



Wind & Watersport Vlaanderen – National Authority for IRC in Belgium

1. <u>Certificates issued</u>:

In 2020 the number of certificates decreased to 43 – a decline for obvious reasons as most local IRC regattas were cancelled. The only Belgian event was the Open Belgian Sailing Championships IRC where 40 boats could be mobilised. The owners could be motivated to participate by proposing a Single Event Rating (SER) – 28 SER IRC where issued in the last weeks for the event. The office of UNCL was very helpful in this period. We presume number would have been stable in a normal year with some beautiful new IRC boats in the Belgian fleet. Only 5 new owners asked a IRC (SER) for the first time.

90% of the certificates are issued by the Belgian National Authority, WWSV. Only 4 out of 47 certificates came through Belgians who demanded their certificate directly at UNCL (2) or RORC (2). It is the policy that all Belgian demands come through WWSV, some boats ask a certificate without valid sail number – this is issued by Belgian Sailing.

2. Comments:

2020 was not a successful IRC year, and not a successful sail racing year in general, not in Belgium and not abroad. Belgian boats like to compete in foreign waters too. We hope that the 2021 races can be scheduled soon and we expect Belgian Boats again in RORC races and racing in France and the Netherlands. For the Fastnet Race we expect at least 10 Belgian candidates. The racing in the Med attracted some Belgian teams, five this year. Some of them will participate in the Middle Sea Race, the Spi Ouest France and Les Voiles de Saint-Tropez. The Halfton Class stays actif in Belgium with 10 to 15 teams who are looking forward to a new Half Ton classics Cup as this year's edition was cancelled.

IRC fleets in Belgium suffer from competition of local measurement systems (Cruiser Rating) and Osiris. The number of certificates in Cruiser Rating decreased to 60 compared to 170 in 2019 and 250 in 2018. Lots of clubs organise local regattas with own rating systems. Popular winterraces in Zeeland use another local system. The biggest club regatta at KYCN with regularly over 50 boats uses the French OSIRIS. With good support from UNCL, it was agreed with KYCN to switch to IRC Go in 2020, but since all races had to be cancelled until end of June, it was decided to postpone this change to 2021.

Local races have more succes than championships. The number of boats in the local championship Open North Sea Championships is stable but low. People tend to stay in their club for informal racing and events with higher numbers in participation.

3. General situation in Belgium

A lot of boats qualify to ask for an IRC certificate but prefer to use other local systems (Cruiser Rating, Osiris/HN, unmeasured). Regatta's in clubs use the alternative rating formula's and gather bigger fleets – up to 50 and more. Regatta's in IRC attract specialised fleets. These boats also compete in international competitions in the UK, France, Netherlands. Only few Belgian boats are known to have an ORC certificate or do compete in this system (for example Scheveningen, Breskens, Stellendam – Holland)

BEL IRC is the organisation of the IRC owners and keeps a yearly information session. This year we saw more activity in boats looking for optimalisation of their rating. But only one boat was weighed, a number of test certificates were issued and the number of modifications was stable. The informative sessions are good but only attire confirmed IRC sailors. The formula of the Open North Sea Championships has been reviewed but didn't generate the desired effect yet. The Open Belgian Championship was an event with a very nice competition in both IRC 1-2 and IRC 3 though some animosity between the halftonners and other IRC 3 boats is a recurring issue.

A new trend is the fleet of J/80's in Nieuwpoort where fleets up to 15 boats appear for local racing. Some of them are looking for participation in international regattas. A lot of sailors look at this formula, rather than handicap sailing in IRC. The smaller budget, the limited team size and the fun aspect of these sport boats attract more youngsters and talented sailors. It is not sure whether these sailors are "lost" crew for IRC teams, or whether they could become new talent that could move on to IRC racing.

4. Challenges for 2021

After this difficult season of 2020 it will be a challenge to keep owners en crews motivated to sail further in IRC. We're convinced that teams with an international agenda will pursuit their IRC membership but sailors, clubs and organisers must be challenged to choose for IRC rather than other handicap systems. The project with IRC Go in one club should be realised in 2021. The use of the SER gave a taste of IRC to competitors and might be a good entry. Information sessions and assistance to sailors about IRC are essential.

The need for national IRC measurers is obvious. We'd like to attend or organise a clinic with UNCL or RORC in 2021/2022. The Halfton Class asked if they could form their own measurer but that is something we want to supervise.

The contact with UNCL is of excellent quality and we'll continue to promote IRC with our sailors.

Report / Carl Sabbe – BEL IRC – Luc Geirnaert – WWSV