

BDA Congress and AGM

Saturday 11th April

Links Hotel, Loughborough

1. Opening address from Chairman – Neil Pickles

Welcome from Neil to all attendees to the combined Congress and 2025 AGM.

2. Opening session with Q&A about the Water Safety Policy – Dave Bangs

Dave Bangs announced that the new Water Safety Policy will be uploaded to the BDA website once it has all been approved by the BDA exec. The new policy will have everything in one document and will reflect the new framework and how we can use this to protect everyone involved as this is paramount.

The original policy was in much need of being updated including the number of gaps that needed to be addressed, and the language used in it. When it was first written, it was envisaged that corporate companies would work in conjunction with the BDA, but now corporate companies run their own events. This is now no longer applicable for our volunteer-led clubs. The roles, authority and expectations of when to stop an activity were not explicit in the older policy. An example was given that while racing in Brandenburg, the government had the authority to stop all activity on the water due to bad weather. The risk assessments were present but not clearly embedded into the wider safety management system and there was limited evidence of a possible audit trail in case of an incident, which is what insurers now look for.

The new system supports volunteer activity; this is now explicitly written in with a grounded duty of care. There will be roles put in place to show clear governance structure (such as Event Organiser, Safety Officer, Water Safety Lead). Andy Menzies may possibly take on the event safety plans and coverage and be a BDA link for all clubs. Water safety arrangements will be planned deliberately; it is up to clubs to ensure these are in place for their activities. Clubs will be expected to create risk assessments for their club and create safe methods of working. These will be a live working document and should be revisited on a regular basis. These risk assessments will provide an audit line from the BDA officer right to the club safety officer, with a paperwork trail, which is needed for insurance and investigators. Links will be created to the emergency services and declarations are now required in place of disclaimers (such as for medical conditions).

The document will also be shared with the insurance brokers to check the BDA have everything covered. Within each club there will be a competent person who will check and review the risk assessments on a regular basis. This framework provides strong protection for each participant but also for the governing body and those who have authored and approved the document.

For race events, there will be a designated safety officer from the hosting club who will provide documentation of a safety plan for the day. These methods of working should also be clear to emergency services.

A template of a club risk assessment can be provided, and this can be adapted for a race event. A local risk assessment would be classed as the minimum criteria needed for each club to provide.

During Covid there was an audit line from set up for BDA clubs, when sports clubs were permitted to start activities again with limited numbers. BDA clubs had to submit an official document to the BDA, which recorded that the club would be following the DCMS requirements. The new Water Safety Policy has a

similar system for local risk assessments, which the Club Safety Officer will send to the BDA to be included in SharePoint.

Following on from the Congress, each club should be looking at producing a risk assessment for the exec to review. All clubs will need to appoint a water safety officer who has a background in water safety. There will need to be some time for clubs to get their documents in place, ideally these will need to be completed and reviewed by the BDA by the next racing season. This year will be used to get clubs in line with the documentation needed for the policy. Flexibility is allowed, though any deviation needs to be justified – need to be clear for the insurance.

Preston Dragons have already revised their risk assessment to cover summer and winter training as well as ensuring BAs are worn in their dock. In addition, they have purchased a safety boat, which accompanies them in all of their training sessions. It was encouraged by Dave Bangs that if clubs can also provide support to other clubs this will be greatly appreciated.

3. 2026 League events with Q&A – Darrell Snape and Linda Harris

Darrell Snape introduced the session by saying that there will be changes implemented at the race events this season.

Helming is the main focus of this season as some helms are simply not competent enough to steer a dragon boat at a race event. One of the things to stipulate is that helms should be competent to steer a boat in a race situation – either have an Advanced Helm qualification or already be a competent Basic Helm. When questions were asked about this, it was stated that if the person steering was not an Advanced Helm, the chief official needs to be informed beforehand. Qualified Basic Helms, who want to progress to Advanced Helm, need to be assessed by a CL3 or CL4 at three different race venues. Race officials who can observe helms can give feedback to the Coach carrying out the assessment. Helms will be reminded to bring their orange book if they are being assessed on a race day. If clubs do not have a CL3, there will be plenty available on a given race day who can assess.

