss be given a seat on the Executive. Maja is a former European rear commodore and had been active in FI and the Swiss NCA for many years but currently holds no role in either organization. I placed the matter onto the agenda for the next Executive meeting and asked Maja if this was an official request from the Swiss NCA. The Swiss NCA then made the request official. I replied to the Swiss NCA asking them to reconsider, I was concerned that the rest of the world may take the view that the Swiss were trying to exploit a loophole in the constitution and that would not make them look good. Our Treasurer Penny Gibbs also pointed out that the UKFA membership list which had been supplied to Maja was clearly inaccurate, her husband Ian is not on that list for example and that the payments made indicated that the UKFA had 5 votes versus the 4 votes of France and Switzerland, nevertheless the Swiss persisted, albeit explaining that they had not intended to behave controversially. The UKFA were very angry that their membership list had been distributed abroad without their consent and to a person having no official Fireball position. In the meantime I continued trying to persuade Andrew to accept the new position, on 13th April I emailed him requiring that he accept or refuse. I received a single sentence reply - “I accept”. On 24th April the UKFA wrote to me advising that they had no confidence in Andrew as secretary and that they were not happy with the behaviour of the Swiss NCA.

This was the background to the Executive meeting held on 27th April 2015, which was attended by Andrew Davies and also Mainne Erne from Switzerland, who had agreed to take on the Executive Secretary role for this meeting with a view to hopefully making this arrangement permanent.

During that meeting I updated the executive on my progress with re-arranging the secretarial role. The elected rear commodores expressed their views, Andrew was criticized for failing to attempt to build bridges with the NCAs who were not happy with him. Four Rear commodores plus the UKFA representative stated that they felt that the class could not progress with Andrew as secretary, Jakub Navpravnik being the exception. Jakub represents the largest number of sailors but is in a difficult position because the NCAs he represents are not agreed amongst themselves. He exercised his judgment and I respect that. The meeting also decided that the Swiss request for a seat on the executive be denied because the constitution refers to "paid up members", which gives the UKFA 5 votes. The rest of the meeting progressed without incident and the minutes will appear on the FI Website as normal.

So I have spent the week following this tough meeting considering how to move forward. I fully believe that Fireball Switzerland acted in good faith but the timing was fatal to my hopes of engineering a compromise. Having spent 3 months in the job, 99% of my effort has been devoted to trying to arrange this compromise between the Joe and Pat camps. None of this has in any way contributed to selling a single Fireball or attracting a single new sailor into our class, which I find very frustrating. We have to have a new start. The commodore and rear commodores are elected and we have to accept them even if we didn't vote for them. The rest of the executive are appointed by the commodore and approved by the Council. The commodore therefore has a responsibility to appoint people who are acceptable to all or at least a large majority of the NCAs. Despite the efforts detailed above I have failed to achieve this for Andrew Davies and I therefore cannot appoint him as secretary. Andrew has contributed greatly to the class over years and I wish that I could have made his exit more graceful. I have tried my hardest.

So now I have to find a new secretary, I had no "plan B". I still plan to split the job between multiple people, with international distribution, using volunteers wherever possible. I hope that Mianne will continue as executive secretary. Since the class is governed by English law we will have to keep a presence in the UK but I am concerned that FI is too Anglo Saxon, around half of our members don't have English as their first language. I'm very happy to have anybody make suggestions, please don't be offended if I don't act on all of them. I have also been very impressed with the way that Facebook has helped us disseminate information regarding the corrector weight emergency rule change. This makes me think that a full time secretary employed to answer phones and emails may not be entirely necessary.

Expect me to announce the full composition of the Executive within 1 month from now. Please take action to ensure that your NCA is in good standing before then. I will act as secretary until such time as I have appointed a new one.

Other news.

As you will all know I asked Tom Egli our technical officer to create an emergency rule change to allow just correctors to be reweighed instead of whole boats. This is designed to simplify the transition to the new hull and corrector weight. It is intended to rescind this rule at the end of the year.

Vyv Townend has undertaken to form a committee to review our constitution. Recent events have shown that this is sorely needed. A constitution doesn't get tested until somebody tries to make it say what they want it to say.

The UKFA report that preparations for the 2015 World Championship are on track, it promises to be a great event and I look forward to meeting Fireballers from around the world there.

Fireball Italy are preparing for a European Championship on Lake Garda in 2016 and Fireball South Africa for the 2016 Worlds. So we have an exciting programme ahead of us.

We are investigating how we can make the Website more useful, in particular getting some more languages onto it. This is not as easy as I wish it was but I won't give up easily.

Finally I appeal to all NCAs to support the Executive, this has been the toughest few months that I can remember for a long time. Let's get moving forward once again. There is so much that we can do to develop and promote our fabulous little boat, if we are united.

Best Regards

Steve Chesney
Commodore Fireball International.