



IRC Congress 2024

Minutes of a meeting on Saturday, 12th October 2024 at Dubai Offshore Sailing Club (DOSC)

Present:

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| Michael Boyd | Chairman |
| Carl Sabbe | Vice Chairman / Belgium |
| Simon James | Vice Chairman / IRC South East Asia |
| David Cullen | Irish Cruiser Racing Association |
| Willem Ellemeet | Dutch Owners' Association |
| Gilles Fournier | IRC Board |
| Liz Hall | Irish Sailing Association |
| Akihisa Miyakawa | Japan Owners' Association Chairman |
| Haruhiko Kaku | Japan Sailing Federation |
| Richard Palmer | IRC Board |
| Philippe Serenon | FRA PropIRC (owners' group) / IRC Board |
| Ed Shiffner | Dubai Offshore Sailing Club Rear Commodore |
| Stephen Tudor | GBR IRC Committee Chairman |
| Chris Zonca | Australian Sailing |
| Jason Smithwick | IRC Director of Rating |
| Ludovic Abollivier | YCF Centre de Calcul IRC Senior Manager |
| Jenny Howells | RORC Technical Manager |
| Emma Smith | RORC Technical Team |
| Sally Moss | RORC Technical Team |
| Jeremy Wilton | RORC CEO |

Present on Zoom:

| | |
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| David Griffiths | Australian Owners' Group |
| Jerry Rollins | Philippines Sailing Association |
| Godwin Zammit | Malta IRC Owners' Association |
| Jean Sans | IRC Technical Committee |

RORC – Royal Ocean Racing Club

YCF – Yacht Club de France

Where noted as 'published' below, the documents may be found at

<https://ircrating.org/about/irc-congress/>

Actions are marked with a sidebar

1. Introduction and Welcome

Michael Boyd welcomed the participants and thanked DOSC for hosting the meeting.

2. Apologies and Proxy Votes

Apologies were noted from Gideon Mowser (Hong Kong Sailing Federation) and Nick Scott (Royal Yachting Association). There were no proxy votes submitted.

3. Approval of Previous Minutes

The minutes from the 2023 Congress were approved without amendments, with no outstanding issues to address that were not already included in the current agenda.

4. IRC Board Report

Michael Boyd presented a report from the IRC Board, stating that regular meetings were held and generally covered topics that would also be discussed at Congress. He extended thanks to Carl Sabbe for his leadership in improving transparency, which would be addressed in more detail later in the meeting.

5. IRC Annual Report (published)

Jason Smithwick presented the IRC Annual Report. The overall number of certificates issued had remained stable, despite a gradual decline in the number of participating boats over recent years which was consistent with a wider trend across the sport. Jason requested any further information on evidence relating to a declining of participation numbers. The report also indicated stability in income, probably due to a shift towards larger boats. Further updates included discussions on keel trim tabs, which had seen a rise in popularity among high-tech boats, prompting a review of rating policies. The report also highlighted ongoing evaluations regarding scow bows and noted that events and sailors are still adapting to the rating of the number of headsails. It was planned to keep the rules and formula around this stable for another year.

It was noted that in addition to IRC Technical Committee both YCF and RORC have separate technical committees which include industry experts and designers and which also advise on safety, trends etc.

The 2024 IRC European Championship had been held successfully in Dublin, Ireland. The 2025 IRC European Championship will be held in Bonifacio in Corsica in late September, with 2-3 days of competition.

6. National Reports (published)

Updates from the various regions reflected efforts to adapt to changing dynamics, improve understanding of the rules, and promote sailing despite some challenges. Australia reported successful equipment inspections that enhanced compliance, with a few surprises found during inspections serving as valuable learning opportunities. In Ireland, there was notable progress in raising awareness of the IRC rules through equipment inspections, which helped improve understanding of compliance among owners. In France, equipment inspections were highlighted as a priority, and these are sometimes also undertaken on individual boats separate from events. In November Japan will host a mini-ton cup which will use Endorsement for the first time, and all the entries will be weighed and measured.

Youth engagement remained a priority, with various initiatives to attract younger sailors to participate in events. In France concerns about declining boat ownership and the complexities involved in the sport were raised, and the necessity for owners and race organisers to be more proactive in encouraging young people into the sport. In the Netherlands, participation among young people remains low, with many reluctant to commit to events far in advance or for extended periods. However, in Malta young people are joining in thanks to efforts by sailing schools and sailing clubs. Belgium had seen a shift toward increased participation in smaller, trailerable boats.

