



World Swimming Coaches Association Newsletter

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From the Executive Director

Once again, recent activity by OUR International Federation, FINA, has raised eyebrows around the world and raised the question, “IS FINA FIT FOR PURPOSE?”

“Thrones” for the Bureau at the Short Course World Championships. THRONES. Is the Bureau ROYALTY now?

NO RESPONSE on doping questions posed in regard to an Olympic champion and his nation’s lack of timely reporting. NO RESPONSE on doping questions posed by the current “Russian Debacle” in systematic sports doping. *Is FINA reversing its field and being soft on doping once again? At the least, the lack of transparency is concerning. FINA continues to honor convicted dopers from an earlier era, including those CONVICTED of causing grievous harm to minor children.*

Awards given to politicians because they spend their countries’ money putting on FINA’s world shows. Money that then goes for THRONES for the FINA Bureau. THRONES. Those that give their entire professional lives to our sport, honored in lesser ways.

Those responsible for the death of an athlete competing in a FINA event, ELEVATED to the committee that “oversaw” his death. Who is making these “decisions?” DO WE NOT ALL DESERVE BETTER? MUCH BETTER?

In this issue, we republish Craig Lord’s first two articles in a series of five that explains and lays out the case regarding FINA. (An organization from which Mr. Lord RESIGNED due to his frustration with an inability to get answers.) In my opinion, this is “fake democracy” on the part of FINA and they need significant reform or replacement. More on that at another time.

THANK YOU TO ALL THE COACHES WORLDWIDE WHO KEEP OUR SPORT ALIVE, with precious little support from our International Federation.

-John Leonard,
WSCA Executive Director

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FINA Future – Part 1:

Heritage & hierarchy on which the house of the swim fed is built
by Craig Lord, *SwimVortex.com*, October 22, 2014

In the first of a new series, FINA Future, asks: what is it; who are they; how is it built and how does it work. The series destination: the betterment of Swimming and what FINA must do to get there from where it is. The purpose is not to hunt down the guilty but to gather and share deeper understanding of how the umbrella body for aquatic sports functions in order to consider what it is getting right, where it is going wrong, which structures should be underpinned and which need demolishing. Is FINA fit for purpose and is it working in the best interests of the constituency it is supposed to serve? Easy to spot many ways in which it is; not hard to see where things could be much better.

We start by looking at the structure of FINA. To some this is fairly academic stuff but it is the best place to start because the structure of the international federation may well be regarded as having contributed to "FINA" landing itself in another fine mess, this time by wading into world politics at a time of high sensitivity and in a place where conflict and doping collided to create a perfect storm of controversy that should have and could so easily have been avoided.

Why "FINA" in quotation marks will become clearer but in short the international federation is a collective of many people and even where you might point to Mr. A or Mr B. as having done X and Y, the thought process cannot stop there, the question clear: why did the checks and balances built into the FINA [constitution](#), its [rules](#) and [by laws](#) that outline and define the duties and responsibilities of those who govern at the top table and tiers below it fail to prevent those moves that are met with an instant response from the wider world of swimming: "How the hell did that happen?"

It was late last week when FINA announced proudly that it had awarded its top honor to a national leader, Vladimir Putin, President of Russia and a man at the eye of a crisis and controversy involving annexation of territory and loss of life, regardless of who any of us blame, wherever any of us sit along a spectrum of support for one view or the other either side of the neutrality that ought to have been adhered to in the world of sport.

FINA Code of Ethics – IV.E. Neutrality

Officials shall remain politically neutral in accordance with the principles and objectives of FINA, the confederations, associations, leagues and clubs and generally act in a manner compatible with their function and integrity.

In my view it is clear that awarding Vladimir Putin FINA's highest honor—a decision that was taken without consultation with the wider membership of the international federation nor, I am led to understand, with the full agreement and vote of the ruling Bureau—was anything but a "politically neutral" act, particularly not at this moment in history.