Issues have arisen over the last few years which have caused a delay in the race programme. Problems can arise with helming at various points in a race – when boats are lining up at the start, turning round a buoy, trying to run straight down the course, staying in the correct lane. It was noted that there is plenty of support available for helms who want to improve.

All crews need to be on the start line 3 minutes before the start. This season, helms will be given one chance to reset, otherwise they will be sent from where they are.

Boat marshals will be in full control of where they can send boats to park. It is not up to the clubs to decide where they go as there is a reason why marshals have picked a designated spot for each crew. This will be for the duration of any event. If the rules are not followed, races will need to be cut. This will all be reiterated at the crew managers' meeting at the start of the race day. Penalties on a race day will include late to start, messing around, finishing in the wrong lane, crew numbers – these can be handed in at the crew managers' meeting.

Drummers must be 12 years old due to their size. Their buoyancy aids must fit securely and they must be able to sit safely on the drum seat, with their feet on the ground. One of their parents or an adult responsible for them must always be on the boat. If a full junior crew is on the water, the responsibility lies with the officials and the safety officer on that day. An additional safety boat will be needed during the race and the risk assessments will need to include this possibility too. Documentation must be provided before the race day if a full junior boat is racing and the hosting event organisers will need to ensure that this is documented in their safety event plan for the race day.

Amendments will be made on the JustGo platform to allow for roles to be added to the crew sheets so that officials can see who is helm on the day.

What happens if a person has helming skills without having a helm qualification? They could complete the Basic Helm test – which is straightforward for a competent helm, register on the modular scheme for coaching and helming, receive their Basic Helm certificate and get recorded on the system as a BDA Basic Helm.

The point was made that we don't have enough female helms and women's crews are required to have a female helm at National League regattas. A solution would be to train more helms, both male and female, at club training sessions, assess them for Basic Helm. If they are confident to helm at race events, they can work towards being assessed as an Advanced Helm. The point was made that it's competent helms that are needed at events.

A point made about lining up on the starts at the Nationals was that it's sometimes difficult to hear the starter from Lane 6. A positive point was made about one of the starters at the Nationals, who asked the boats to move forward together to the start line and started the race on time.

4. Annual General Meeting 2025

Andy Menzies took charge of the AGM over Mike Thomas who had been called away for IDBF business.

1. Apologies

Mike Thomas

Christine Cosgrove

2. Appointment of Tellers

Sue Menzies

Linda Harris

No secondary votes are allowed if votes have already been counted on forms.

3. 2025 Chairman's Report

A reminder that all the executive committee members are volunteers.

Last season we had fewer events than expected as the weather prevented Stockton from going ahead. This year, there is a contingency plan in place for the Stockton event.

The National Championships event was well attended with 150 crews in total racing over the two days. Issues still happened over that weekend regarding timekeeping, and this has been mentioned that things will be stricter this year. The Mixed team category is doing better than the Open team category – this has been reflected in the race programmes at our league events. The criteria for Mixed teams at our National League events is a maximum of 10 male paddlers. Also, we have had some new clubs join the BDA platform over the last season, which is positive.

The insurance premiums have reduced, which has allowed membership fees to remain the same with no increase.

GB is still an ongoing process. Christine Cosgrove has been doing a brilliant job organising all the crews, which is now allowing squads to share resources and their race experience.

There are some ongoing issues within the IDBF regarding governance.

Looking forward to the new race season with the addition of a new race venue (tbc).

4. Secretary's report 2025

There are currently 1,323 members registered on the BDA platform over 36 clubs.

The BDA Executive Committee had 10 meetings over the last year – 8 over Teams and 2 in person.

All of these meetings were well attended by committee members.

5. Treasurer's report 2025

2025 saw the continued growth in our racing with well organised and structured events. We had a record attendance at the National Cup Finals and overall, it was a positive year. However, it was disappointing that we had to cancel an event for the first time ever due to the adverse weather in Stockton.

