

Report from the Light-end Working Group for the 2009 IGC Plenum

The objective of this Working Group is to investigate actions across the entire light-end segment of Soaring toward better exploitation of that segment for global membership growth.

In its discussions, the Working Group considered the following:

- The light-end segment of Soaring is fragmented. There is a wide variety of gliders at the light-end of Soaring that do not have a racing home.
- This includes the new generation of ultralight gliders and motorgliders (a.k.a. ULM in some countries) that are emerging and becoming very popular in some countries, and that may drift to other organizations without a “home” as a class in IGC.
- Currently, only the World Class offers a competition avenue for FAI competitions in the light-end. The desire is to open FAI competitions, as well as Regional and local competitions, to wider participation by definition of a class that would be more inclusive of the current variety of gliders at the light-end.
- 13.5 meter span encompasses the majority of the light-end fleet, including older and newer gliders, and provides a clear and significant gap in performance with the 15-meter range. An FAI 13.5m would subsume the current World Class and replace it at WGC and international FAI competitions.
- Experience from the current span-limited classes at the high-end indicates that a class defined solely on a span limit tends to favor the latest models with the highest performance (and highest cost), essentially progressively removing from competition older models with less competitive features and relentlessly driving the cost for competitiveness up. These were judged highly undesirable for the light-end and the desire of a widely inclusive class with respect to gliders and countries.
- Experience from the success of the Club Class indicates that handicaps could allow both older and newer gliders to compete in a common class. For a 13.5m class, this would additionally allow entry over time of emerging designs and future models.
- Data from membership surveys (e.g., Australian report to 2006 IGC Plenum) indicate that 1 to 2 years after entry in the Sport is a critical time to maintain interest and progress, toward long-term retention. A low-cost light-end segment with wide racing opportunities may provide significant contributions in that regard.
- Models were examined from other sports, such as Sailing, where significant membership attraction, in particular young people, and retention at the critical times, is provided by the multitude of small boats classes and the opportunities they provide for local/regional handicap-based or single-design races.
- From historical, economical, or meteorological reasons, there is a very large variability among countries in both the percentage of light-end gliders in the fleet and the type of light-end models. Availability of racing in subclasses under the 13.5m “umbrella class” for the light-end may provide some countries, particularly those with developing or emerging Soaring infrastructure, with added flexibility and racing opportunities to augment participation and foster retention at the critical times of progression in the sport.

Accordingly, a proposal for the definition of a 13.5m class for FAI racing was developed in coordination with the IGC Bureau, and submitted to the Plenum for consideration.