

**IGC SAILPLANE GRAND PRIX
ACTION PLAN
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Version 0.4

Introduction

The IGC has a number of responsibilities to the international gliding community. Historically the IGC has tended to focus on World Gliding Championships, world records, and badges and pay little heed to the problems of airspace, licences and membership and other such threats facing national gliding bodies and their members.

The IGC as a body is not able to deal with specific issues on a country-by-country basis, but can only provide top-down leadership and overarching policies on issues such as airspace and licences etc.

The IGC is also not a legal entity and cannot enter into contractual arrangements independent of the FAI. Accordingly, any arrangements made with partners for the provision of services need to be achieved via the FAI.

A significant challenge facing gliding is that the sport lacks “visibility”. Amongst gliding enthusiasts there is huge support for the sport and competitions run international, nationally and at regional levels within countries. However, the 125,000-glider pilots worldwide face challenges attracting significant public or media attention to their sport.

The Sailplane Grand Prix (SGP) has been developed as a stand-alone competition that aims to combine the spectacle of gliding and glider racing with a short, sharp and understandable format to attract the media and the public.

The IGC has the expertise, internally and through member nations and their clubs, to create and sustain a gliding race format such as the SGP race. What the IGC lacks is finances, marketing and media presentations expertise and capability. These shortfalls create a significant challenge for the future development of the SGP race.

Objectives of the SGP

The IGC Bureau has defined three objectives for the SGP:

1. To educate the general public about the sport of gliding including the challenges of glider racing, the performance of modern gliders and the excitement of the GP race through the use of television as the primary medium
2. To engage glider pilots with the GP race format using the internet as the primary medium
3. To entertain the public and glider pilots through television and the internet

Desirable Outcomes for the SGP

The SGP is designed to provide an interesting and spectacular gliding race for the media and public. The SGP is also intended to compliment the existing World and Continental Gliding Championships.

With a SGP product that is media friendly, understandable and exciting it is anticipated that the public's imagination, interest and curiosity will be sparked and that sponsorship support will be generated.

Public interest will, if the experience of other sports is an indication, create a demand for gliding opportunities. This will provide, at club-level, the chance to improve membership numbers. Providing an alternative type of race at club level with a Grand Prix-type event may also help to retain members.

Public and media interest can serve to enhance political awareness and acceptance of the sport. This may result in IGC and national bodies being better able to argue for the protection of airspace for recreational use; access to airfields; and, for reasonable and appropriate licensing and medical requirements.

The History of the GP to date

The Original Concept

The initial testing of the SGP concept was achieved in Gawler, Australia, in 2001. The original concept behind the development of the SGP was that it form the gliding element for the World Air Games in 2005. The dream was that the race be short, sharp, simple to understand and flexible in design to enable it to be modified to meet changing demands and the vagaries of particular soaring sites.

The simplicity in design was also meant to allow a SGP to be held on an airfield with the minimum of support and infrastructure; the ideal being that the host airfield be already in use by an active club with a strong history of running gliding events.

The Reality that Developed

Following a five-year development process and the cancellation of the 2005 FAI World Air Games, the first FAI World Sailplane GP Final was held in Saint Auban, France, in September 2005.

A full round of eight qualifying GP races was held in 2006 with the second FAI World Sailplane GP Final being held in Omarama, New Zealand in December 2007. Media interest in the qualifying round and 2nd Final was significant. Pilot involvement was strong with a number of pilots flying in more than one qualifying GP to gain entry to the 2nd Final event. A fatality at the 2nd Final was not related to the style of racing and has not resulted in any apparent reduction in enthusiasm for the GP product amongst the gliding community.

A further round is underway in calendar years 2008/ 2009

Air Sports Live using tracking, air-to-air helicopter TV cameras, big screen TV presentation and graphical presentation of the race achieved live presentation of the January 2006 qualifying event.

Live Internet coverage, including tracking, live streaming of video and commentary was provided by Air Sports Live at the 2nd GP Final. There were a number of technical problems with this coverage that could be attributed to the media producers learning how to put this product on the Internet.

A DVD product was also produced following the 2nd GP Final.

In January 2006 and December 2007 Air Sports Live, as a Company, also undertook the marketing and management of the public access to the airfield. These two events created a significant degree of interest but also created a number of problems, including the expectations generated amongst the public, the competitors and the gliding community for future GP races, particularly the final.

At other SGP events, live internet tracking has been provided through the medium of Vpos and Silent Wings. These have been adequate solutions for those who are knowledgeable about the sport, but provide insufficient information for others.

The Situation Now

The end result of this development has been the creation of a race format that is fun and flexible and does not need a lot of infrastructure support to stage. However, it demands significant financial and infrastructure support to market and to present it well to the public.

The FAI World Air Games

The SGP remains the IGC's contribution to the new format FAI World Air Games with modifications to the style of the event to suit the limitations and objectives of the World Air Games organisation.

The GP Round

The successful completion of the 1st round of the SGP led the IGC to decide that future rounds of the SGP be held on a two-yearly cycle, with the final being held at the end of each two-year cycle. The decision was that the finals be held in odd calendar years so that they did not conflict with the premier FAI World Gliding Championships.

Challenges for the SGP Future

The three objectives raise significant challenges for the IGC in determining:

- Who is the target audience in each case?
- How to supply a competent and financially viable tracking solution for the internet?
- Where to source the expertise for marketing and presentation, which includes both live internet and TV and delayed TV and other formats?
- How to generate the finances to support the investment required in marketing and in tracking devices and the creation of TV and internet products?