At the end of the 2025 financial year (which runs from 1st January to 31st December 2025), we made a small loss. This was due to Individual Memberships down from 2024 from £42,220.89 to £37,884.55 and an increase of some costs such as salary cost and the contributions made to GB squads to represent at international overseas events. Nevertheless, we have been managing costs well and it was another good year for the National Cup final, which saw the event make a small profit while other National League entries broke even in most cases.

The total turnover for the year was £105,571.47, which is down from £106,986.20 in 2024 (mainly made up of Individual Memberships, club fees, National League Income and National Cup Income). On a positive note, it is nice to see more Junior Memberships coming through on the platform.

Our costs were managed well, and savings have been made in key areas such as our insurance premiums. This was previously £17,000, now reduced to £11,000. New costs this year include the loans paid out to Clubs for the purchase of new boats under the Finance Agreement, which has been well-received. The Association is in a good financial position and can support Clubs and Members moving into 2026 and beyond. The Executive Committee propose to set up a high interest savings account and ringfence some money to protect the long-term plans for the association.

The decision has been made regarding no increase in membership for 2026 and the continuation of the 12-month rolling membership. Our continued use of the Azolve System for our membership system has allowed us to manage multiple transactions alongside the use of Xero for managing the accounts.

There are plans in place for the BDA's 40th celebration in 2027. We are looking at sponsorship deals, which would keep the ticket costs down, while promoting some of our suppliers (of kit, paddles, boats and more).

Many thanks go to the Exec and Members for their support along with the great work done by our external accountant, Ian Jarvis of Vertis Accounting, and Ali Marsland, who has taken on a lot of administrative work for us, including sending an informative newsletter to all BDA members on a regular basis.

At the end of the report, members asked how healthy the BDA accounts are. At present, there are two bank accounts, and these currently have around £74,000.00. The information regarding profit was not yet available to give out at the AGM.

Another question was raised about the GB Scimitar money as this had yet to be refunded to the relevant squads. This has been noted and will be chased up.

6. Elections to the Executive Committee

Name	Position	Online			During AGM		
		Yes	No	Abstain	Yes	No	Abstain
Neil Pickles	Chair	58	8	20	24	0	0
Dave Bangs	Member	74	6	4	24	0	0
Stephen Roe	Member	37	7	13	24	0	0
Michelle McCluskey	Member	40	8	11	24	0	0
Karen Snape	Member	33	11	14	24	0	0

All the above candidates were voted on to the Executive Committee and Andy Menzies, the Vice-President, welcomed them all.

It was noted that new people would be welcomed by the Executive, even if they only wanted to observe. In addition, a junior rep could now be added to the Executive given their current progression within the Membership.

Break for lunch

Afternoon sessions

Some GB matters

Funding

Is there any financial support for selected GB paddlers?

Soaring Dragons will be selling hot drinks at race events to raise funds for Junior GB paddlers so please support. There will be a funding opportunity at the Stockton event.

O1s

Marsport have built the new GB O1s. There are two different boats that have been purchased with different weight categories: the Etta and the Phoenix. The Etta is for a paddler of up to 85kg and the Phoenix is designed for a paddler 115 kg max. Both boats will probably take more weight. These new O1s are £1,850 each.

The GB squads can book the O1s for the day. The BDA will pay for transporting the boats to and from a venue. Clubs can also book the O1s for a day and the club would pay the cost of the transportation.

5. O1 Development – Lorna Estlin

Lorna has produced a modular scheme for paddlers who are new to O1s. The aim of this personal skills award is to equip paddlers with the essential skills to paddle an O1 effectively and safely. In addition, this

will show that paddlers are competent before turning up to GB trials. This has been used by BCS paddlers who were required to use an O1 in the trial for GB, despite having never used these before.

This award will include teaching people how to set up the boat, awareness of safety and basic O1 paddling skills.

There is an O1 Basic Competency Coaching Handbook which both O1 paddlers and Coaches will be able to access online. As paddlers learn and develop their O1 skills, these can be assessed and recorded by the Coach. When the scheme is up and running, and achievements are recorded, new O1 paddlers who have signed up to the scheme will receive a certificate via email.

