

Background and Analysis by the FISA Council of the proposals for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic event programme

Introduction

In Tokyo next month, the delegates of the FISA Congress will select the proposal for the 2020 Rowing Olympic Programme that will be submitted to the IOC for consideration by the IOC Olympic Programme Commission (in May 2017) and subsequently for decision by the IOC Executive Board (in July 2017). Following two years of extensive consultation with the member federations in a totally transparent process, FISA's Council is proposing what we are convinced is the best and most realistic option in the current context of Olympic sport. An alternative proposal has been submitted by five member federations. Although the FISA Council carefully considered and fully understands the reasoning behind the proposal, the Council does not support it. Submitting this alternative proposal to the IOC Executive Board would weaken the position of the sport of rowing in the Olympic movement.

What is our objective?

FISA's top priority is to ensure the best and most viable and sustainable future for the sport of Rowing. To do so FISA must maintain the strongest possible position in the Olympic Games and within the Olympic Movement. This means achieving gender equality, maintaining our 14 events - including the lightweight category - and as much of our athlete quota as possible. It also means that we must continue to demonstrate our commitment to the goals set out in the IOC's Strategic Plan, Olympic Agenda 2020.

Why the FISA Council proposal?

Change will occur and we can lead it or be led. Rowing is part of the international world of sport and it is a leading sport in the Olympic Games. As such, we must acknowledge the broader picture outside our own sport and the pressures on the Olympics and the Olympic programme, and respond appropriately. We have a responsibility to do our part.

What is clear is that, in 2017, Olympic sports are operating in a new context:

- The Olympic Games are under tremendous pressures in terms of costs, potential host cities, complexity and credibility. To keep the Games successful and attractive, the IOC must impose unprecedented constraints and pressures on all sports in terms of both event and athlete quotas. Rowing, having the third largest athlete quota, is under particular scrutiny.
- There is also increased pressure from other sports and the leadership of the Olympic Movement, who question why rowing is permitted to have a limited weight category in their quota when the only other sports with this benefit are the combat sports and weightlifting.
- The IOC no longer uses a sport-based approach to determine the Olympic programme, but rather an event-based approach. Therefore, the Olympic Programme Commission and IOC Executive Board will be considering the value of each individual event in every sport in terms of its contribution to the success of the Games. In this new context and with this increased flexibility, the IOC Executive Board is now more likely to consider changes to individual events than may have been the case in the past.

FISA's Role and Obligation to its Members

As the International Federation, FISA has access to information about the international sport landscape and the movements and trends therein. It is our responsibility to transmit this information to you, our constituent members.

Over the past two years, alongside our consultation process with the member federations, we have worked very hard to build a constructive and trusting relationship with the IOC leaders and administration. Like the other sports, rowing must listen, react, adapt and exercise extreme care in our strategy with regard to how we position our sport.

From all of our discussions with the IOC, the message is clear: they strongly question the inclusion of lightweight rowing in the programme of the Olympic Games. This is certainly not a new situation; the IOC has consistently questioned the inclusion of lightweight rowing in previous reviews of the Olympic Programme but the context has dramatically changed. It is very clear to us, given this new context, the IOC will not consider an increase in the number of lightweight events, nor even the status quo of three.

This brings the Council to its assessment of the two proposals on the table for vote at the Congress:

AUS, CAN, CHN, DEN, SUI Proposal: Replace the M4- with the LW4-

The proposal submitted by the five national federations listed above **is highly unlikely to be supported by the Olympic Programme Commission nor accepted by the IOC Executive Board**, for the reasons mentioned below:

- This programme proposes an increase in the number of lightweight events, from three to four.
- It is extremely difficult to justify the LW4- as an Olympic Programme event considering that it has not been on the World Championship programme for the past 20 years.
- Most importantly, by submitting such a proposal, we believe the IOC may then:
 - Consider that FISA has ignored the questions raised in regards to the lightweight category, so dismiss the proposal outright; and
 - In dismissing the proposal, take the opportunity to eliminate the rowing lightweight category altogether
 - In the worst case, reduce the number of events and athlete quota.

This proposal therefore carries a high risk that the number of rowing events will be reduced, as well as the possible exclusion of all lightweight events, resulting in a significant weakening of rowing's position within the Olympic movement.

FISA Council Proposal: Replace the LM4- with the W4-

The FISA Council strongly believes that this is the only proposal that **would be supported by the Olympic Programme Commission and accepted by the IOC Executive Board**, because it addresses their concerns regarding the rowing programme, being gender equality and the lightweight category.

In reducing the number of lightweight events to the two lightweight doubles only, we are acknowledging the concerns of the IOC while presenting a solution that maintains the two events that have been proven to increase universality, the reason the lightweight events were introduced in the first place.

We believe that this proposal therefore offers the best chance to retain the 14 Olympic events and the athlete quota.

Conclusion

The FISA Council has made this proposal following an extensive process that involved the member federations and the IOC, taking into consideration the difficult context in which we are operating. It addresses the main challenges to the rowing programme expected from the Olympic Programme Commission and the IOC Executive Board: gender equality and the lightweight category, and puts us in a stronger position to maintain events and athlete quota.

19 January 2017

FISA Council