The move begged the question: should FINA ever honor state leaders given the obvious potential for backlash that screams: best stick to what's on your label—"Water is our World", not world politics.

[continued on next page]

Rendering unto sport that which belongs to sport, the parallel problem is clear, too, and prompted protest from leading coaches: honor had been bestowed on a head of state at a time when his nation happens to have a woeful doping count, the highest in the world during the past two years in swimming. As far as I am aware, not his fault (and indeed the Russian sports minister has warned the troops to clean up their act or face a whole-nation ban) any more than it is the fault of any head of state when people decide to cheat. Even so - an award for Putin, who the head of state, is an award for Russia is an award for Russian Swimming at a time when such things ought to be avoided by an international federation whose constitution and rules, not to mention swimming's signature on the dotted line of the WADA Code, scream "Thou Shalt Not Dope".

A little over a week has passed since I resigned from the FINA Press Commission. Against a backdrop of Putin and the sums of money that change hands in staging global sports events, the work of those tasked with ensuring good working conditions and flow of information to journalists is small beer. Still, as Tolkien would have it and as we will show here: small things can matter a great deal, for it is in the detail of how FINA functions that we find the answer to the question "How the hell did that happen"?

Our series will not be rushed, this opening consideration to be followed soon by *Part 2*, those two articles to stay in focus for the next few of weeks on the way to suggesting answers to the question: "How does swimming make things better by improving the way it is governed?"

We start by asking:

- What is FINA?
- What was its original mission and what now is its modern zeal?
- How is the hierarchy and governance of FINA constructed?

What is FINA?

The Early Years 1908-1919: At a time when he was President of the Amateur Swimming Association, a body founded in England in 1869, George Hearn chaired a meeting at the Manchester Hotel, London,

on July 19, 1908, at which the **Federation Internationale de Natation (FINA)** was founded.

The meeting - coinciding with the first Olympic Games to be hosted by Britain's capital after the 1906 Mount Vesuvius eruption dictated a need for Italy to spend its money rebuilding Naples and not investing in Rome - lasted some four and half hours. It was agreed by a committee of 23, including eight from Britain, that from that time on, "England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales", as noted in the minutes, would be considered as one country. That remains one of the constants in the world of FINA to this day.

The founding fathers of FINA were: George W. Hearn (Great Britain); Oscar Gregoire (Belgium); Vicktor Balck, Beruh Burman, Erik Bergvall, Konrad Littorin (Sweden); Max Ritter, E. Seidel, Hermann Zieler Jr. (Germany); Reinhold von Villebrand, J. Henriksson, H. Rein (Finland); Henry J. Vida (Hungary); E.P. Denny (France); C.F. Lohmann, P. Lykkeberg (Denmark); R.H. Nicol (Wales); W.J. Leighton (Ireland); H. Benjamin, W.N. Benjamin, F. Baxter, J.C. Hurd, R.F.B. Cross (England and Scotland).

The pioneer committee wasted no time in establishing the cornerstones of a new FINA rule book, and one of the most important decisions of the day showed the intention of those early guardians of swimming to take charge of what had been, at the international level, a very loose affiliation of swimming activities devoid of cohesion or common standards: "... no nation shall institute, or allow to be instituted, within their jurisdiction, any Race or Competition, which shall have the title of a World's Championship".

That principal was in keeping with Hearn's priority of codifying the Olympic aquatic sports of swimming, diving and water polo, the start of standardization of the structures of those sports crucial to their longevity. While rules and regulations have been much derided over the years (sometimes for good reason and with great development as the result) their presence provided the framework for common practice, community and tradition to evolve.

Indeed, the early mission and rules laid the very foundation on which the house of FINA was built to last. Much has morphed along the way, of course.

The FINA Mission: Then and Now

In 1908, with Hearn at the helm, some of the key founding principles of FINA spoke to the age: amateurism, modesty and the need for standardization in the midst of a chaos of claims to be the best at a time when hardly any two swims swum apart were alike enough to be compared.