In Southeast Asia, efforts were being made to rebuild the sailing community post-Covid, with particular emphasis on making the sport accessible to both expatriates and local sailors and encouraging boats to travel to different events in the region. Meanwhile, the UAE focused on fostering a stronger grassroots sailing culture, working to encourage cruising boat owners to try racing and exploring ways to expand racing activities beyond the established sailing centres. The potential for sailing in Jeddah was also discussed and a potential new 600-mile race in the Red Sea, along with long-term aspirations for growth in Qatar and Oman.

Other regions, including France and the Baltic states, reported encouraging signs of growth, with new races and collaborative events helping to draw interest from different countries. The Baltic Sea Race in Finland is

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attracting more boats, and a new rule authority in Estonia has been established to support IRC growth. The Philippines also reported a small but growing fleet with new boats joining.

The International Maxi Association was not represented at the meeting, but Jason Smithwick and Ludovic Abollivier attended the Maxi Yacht Rolex Cup. Jason highlighted the IMA's careful approach to rated data sources; and noted that the 70% reduced crew rating (which is specific to IMA events) is being used in some sections of the fleet as an optimisation tool. Ludo reported positively on equipment inspections, emphasising their effectiveness. Jason underscored the importance of carefully managing this significant fleet, given the ongoing pressure to consider alternative rating systems.

On behalf of Turkey, Ludovic Abollivier reported that approximately 300 certificates are issued annually, with events taking place throughout the country.

Jeremy Wilton reported on behalf of RORC and highlighted the resurgence of the Admiral's Cup in 2025, which has seven official entries so far. It is 22 years since the Admiral's Cup was last staged and there has been great interest globally: RORC is expecting up to 20 teams of 2 boats.

Across all reports, there was a sense of resilience and commitment to addressing logistical challenges and finding innovative ways to maintain participation and attract new sailors.

7. IRC Notices for 2024

No official notices or interpretations had been issued for 2024, except for an advance specific notice regarding the future rating of trim tabs issued to the International Maxi Association (IMA) and design offices.

8. Proposals for IRC Rule and Rating Changes for 2025 (published)

IRC Technical Committee proposed rule changes:

Several proposed amendments were presented by Jason Smithwick on behalf of the IRC Technical Committee. Full details are in the published paper. In summary:

- **Sail Measurement:** Update to align with the 2025-2028 Equipment Rules of Sailing (ERS), specifying consistent batten characteristics for sail measurement. Simon James raised the question of whether In-House Certification (IHC) measurers can measure sails outside their lofts; it was confirmed that they may, and clarified that while they could not affix an IHC sticker they could use an IRC measurement sticker.
- **Internal Ballast:** Clarification that internal ballast must be fastened or bonded in place according to ERS definitions. Concerns had been raised about the fixing of internal ballast, with one particular example being ratchet straps, which is not considered a secure method. This issue also underscores the importance of adhering to the Offshore Special Regulations (OSR).
- **Rotating Rig:** Explicit addition of rotating rigs to rig factor considerations, and requirement for unusual rig features to be declared at any time. In answer to questions about what 'full detail' means in rule 21.2.4, and what were the effects on rig factor: this depends on the boat and the feature. The rating offices have a documented list of hull and rig factor standard adjustments.
- **Sheeting of Sails:** Headsails, flying headsails, or spinnakers cannot be sheeted from multiple points simultaneously.
- **In-House Certification Measurer:** Adjusted terminology to match the 2025-2028 ERS.
- **Spare Headsails:** Permits carrying multiple spare headsails onboard, only when using a single furling headsail.
- **Stored Power:** Clarification that stored power excludes power generated or accumulated by the crew while racing. Crews cannot top up accumulators before racing, but may do so while racing (*racing* as defined by RRS).

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- **Headsails and Flying Headsail Definition:** Minor update in wording for consistency with the spinnaker definition.

All the above IRC Technical Committee proposed rule changes for 2025 were accepted.

Country submissions:

Full details are in the published papers. In summary:

AUS – IRC rule 9.8, rating reviews

This submission proposed reducing the tolerance for weight variation in the context of a protest or rating review from 5% to 1%. This sparked debate about the practicality and fairness of measuring weight with such precision across different conditions.