Meeting the Identified Challenges

Who is the Target Audience

The suggested target audiences for the three objectives are:

- Educate - general public and new members
- Engage - existing participants to increase their activity
- Entertain - general public and existing participants

Each of these audiences must be provided with a product that is tailored to their needs. How this is done is dependent on the resources available.

A Competent and Financially Viable Tracking Solution

The reality is that the systems used so far either have limitations or are too expensive. The IGC is not in a strong position to tender for supply of a tracking system because it does not have the financial capability to pay for such a system.

However, there is a growing demand for such systems and a growing supply of them (as we have seen happen with GPS units) and other Air Sports are also seeking tracking solutions.

The IGC should now be actively engaging with the FAI to ensure that a competent and common tracking system is available in the near future.

Sourcing Expertise for Marketing and Presentation

These are independent requirements; the reason for grouping them here is that neither the IGC nor, at this stage, the FAI have the capability to provide either type of expertise.

Again, a growing demand coupled with a growing desire for air sports to be available on mass media products, is likely to create a solution that attracts competent partners to the FAI (and therefore OIGC) for both the marketing and the presentation of air sports.

Because the IGC cannot, of itself, legally enter into contractual agreements, the IGC should also now be actively engaging with the FAI to leverage off potential FAI initiatives for the promotion and presentation of air sports.

Creating the Financial Capability

This is a “chicken-and-egg” situation; if finances were available the IGC would be better placed to act independently; and if the IGC were better placed financially, then creating products that would be more attractive to sponsors would be easier. The reality is that IGC has no funds for such a project and the FAI has limited funds for such a project.

Therefore, external financing needs to be found, especially if the capability demonstrated by Air Sports Live, for example, is to be repeated.

Again, the IGC needs to be actively engaged with the FAI in seeking financial support for air sports products.

The Future Development of the SGP Product

The experience with the SGP to date suggests that there are three clear development paths available:

1. The cessation of the SGP as an IGC sanctioned event.
2. The continuation of the SGP as an alternative form of glider racing that may be used for national and international events on a two-yearly cycle. The SGP would also be the IGCs contribution to the World Air Games.
3. The continuation of the SGP as a form of glider racing designed to meet the objectives stated earlier, which means that finances and expertise need to be provided to create the whole spectacle rather than just the staging of a gliding race.

Pathway 1 This would see us failing to achieve our objectives for the event. Therefore, this option is not viable.

Pathway 2 The continuation of the SGP as just “another glider race” without the bells and whistles, also does not achieve the objectives set out. However, it is an option for SGP races held at national levels where the primary objective may be to select pilots to compete in an international SGP event. This option requires a local organiser with adequate existing infrastructure aided by support from the IGC. It is effectively no different for the local organiser than hosting and running a conventional regional or small national gliding championship. This pathway also allows the SGP to continue while solutions are sought for the identified challenges.

Pathway 3 This option fulfils the IGC objectives for the SGP, but also imposes significant financial and infrastructure requirements on the IGC and the host. Creating a way forward to achieve this option is a challenge, especially in the current world economic climate. This option requires a local organiser with adequate existing infrastructure aided by support from the IGC. But it also requires dedicated marketing and presentation expertise, both with appropriate financing, sourced from outside of the FAI-IGC environment.

The Short-Term Situation

In the short-term we cannot expect to see any sudden supply of equipment and funds to allow us to achieve our objectives for the SGP.

Therefore we need to focus on how we maintain the momentum already gained and continue to develop the SGP product.

Effectively we are in the situation proposed by Pathway 2 above - *The continuation of the SGP as an alternative form of glider racing that may be used for national and international events on a two-yearly cycle. The SGP would also be the IGCs contribution to the World Air Games.*

To do this we need a local organiser for each event and support from the IGC for each event.

We need to be prepared to maintain the SGP at this level for at least another two rounds (ie until the end of 2013)

Any presentation of the event – through television and / or internet – will be entirely dependent on whether local sponsorship can be found for each event.

The Role of the Local Organiser

The selected site for SGP events needs to satisfy a number of conditions to enable the event to be achieved. This includes having:

- An existing gliding infrastructure to simplify the work necessary to create the event
- Local experience in running regional size gliding competitions
- Volunteers to provide assistance with accommodation, gridding, scoring etc
- Accommodation and catering on or adjacent to the airfield

The local organiser will only be responsible for financial costs associated with hosting the race itself at their airfield. In order to minimise the costs to competitors, it is desirable that these costs be covered by sponsorship rather than through entry fees.

Pilots are expected to fund their own costs of attending the event.

The Role of the IGC

IGC needs to ensure that the SGP product is consistent and well managed. This is, in its simplest form, achieved by having an experienced GP official present at the event, who would probably be appointed as the “Referee”. The basic expenses for the Referee will be covered from the IGCs Juror and Steward competition budget.

The IGC may also provide an Operations Director to manage the SGP Final.

Summary

The IGC has created a gliding product that provides opportunities to educate, engage and entertain the public, the media and other glider pilots.

The promise of a spectacular presentation of the Sailplane Grand Prix, accompanied by extensive marketing, has not been able to continue since the 1st round because of lack of partners with funding prepared to commit to supporting the SGP.

In the short term the IGC and local organisers need to work closely together to maintain the viability of the SGP event.

At the same time the IGC needs to actively engage with the FAI to seek opportunities for marketing, presentation and financing of the SGP, to release its full potential.

The IGC needs to be prepared to run two-yearly rounds of the SGP in 2010/2011 and 2012/2013 as, basically, GP races with minimal presentation of the races.