A stringent definition of “amateur status” was written into the first FINA rule book, as were conditions under which records could be set, including the assertion that “no claim for Record can be considered unless all swimmers wear recognized costume with drawers under the costume”.

The first rules on World Records have a direct link to the rules of today: the London 1908 meeting agreed that world records could only be set in “absolutely still water (i.e. without current or tide)”. That remains the case, though the status of some pools hosting major moments has been called into question of late. Imperial and metric measures were official, the length of pools variable back in FINA's early years.

The first official FINA distances:

- Front-Crawl: 100 yards, 100 meters, 150 yards, 200 meters, 220 yards, 300 yards, 300 meters, 400 meters, 440 yards, 500 yards, 500 meters, 880 yards, 1,000 yards, 1,000 meters, 1,500 meters and 1 mile.
- Backstroke: 100 meters, 150 yards, 400 meters.
- Breaststroke: 100 meters, 200 yards, 200 meters, 500 meters.

Other conditions to be met by record-breakers included the need to start from a dive, except in the case of backstroke, and for the time to be registered by a minimum of two timekeepers. In a quirk of its time, where three timekeepers could not agree, the average of all three times was registered as the record.

A surveyor was needed to measure the pool, and records had to be applied for within 14 days of a

time being recorded. Those basic standards remain very close to original intention to this day.

In Paris on August 1, 1909, Hearn, as Honorary Secretary, presided over the next FINA meeting after foundation in London. It was in the French capital that the **first full set of FINA rules** was laid down, including the principles established in London 1908 on the issues of amateur status and world records. A few pertinent pioneer rules:

- Rule 1 established the new organization's name as the “Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur”, to be comprised of “all Nations or Countries who accept and agree to abide by the Rules herein contained”.
- Rule 2 spelled out the objects of FINA as: To draw up and enforce an Amateur definition acceptable to all nationalities, and under which the Sport shall be conducted. The mutual recognition of all suspensions The Framing of Regulations, under which the Worlds [*sic*] Records alone can be recognized. To ensure that all contests open to the Federated Associations shall be organized under the Laws of the International Federation.
- Rule 3 set in place the framework of FINA management: “The Council of FINA shall consist of Two Representatives appointed by each Nation or Country, together with an Hon. Sec and a Treasurer, who shall be elected at every Council Meeting held, and who shall be an ex-officio Member of the Council.” While eight nations—Belgium Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Sweden and the three home countries forming Great Britain—were represented at the 1908 conception of FINA, the international federation began its official, formal life with 20 nations registered as being eligible for affiliation—including “Bohemia”, Greece, Norway, Russia and Switzerland—though not all those actually signed up from the start and by the time FINA met at the Hotel de Ville, Brussels in September 1910, the list of founding nations had been reduced to 15.
- Rule 4 listed the nations eligible for membership of FINA as follows: The First FINA member nations: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Hungary, Italy, South Africa, Sweden and the United States of America.
- Rule 12 noted that each national federation was to recognize each other as “the only bodies

competent to regulate International relations” in swimming and water polo. Although records had existed before the birth of FINA, it was not until the Paris meeting that the federation sought to formalize standards by requesting that all nations draw up a list of national records so that an official list of World Records could be established dating from January 1, 1910.

In Stockholm from July 8 to 10, 1912, FINA met at the House of Parliament in the Swedish capital and the first World Record Application Form was introduced. At a time when trouble was brewing beyond the field of sport, FINA’s first brush with true controversy landed on the table in Stockholm. German delegates, in the face of agreement among other members that the international federation should press the IOC to allow FINA to appoint starters, timekeepers, judges and referees for sports under its jurisdiction, objected on the grounds that the Olympic committee of the nation scheduled to host the 1916 Olympic Games in Berlin should control such matters.