A few questions

Why is an O1 practice capsize drill not included in the early introduction to O1 paddling?

What to do if you capsize is talked through in detail with new O1 paddlers before they get into the O1 for the first time. Some paddlers may be put off before they even begin if they have to do a capsize drill before they have learnt to paddle the boat. Another reason is that aspiring GB paddlers may be introduced to O1s in the winter months in preparation for a trial in the spring, so it's not the best time to do capsize drills.

Will all qualified coaches still be allowed to teach people to paddle an O1?

Yes, qualified coaches can continue taking O1 groups. The current information states that Level 3 and 4 Coaches will approve the completed assessments. This is likely to change to include Level 2 Coaches.

If Coaches wanted all O1 paddlers to work towards this award, would the Executive agree to this?

The answer was Yes.

Is it fair that all clubs do not have access to O1s?

Clubs can book the GB O1s for a day. If a club or individual paddlers want to buy O1s, second-hand boats are less expensive, and clubs can get advice if needed about where to look for boats.

Lorna has used the outline of teaching the basic O1 skills with some of her Club paddlers and she has received some very positive feedback from new O1 paddlers.

6. Open Q&A

League results

The league results for 2025 have now been published. Apologies from N Pickles for the delay. These have been generated by C Bailey, who has been absent due to her involvement with the Winter Olympics.

N Pickles asked which club currently has hold of the open league trophy, and the men's league trophy.

The Mixed winners were Soaring Dragons and women's was also Soaring Dragons.

With the current points ranking system, crews start off where they left in the last season. It was commented that everyone should start again on zero. Soaring Dragons noted that Notts Anaconda should have won the season, but Soaring had an advantage because they started out ahead and stayed where they were. Notts had a fantastic year but didn't win the league as they started off lower than Soaring, and yet they progressed dramatically. It has been noted that getting to all events over the season is very expensive, especially given the current climate.

This year, the results from the previous event will be published before the next race event so that clubs will know who they need to beat. It was also mentioned that clubs with new paddlers are not really aware of the league and this switches them off and retention falls. Also, if crews have a new orientation of paddlers, then this could mean that they are at a disadvantage before they start the race day.

Communication

It has been raised that communications could be used a bit more to help the Exec. The monthly newsletter is now used to help give Members regular updates thanks to Ali Marsland. Michelle McCluskey is now doing social media comms. The Exec still needs information about club activities so the BDA can support clubs with getting their information out to everyone. All Members get the monthly newsletter.

For those who require more knowledge about the procedures within the BDA, it was raised that we could have a password-protected area on the website where we could pass this information over to the members.

The question was raised as to whether clubs can be aware of what race distances will happen at each race event. This will allow clubs to know what they need to train for and how to plan for their training sessions accordingly. All race events have now been published on the JustGo platform so all clubs can sign up for all league events as of now. It was mentioned that the club organised events are valuable because they bring in a lot of fun for new paddlers and these are needed to support retention of paddlers.

Race venues

Some recces are needed for new venues such as Scarborough, the Cotswolds and Stratford. Clubs will now be asked in the newsletter about local venues to them and if they believe these locations would be suitable to host an event there. A couple of suggestions were made including a collaboration with British Rowing (not always possible) and asking charity events as they know lots of areas (sadly these are either not applicable for our race distances or too expensive). A local club to a new race venue would need to take on the management of the event as this would not be possible for the BDA to deal with.

A proposal was made about Strathclyde and how this could be used as a venue. It was mentioned that it would be worth putting the information out to clubs as an expression of interest before putting up any money.

Other questions/comments

Members have expressed issue with JustGo platform and printing crew sheets for race events. Jenni Henderson is aware of this problem; it is a browser issue and will be looked at before Liverpool.

There was a call out for any members (active or inactive) who wish to become an official, please contact Darrell Snape.

Members have raised concerns about the cost of travelling to events across the country. This may have an effect on the attendance of crews at events throughout the season given the current climate.