

## ACT Rowing Association – Boat Race Official Report to AGM

### Boat Race Officials

ACTRA relies on volunteer support for the provision of Boat Race Officials for ACTRA sponsored regattas. The size and competence of this pool over the past season was strong, with 40+ BROs available to call upon for most of the season. A predominance of BROs come from the two Grammar schools. Without their significant contribution ACTRA would struggle to have sufficient BROs to run the regatta program.

There has been some earnest effort amongst other clubs to build their contribution to the BRO pool, with commendable effort coming from Capital Lakes and Radford College in this regard.

There was little problem last season with obtaining sufficient BROs for each regatta. On average there were 20 BROs available, which is quite comfortable to run any size regatta on the LGB course. Also of note is that most of the BRO burden is carried by a little less than half of the total BRO pool. It is retention of these BROs that should be of primary concern for ACTRA.

Average BROs per Regatta	BROs	BROs attending more than 50% of Regattas	Club
1.9	3	2	ANUBC
0.7	4	0	Black Mountain
2.8	4	3	CRC
1.6	4	1	Daramalan
6.3	13	7	Boys Grammar
3.4	8	4	Girls Grammar
0.0	0	0	Lake Tuggeranong
0.9	3	1	Capital Lakes
1.2	3	1	Radford
1.2	2	1	Unaligned
<b>20.2</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Totals</b>

The large number of ‘casual’ BROs is not of any concern, as these BROs provide a useful surge capacity for large regattas and closely spaced regattas. They are valued, and having more on the register will deepen ACTRA’s capability to handle large regattas such as ISRA. There is a misconception amongst some that this group of BROs is of limited use. To be clear, this group is just as valuable as the more active BROs, and ‘casual’ commitment should be supported at all levels.

ACT now has one FISA accredited BRO, and 2 Rowing Australia accredited BROs. There are a significant number of other experienced and highly competent BROs (in excess of 20), and this core group continues to provide high quality BRO services and steer a BRO culture of encouraging and promoting enjoyable regattas. Visiting clubs frequently remark in a very favourable manner on the contrasting approach and style of ACTRA BROs compared to BROs in other states. This is pleasing and something that ACTRA BROs hold dear and strive to maintain.

The coming season will present new challenges for BROs, as there are a number of BROs whose association with rowing has long past the participation of their children in regattas, and have indicated that they are hanging up the flags for various reasons. These BROs will be missed and efforts must be made to ensure we draft and grow parents of child rowers to BRO ranks.

### **Equipment**

BRO's continue to enjoy the support of the Association in providing BRO equipment of high utility. Special mention must be made of Martin Sessions, who has continued with development of timing system improvements and expansion of the utility of the timing equipment. The radio starters he developed have significantly improved time accuracy and have resulted in significantly fewer non-timed events. Martin has also progressed development of a portable starting light system, which was very successful at the recent University Games. Use of this system has help steer concepts for a more robust and deployable system for the future. I call upon the ACTRA AGM to recognise the significant and valuable contribution made by Martin in development of the starting and timing system.

The new shelter at the finish line has also been very much appreciated by BROs. It has eliminated the hassle and effort required to put up and pack away the tent each regatta, and alleviated storage issues in the trailer. The improvement in the finish area work environment is also greatly appreciated by all. Our regular chief judge would be even more glowing in her praise of the shelter if the roofline extended to provide shelter over the judges position.

### **Health and Safety**

There were very few safety incidents over the season that demanded some form of Association response. Rowers generally followed traffic patterns and kept good look-out in congested areas such as the finish line. There were also no regattas where heat stress was a safety concern.

However, health issues over algal levels plagued a good part of the latter season regattas. The absence of clear policy and agreements with the NCA contributed to some tension in the running of regattas. This came to a head at the ISRA regatta where the Acting Head of the NCA called for the immediate shut-down of the regatta at the start of the second day. While a considered approach of stalling decision making saw this regatta concluded as planned, it soured relations with the NCA and raised a level of hysteria amongst some parents of rowers who over-reacted to published advice from various sources. I need not remind the AGM of the negative PR and considerable public debate that followed the event.