The note from Germany, in support of its National Olympic Committee, was blunt: “A part of a superior organization cannot progress independently, and we must decline to take part in any further discussion referring to this question.” Nonetheless, FINA members pressed ahead with their plans and extended their request to the IOC for aquatic competitions to be held at the Games under the auspices of the international federation’s new rules. To a large extent that has indeed what has happened since the pioneering age and continues to be the case to this day.

On the table in Stockholm was a request from Russia: it applied not only for membership of FINA but also to be exempt from the rule dictating that swimming teachers were automatically barred from being swimmers through loss of their amateur status. Swimming teachers were hard to come by in a nation where swimming was “all but totally unknown”, said Russia, which had sought help from Finland. The Finns would not help out if they were then to be disadvantaged. FINA granted the exemption but advised Russia that it first had to form a national federation before it could become a member of the international body.

In Budapest at the end of May 1914, FINA’s meeting logged word from the IOC of support for the idea of FINA rules and folk effectively running the swim meet at the Olympic Games. A FINA Committee for Olympic Business was established, with Britain, Belgium, Hungary, Sweden and Germany represented. That pressed for standards such as height of starting platforms and a basic condition—the end walls of the pool should be perpendicular to the bottom of the bath—that shaped pools in a way that remains with us today.

So confident were some FINA members that they were doing a rather better job of forming a sound set of rules and organizing the FINA disciplines than any work being conducted by other sports that the IOC was asked to consider extending FINA’s rulebook to all Olympic sports. That proposal, from Belgium, would meet with limited success in so far as the IOC did adopt some of the general principles agreed by FINA for application for all sports in the Olympic family.

FINA in 2014

Some things have shifted only slightly in the past 100 years, relatively speaking, while others have shifted a great deal to reflect the way the world has developed, socially, technically and on other fronts. Here is where all of that leaves us as far as FINA’s mission and constitution goes in 2014—a few pertinent passages:

Discrimination

FINA shall not allow any discrimination against national Federations or individuals (competitors, officials, judges, delegates, etc.) on the grounds of race, gender, religion, or political affiliations.

Objectives

The objectives of FINA are:

- a) to promote and encourage the development of Aquatics in all possible regards throughout the world,
- b) to provide fair and drug free sport,
- c) to promote and encourage the development of international relations,
- d) to encourage participation in Aquatics disciplines at all levels throughout the world regardless of age, gender or race,
- e) to adopt necessary uniform rules and regulations and to hold competitions in Swimming, Open

- Water Swimming, Diving, Water Polo, Synchronized Swimming, and Masters,
- f) to promote and organize World Championships and other FINA competitions,
 - g) to encourage the increase of facilities for Aquatics' disciplines throughout the world with the support of other interested parties, and
 - h) to carry out such other activities as may be desirable to promote the sport.

The constitution and rules of a Member must not be in conflict with the FINA Rules. Where there is a conflict, the FINA Rules shall prevail.

C 12.1 Any Member, member of a Member, or individual member of a Member may be sanctioned: C 12.1.3 for bringing the sport into disrepute.

Beyond the key lines in the constitution, FINA now pays swimmers for performances in stark contrast to its founding years and in keeping with the modern world. In Kazan next year, when Russia hosts the World Championships, FINA, though revenues IOC/broadcast and partners/sponsors plus hosts will award around \$1.9m in prizes to swimmers in pool and open water. The division goes as follows: Gold - \$15,000, Silver - \$10,000, Bronze - \$5,000, 4th - \$4,000, 5th - \$3,000, 6th - \$2,000.

There will also be world-record bonuses of \$25,000 for each world record. And in such a world, the imperative to get it right on anti-doping measures is all the greater, athlete testing accounting for a sizeable sum in the budget (a theme we will consider later in the series).

Within the above framework (the FINA handbook, of course, runs much deeper in details and scope that the short selection of items here at this stage), is the structure of 'how it all works'.

