

WSRA Chairman's report 2008

Dear members

As the days lengthen and our thoughts turn to the coming season it is with a tinge of sadness that I take up my pen to complete the chairman's report for the last time. However, it is with pride that I can report that the WSRA has had another extremely successful year despite one of the worst summers on record.

Your committee (to which I am extremely grateful) has worked hard over the last 12 months to provide members of the WSRA with a range of exciting league and non-league races, whilst maintaining an impressive safety record.

On the water. The season started with a memorable Celtic Challenge which was a true challenge in all senses. Once again the Irish beat Aberystwyth to the line by a handful of seconds after over 17 hours of rowing. I am pleased to report that even though the event made a financial loss in 2008 the organising committee are prepared to go ahead with another challenge in 2010. The two leagues functioned well and friendly races were extremely well attended. The focus on enticing novice rowers into the sport was very effective and I hope that these new rowers and clubs will compete in the leagues in the future. All the championship races were held and were well supported providing some exciting racing.

However, again my biggest disappointment was the further reduction in junior members within the association and junior teams taking part in races. We must ensure that Clubs are more active in recruiting junior members and creating links with local schools. This has to be a priority for the future.

Although the longboat remains our primary focus the number of Yoles is increasing and provides a welcome progression of our sport into the international arena. The success of Aberdyfi in this area shows that we have the potential to be extremely competitive. Indeed sliding-seat sea rowing figures prominently in our development plan for the future. We have had access to the WARA high performance coach and clubs have benefited from his focussed, professional approach. The development plan describes the setting up of an elite squad which will compete at an International level for both Wales and GB in sliding seat Yoles. Although this is a welcome development I sound a note of caution. The increased involvement of WARA in sea rowing may well erode our position and seek to control our participation in events. It is vital that we maintain the good relations we have fostered with WARA to ensure that we continue to have a say in the development of our sport.

Off the water. Although individual clubs have active social calendars, the social side of the WSRA continues to decline and this was epitomised by the lack of interest in the annual dinner. This year Mochras showed the way forward by organising an end of season race and meal. This was very well attended and was great fun. Perhaps such an event could take over as the annual dinner and rotate amongst clubs with safe reliable late season venues.

Finance and strategy. Financially the WSRA is extremely sound and we are entering a position where we would be able to finance our own initiatives to support clubs and rowing. This is very important in a climate of reduced grant funding. However we will need our healthy bank account when we come to finance the new mould for the Longboat. Our contacts with WARA have strengthened and our development plan will enable the flow of grants to start once again. One of the aspects of which I am most proud of is the way in which we now ensure that all affiliated clubs have a comprehensive insurance scheme in place.

People – some special thanks. I would like to thank the whole of the committee. They work tirelessly on behalf of the association and deserve our gratitude and thanks. Finally, I would also like to record my thanks to all the clubs and rowers that make our events so excellent. I have enjoyed my tenure as Chairman and I thank all of you for the support and warm friendship that you have shown me over the last few years. See you on the water.

Mick (Mick Fothergill - WSRA Chairman Jan 2009)