

Chair's Report to the 2021 ACM

It goes without saying that 2021 has been a very difficult year in the shadow of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. During the spring and early summer we were forced to cancel almost all of our races, however from late summer into autumn we have been able to host races across all divisions. With “necessity being the mother of invention” we have discovered new ways to maintain our activities, find new ways to communicate, new ways to run safe competitions and activities. Some of these enforced changes we will keep, such as using WhatsApp, where possible, to communicate race information and post protests. The temporary promotion rules for Div1 and Div2 that were introduced to recognised exceptional performances will not be made permanent as they are no longer relevant as we move back to running a full calendar of competitions.

Although returning to racing has been warmly welcomed, competition entry numbers across all divisions have reduced significantly. In several clubs there are encouraging signs that taster sessions have attracted a significant number of potential new paddler and we hope that these will progress into the ranking systems and start to build up numbers in the lower divisions. The prospect of a full calendar of racing in 2022 may encourage paddlers who have not raced in 2021 to appear on a start list. Of course, we will not know the true damage to Slalom entry numbers wrought by COVID until late 2022 or even beyond. This is of deep concern to all of us here today and collectively we need to find ways to attract new entrants and encourage past competitors to race again.

The outlook for 2022 remains challenging, especially in the early part of the year. Although there is a full calendar planned for 2022, we need to be prepared for COVID mitigations to be required but, hopefully, lockdowns forcing race cancellations will not be necessary.

GB teams have been successful at International level and the GB Canoeing report speaks to the details. There are some shoutout performances; C1 Olympic Silver for Mallory, K1 World Bronze for Kimberley, C1 U23 World Gold and C1 European Silver for Bethan, K1 U23 European Silver for Johnny, Extreme World Gold for Joe and U23 Extreme World Gold and U23 Extreme European Silver for Nikita. Many others achieved finals and medals across World Cup and Championship races, and this bodes well on the journey to Paris in 2024.

Deborah Catty is leaving the committee and I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for the dedication and enthusiasm she has brought to the Secretary role. As I stated last year, I have decided that this will be my last “shift” as Chair and I will stand down at 2022 ACM. Andy Grudzinski has been elected Vice Chair and together we will work towards a smooth handover to a new Chair.

This is also the time of year that we think about those who are no longer with us and who were familiar faces at all the ACMs I attended. Both John Sturgess and Mike Carter dedicated immense amount of time and effort to the sport, and we are truly grateful for their dedication and contribution.

Finally, thank you to paddlers, volunteers, organisers, committee members and everyone who helps to support Canoe Slalom.

Dave Spencer
Chair, Slalom Committee
November 2021