The House of FINA – Hierarchy

The layers of what follows run deeper than those we consider in this opening part of our series but important to get to grips with the basics for those not already steeped in the system:

The top brass: FINA Bureau

23 voting members, including three executives (the FINA handbook suggests that there are 24 voting members but the Athletes' representative listed as a

member has no vote), who are the president, honorary secretary and honorary treasurer. Honorary reflects the title-only nature of the roles: they are figureheads who have a say but do not actually do what the likes of Harold Fern did in the pioneering years of FINA: take personal charge of writing and sending out letters, instructions to federations, adding up the sums, submitting accounts and so forth. Such things are now done by a small team of professional staff at FINA HQ in Lausanne plus the professional companies hired to oversee good bookkeeping, auditing, marketing and the like.

Beyond the 23 voting members and the executive are members "without vote": the one athlete's representative, the one Honorary Life President, Mustapha Larfaoui (president between 1988 and 2009, a term that is the subject of discussion over whether it should be possible for one man to sit in the top chair for so long) and 10 honorary members of the Bureau, nine of whom are folk who have served on the Bureau, including hon. sec and hon. treasurer past, for example, but either stepped aside or lost out at voting stage for a right to remain as a full voting member at the top table.

The one remaining among them is the paid Executive Director—Cornel Marculescu—who effectively runs the show across all Olympic disciplines under the FINA umbrella on a daily basis and is based, when not travelling far and wide on business, in Lausanne.

In the mix of all of that, the voting members shall include five vice-presidents, one from each of the continents represented.

The "Executive" consists of five members, those being the president, the hon. sec and hon. treasurer and two others from the Bureau nominated by the president.

FINA may co-opt onto the Bureau a member from the host nation of the next Olympic Games or World Championships if the country hosting is not already represented at the top table.

No nation may be represented by more than one Bureau member, while the geographic composition of the Bureau is established through voting:

- 16 members are elected by General Congress in accordance with the votes of continental organizations affiliated to FINA (CANA, UANA, AASF, LEN and OSA) in the following counts: 3 from Africa 4 each from the Americas, Asia and Europe 1 for Oceania
- The latter has accounted for Australia's difficulty in finding room to be represented at the top table, the Oceania post currently occupied by the delegates from Fiji, though a move to have
- Beyond the 16 continental votes, another 7 members are elected from "the world at large", the count per continent not to exceed 1 for each of Africa, Asia and Oceania or two each from the Americas and Europe.

Who are Bureau members answerable to: **General Congress**

The highest authority of FINA is the representative body of all FINA members, consisting of two delegates from every nation, each delegate carrying one Congress vote on issues to be decided. Where a nation has just one delegate, that delegate carries two votes.

I've heard it said that "anyone can be elected to FINA". Not quite. You can only get this close to any influence if you work your way through the ranks of your domestic federation and are nominated to serve at FINA level (same for the continental organizations affiliated to FINA).

The Congress also includes all members of the Bureau as above, including those without vote, the influence of former leading lights ever present, for better or worse in a model that is apt to slow down the pace of change when change is called for by the wider membership.

Technical Congress

The same structure as above (but dealing only with technical matters and the rules pertinent to such things) unless the theme being dealt with is pertinent to a singular sport: if diving is being discussed, then the two delegates per nation quota may be reduced to one delegate per nation. Technical Congresses take place every four years and coincide, in general, with the showcase World Championships. At least 20 members must be present for a quorum - and decisions taken can be overridden by the General Congress.

Who provides the expertise: **the Committees**

- 6 Technical Committees to represent each sport and the general category of Masters
- 13 Specialized Committees: sports medicine; doping; athletes; coaches, finance, national federations; development; legal; media; awards, marketing; swimwear; facilities
- In addition, there are three judicial panels: doping; disciplinary; ethics
- and the Bureau may form any ad hoc committee deemed appropriate to deal with matters arising.

Members of committees are chosen and appointed by the Bureau, subject to the approval of member federations that committee members are either affiliated to or associated with through nationality.