It was agreed to change IRC rule 9.8 to 2% variation for boat weights, balancing practicality and accuracy with the ability to detect intentional discrepancies.

NED1 – IRC rule 21.1.5 (d) sail limitations during an event

A proposal to change IRC rules to allow boats to change sails during an event by default was discussed extensively. There was a consensus to maintain the general policy of IRC rules being the most stringent option, allowing exceptions to be handled through a Notice of Race.

The submission was rejected.

It was agreed to add suggested NOR wording to the Race Management Guidelines for event organisers that wish to amend IRC rule 21.1.5 (d).

NED2 – IRC rule 21.1.5 (e) spare mainsail

A proposal to allow spare mainsails to be used as a racing replacement was rejected due to concerns about increased costs and complexity.

It was agreed to add more detailed examples of NOR wording to the Race Management Guidelines for event organisers that wish to amend IRC rule 21.1.5 (e).

FRA suggestion – unified club rating system

The committee discussed a proposal from FRA for a unified club rating system, noting that the GBR currently has 1,500 boats rated under the YTC in collaboration with the RYA. YTC is popular in the UK, provides a pathway to IRC, and is gaining international interest including Dubai and Cascais. The RYA funds YTC in the UK, while an overseas proposal suggested a fee of £20 per boat.

The IRC GO! System is being used in Belgium. It is a simplified IRC without sail data, allows an immediate TCC to be obtained online on race day, with the option to move to a more accurate full IRC rating. In France there is also the OSIRIS handicap system.

A working party was suggested by Philippe Serenon, with Ed Shiffner volunteering, though no agreement was reached.

9. IRC Transparency (published)

A paper on transparency presented by Carl Sabbe led to a discussion on improving accessibility to rating data. Suggestions included expanding the search options for Valid Boat Data on the IRC website to include Design type; and allowing more and easier trial certificate options for boat owners. While there was broad

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support for increased transparency, technical challenges and sensitivities surrounding specific data points, like hull factor (HF), were highlighted. There was a general support for initiatives aimed at improving owner satisfaction.

The committee discussed the complexities of implementing increased transparency. Stephen Tudor requested more information about HF calculations be published on the IRC website. Jason Smithwick noted that while HF is a major focus for owners, it is just one of many aspects of the TCC calculation; it is calculated from multiple inputs such as DLR, materials, appendages and accommodation, and is difficult to change. HF should not be considered a negotiation point. In answer to a request for publishing more HF configuration details on certificates, Jason Smithwick noted that while HF inputs have become more detailed, on standard designs there will be a standard HF calculated and not every boat will have all the individual inputs.

There was support for enabling owners to apply for trial certificates directly and this feature is being considered in new IRC application software. Suggestions included a membership system, or a single fee allowing owners to apply for a fixed number of trial certificates.

The general agreement was to improve transparency without compromising the integrity or commercial viability of the IRC rating system.

10. IRC Submissions to World Sailing (see links below)

There were no direct submissions from the IRC to World Sailing; however, two relevant submissions were reviewed, as a number of those present will be at the World Sailing Annual Conference and have the potential to influence the outcome of submissions:

[011 – OSR Storm Sails.](#)

This proposal concerning more stringent requirements for OSR Storm and Heavy Weather Sails was supported.

[013 – OSR Stability.](#)

Serious concerns about the monopolistic language in this submission were raised. RORC had already raised this with World Sailing and had suggested alternative wording, however this had not been heeded. An update received today (12 Oct) removed 'in the ORC rating system' but as 'Stability Index' is an ORC concept this is not a material change.

The Congress expressed strong disapproval of the discrimination and bias toward ORC requirements in the stability regulations, which it considered unacceptable.

11. Any Other Business

The Congress concluded with a discussion on future venues for the IRC Congress. Cowes, UK, was confirmed for the 2025 meeting in conjunction with the RORC centenary celebrations, while Istanbul, Turkey, was proposed as the 2026 location hosted by the Turkish Offshore Racing Club.

Michael Boyd closed the meeting by thanking the dedicated rating personnel in the UK and France, and Congress participants for their contributions and commended their efforts to sustain and grow the sport of sailing.

The meeting finished at 1700.