The Association would be well served by a graduated plan providing guidance to the rowing community on how health threats from algal will be handled, what steps the Association will take to minimise the hazard, and importantly, what responsibility rowers and parents of rowers have in deciding whether they or their children row in a regatta. I am sure we will see a return of algal blooms for the foreseeable future, and a clear approach on how the Association will deal with such hazards should be developed and published to satisfy those who require formal advice on these matters.

### **Storage**

An on-going and annoying issue for BROs has been the continued problem of boat storage and BRO trailer storage. Boats and trailers are becoming unwanted orphans, and the problem at the end of each regatta of trying to find a temporary home for boats and BRO trailers is becoming more and more difficult. The temporary homes for boats and trailers has and is grinding on a few, and a more permanent and workable solution must be found. By workable I mean that the storage location must be reasonably central, otherwise fetching the trailers and boats becomes a burden for those with tow bars, and requires even earlier starts to the day for those 'saddled' with handling these items.

The Gungahlin Cemetery solution, albeit unorthodox, was not a practical solution as the location was too far out of the way, and access was not simple on the weekends when boats are picked up and dropped off. This just built resistance to BROs offering to help out by towing these items.

### **Regatta Schedule of Events**

BROs are aware of the issues and sensitivities around the schedule of events for regattas, and the now constant tinkering of the regatta formats. While this is a matter best left to the guidance of the Regatta Sub-committee, I am disturbed by the number of arguments that attempt to appeal to false BRO issues. This draws the BRO community at large into what is sometimes a vexatious debate, and does little to encourage BROs to continue on or feel valued. Indeed this behaviour unwittingly paints BROs as the villain in the unrest of how regattas are structured.

There are a few key points that need to be clearly expressed at the AGM and to the rowing community at large:

1. BROs do not have any issues or concerns over the length of regattas. Most BROs have already committed themselves to duties for the day, and are not aggrieved by the length of the regatta. If a regatta finished early, that is a bonus that is welcomed. If it finishes on time at 3pm, that is considered a good day's work and a job well done.
2. The race interval should not be used as a relentless means of pushing a regatta through to an earlier conclusion. Shorter race intervals generally mean less time to get back to the next race, and greater stress when a BRO boat is out of action for re-fuelling, rest stops, or other matters. Shorter race intervals mean BROs work harder, with more stress and are more likely to get blamed for regattas being behind time. The temptation to shorten the regatta with more frequent racing also comes with an attitude of no time for breaks. This is the wrong approach. Shorten the race interval if you must, but only if you include more breaks in the program to allow BROs to put their feet on the ground, grab a coffee, have a nature stop, refuel, and catch up with friends in the rowing community for a few minutes. Take these basics away and we may find ourselves without willing BRO volunteers. Keep the volunteers happy – not over worked and stressed.
3. Shortened race intervals places greater stress on clubs for boat turn-around, which results in rowers arriving at the start late. BROs do not want to take a hard line and exclude or start the race without them, as this does not promote participation in the sport. cReating situations

where rowers turn up late generates resentment and harsh criticism on BROs that is unwarranted.

### **Recognition**

We must continually remind ourselves that BROs are VOLUNTEERS. There are a number who deserve special recognition for their continuing efforts and dedication. I commend to the AGM the following BROs, who have provided above and beyond significant contribution to the sport without asking or seeking recognition of their efforts. They are:

Nick Hunter

Rick Warboys

Bruce Selleck

Ross Ford

Keith Love

Martin Sessions

Edwin Bien

[Add the inevitable one I have forgotten]

These individuals willingly arrive earlier than the rest to set up for regattas and are the last to leave after packing away platforms and gear. They give freely of their own time to make sure regattas are set up to run smoothly and equipment is serviced and working. Without these guys, we would struggle to maintain our regatta program

One final closing point. It has been several seasons now since the Association hosted a dinner or other recognition event for BROs. This is an essential ingredient in keeping willing volunteers and providing recognition for their efforts. It was also an important 'buy-off' of spouses, who put up with BROs sneaking off on a Saturday morning instead of doing things around the house. The Association would be wise to restart some form of volunteer recognition. Enough said on this.

Geoff Northam

ACTRA BRO Coordinator