Effectively the committees are there to help the Congress and Bureau—depending on topic and relevance in the pecking order of priorities—form fitting rules and set the conditions under which athletes will compete, officials and coaches and media work at events and so forth.

Pertinent to the reason why this series came into being are such clauses as that specified as a duty of the Media Committee:

To offer advice to the FINA Communications Department on the best way to promote FINA and the image of its aquatic sports throughout the world.

For any organization to get the best out of such mechanisms, that last clause is among those that suggest it would be good to also take account of what might be avoided to steer clear of anything that could taint FINA's image.

No point in a sounding board that bounces back ideas on how to make the world rosy and light if no-one is prepared to listen to the same people on the subject of dark clouds that stand in the way of blue sky and brighter future.

That hierarchy takes us to the next stage: not uncommon for those in hierarchies to protect themselves through structures controlled from top downwards. FINA is built to be inclusive and include the views of many for the benefit of all. In practice it doesn't quite work like that.

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FINA Future – Part 2:

When Things Go Wrong, They Go Woefully Wrong. Why & How?

by Craig Lord, *SwimVortex.com*, October 23, 2014

In the second part of our series "FINA Future", we delve deeper into the structure of FINA, the international umbrella organization for aquatic sports, Swimming accounting for the vast bulk of affiliated athletes. The purpose of the series is to find deeper understanding in what it is getting right, where it is going wrong, which structures should be underpinned and which need demolishing. Is FINA fit for purpose and is it working in the best interests of the constituency it is supposed to serve?

In Part 1 we considered the foundation and the structures of FINA, its mission and purpose: fairly academic stuff but it is the best place to start because the structure of the international federation may well be regarded as having contributed to "FINA" landing itself in another fine mess of late, this time by wading into world politics at a time of high sensitivity and in a place where conflict and doping collided to create a perfect storm of controversy that should have and could so easily have been avoided.

FINA Decision-Making: The Basics

In theory, the structures described in *Part 1* and outlined in the [FINA Handbook](#) could work very well to create the right environment for athletes and others. Indeed, it is fair to say that on several levels it does work well and the athlete picking up several thousand dollars in prizes on World Cup tour and world s/c champs this season may well see no reason to question what he or she has no influence over but benefits from as a result of their performance and the way the system works.

Even so, when it goes wrong, it sometimes goes woefully wrong with FINA. Among those moments down the years: doping; shiny suits; honors that stay in place even after a criminal conviction directly linked to swimming and the health, safety and well-being of athletes has been served; moments when clear rules appear to be deliberately broken by national federations and overlooked by the international federation; and now honors for a controversial national leader who held that status even before Crimea and its woe came along.

And on this day that marks the fourth anniversary of the death of Fran Crippen, we remind ourselves of the most painful memory of system failure.

All of which might be placed under the headline: "Getting it wrong, then defending the indefensible

and thus failing to learn". In the context of those general issues the following compound question arises and is the theme we address today with a nod to what is widely perceived as FINA's latest mistake—honoring a state leader: how did FINA come to get it wrong when it had so many experts at hand; when it had any number of sounding boards to turn to; when it had a fully representative Bureau answerable not only to FINA Congress, the highest authority in swimming, in one direction but national federations in the other—did the very structure of the organization and 'the way things are done' contribute?

At the heart of more complex answers are two simple explanations:

- decisions are taken outside the parameters of the structure, with expert advice, that sounding board mechanism, either overlooked or ignored
- tolerance of being overlooked is high because the system and positions within it are often held on the basis of favors, too many the number of political appointments made to committees that include people with no particular expertise (indeed I can say without any hesitation with 'no expertise whatsoever') in the area pertinent to the committee on which they sit.

For deeper understanding, let us look at the modus operandi of the business of FINA and the working relationship between the Bureau and those committees that exist to keep the federation on track, to ensure that Constitution, codes, rules and the *raison d'être* of FINA are preserved.

