

SUBMISSION FOR FAI GENERAL CONFERENCE 2013 –ANTALYA, TURKEY

ELECTRONIC ATTENDANCE AT FAI MEETINGS

Background

The FAI is a world wide organisation whose origins are European based. For historical and logistic reasons most FAI Meetings are held in either Lausanne or certainly within Europe. In order to preserve the integrity of both FAI discussions and decisions it is important that all countries feel that they have an equal opportunity to participate.

For countries that are distant from Europe, and those that have limited funding, the cost of attending a physical meeting in both time and money may make this impossible on a regular basis. This applies to both FAI general meetings and Commission Plenary Meetings. The problem is greater where the number of participants within a country for a particular air sport may be low. If the majority of those participants are not interested in FAI level competition they may be reluctant to fund what is often incorrectly seen as a 'holiday' for their representative.

A good example is the most recent NAC Presidents' Meeting where only one country that was represented was from outside Europe. For Australia to attend this one morning and half afternoon meeting, it would involve travel, with minimum jet lag recovery after the flights, totalling eight days and a total cost with economy airfares and required accommodation of over \$7,000. It is impossible to sell this within the Australian NAC as a cost effective exercise, and it is a large time commitment which is disproportionate to the benefit.

Current Option

The only current option, other than attending, is to provide a proxy, which only covers voting. This may be only a limited gain as a country can only hold one proxy and many countries, even though they strongly want to have a vote on one topic, are reluctant to provide a proxy for the whole meeting.

Electronic Meetings

The FAI Executive Board are now holding some meetings electronically. Skype, which they may be using, is ideal for one on one discussions and small numbers but is not ideal for larger meetings.

An alternative with world wide acceptance is GoToMeeting. This is extensively used in the marketing and business communities and is specifically tailored for electronic meetings and presentations using the internet. It is ideally suited to formal FAI style meetings, which are controlled by a Chairperson and where participants are called to speak on a topic and then use a microphone to address the meeting. Fundamentally using what is already in place it can be expanded to include those who are not physically at the same location.

GoToMeeing

Many may be already familiar with the product. The organiser has total control of the meeting whilst each online participant has an audio output and can also see the presentation material on their computer screens. There are two options for them to directly participate, depending on the organiser's decisions. They can type questions and comments which can then be read out by the organiser if they see fit. Alternatively their microphone can be un-muted and they can contribute in real time via audio, as though they were physically at the meeting. Using the data entry method it would not be too hard to have an acceptable protocol to enable them to exercise their vote.

By this means they are effectively taking part in the meeting as though they were physically present.

Costs

Other than for evaluation purposes a software licence has to be purchased. This is economical and although costs vary marginally in different countries, a cost of \$US1000 per year for up to one hundred participants in any single event is typical. There is no cost for a participant to download the application onto their computer. The only other direct cost is the normal cost of having an internet connection available.

Other issues

Physical attendance at a meeting may still be a preferred option for many, as the opportunity to be part of the environment and to network is valuable.

Whilst the role of the Chairperson is to control both the physical meeting and the online participants, in practice it may be better to have a separate person looking at the online requests and advising the Chairperson by an appropriate method.

The online attendees are very likely to be in a different time zone but compared to the alternative of physically attending most would consider this to be a minor inconvenience.

It does not assist those with only limited internet access

Organisers of any meeting have to thoroughly prepare beforehand and slightly more effort will be required for online participation.

Technology can fail and participants would have to accept that on occasions this is outside the control of the organiser

Conclusion

It is strongly urged that the FAI adopt GoToMeeting as an alternative to physical attendance at compatible FAI Meetings. The additional cost is modest and by doing so the FAI would promote world wide participation in its business and decision making processes. It would greatly enhance the democratic basis of the FAI and improve the image and acceptability of the FAI. This would particularly be with those NAC's and National Air Sports organisations who feel both somewhat disenfranchised and that the FAI is a remote and potentially irrelevant organisation.

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