As you read what follows keep in mind that while "rules" and "constitution" nod towards good culture, direction and transparency, the by-laws of the international federation sometimes appear to point in the opposite direction. Take this notable entry in the [FINA Code of Ethics](#):

IV. Ethical principles in Aquatics – C. Fair Play

6. No FINA staff or Bureau member shall make adverse comments on a policy adapted by the FINA Bureau once the FINA Bureau decision has been taken.

One can see the logic in that even though the behavior called on from FINA Bureau members could well be seen to work against the transparency required if good governance is the aim (complete with recognition that whistle-blowing is, sometimes, the only way that bad practice can be identified and stamped out).

The issue runs deeper than the by-law, however. If we take the introduction of shiny suits, if we take Putin, if we turn to a number of other issues that have ended in controversy and led to FINA's representative status being called into question, we find a disturbing pattern in answers provided to this author from Bureau members and others close to them down the years: the Bureau was not consulted in full from go before the issue in play was either put into practice/made public or before it was too late to call a halt and rethink.

Similar issues arise throughout the entire system from Congress right through the cycle that includes the committees that feed expertise into rule-making and the framework and conditions in which athletes compete and the standardization and standards that bind them in the spirit of Fair Play.

Key to understanding the hierarchy of decision-making is a structure dictated by the principle of universality at the heart of FINA's model of governance (one that can be found, with local variations, from the IOC down through its member federations).

Universality

The pros: the world is represented, the world feels represented, no-one is locked out and there is "no discrimination based on gender, race, religion, or political opinion", the first "no tolerance" entry in FINA's list of Ethical Principles in Aquatics.

The cons: representation placed in the hands of political appointees who contribute nothing or, at best, little and are there to fulfill a political role that plays out in Congress, in decision-making and the general house-rules and culture of FINA.

The numbers

There are more than 200 FINA member nations, while around 10% of those nations can be said to have world-class Swimming programs in place and 80% can be said to have nothing that resembles

anything remotely close to the cutting edge of elite sport and models (which in themselves vary greatly) to be found in the likes of the USA, Australia, Japan, China and Europe's leading swim nations.

The gulf between the relative few and the majority is vast and while the leading forces in the water are well represented through the ranks of FINA governance and leadership, 11 voting members of the 23-person (just one woman in the mix) Bureau, including those in two of the three top posts, hail from countries that belong very much to the "development" club when it comes to programs that would be described as world-class and producing world-class results.

There are 215 members of technical and specialized committees (give or take a few either side of that line to take account of occasional co-opted members, resignations and movements of that kind). It is those 200-plus positions that makes it possible for FINA to be run on the basis of a very small staff.

Some meetings are held in Lausanne or elsewhere in the world away from the rush of big events while many, if not most, gatherings and committee meetings coincide with FINA events, most commonly the World Championships, long and short.

When FINA moves it moves in numbers, the bulk of those above soon to be heading to Doha for the World Aquatics Convention on the eve of the World short-course Championships—the span of event dates, including travel on eve of and on day after, November 28 to December 8. The actual sports event is December 3 to 7 and something like 1,300 swimmers and 500 team officials from 174 countries have so far registered an interest in attending. Media numbers tend to be much smaller for world s/c events.

Not all on all committees will include Doha in their plans but the bulk will—and when it comes to the World Championships in Kazan next year, all barring those unable will travel.

The cost of all that—small beer when compared to other sporting worlds, the likes of a 2013 F1 team budget list that easily tops \$1bn—is, in swimming terms, not insignificant. As a mere theoretical

exercise that considers what it would cost to have all folk engaged on "official business" in Doha for the 12 days of tour duty, we must consider flights, hotels, food and a per diem (the range is in the order of minimum \$100.00 a day to much more than double that depending on status).

The costs are heightened at Bureau level, with the president and those closest to him treated to first- and business-class flights, depending on status, five-star hotels, dinners and other subsistence offered in addition to per diems and often a chauffeur-driven car available on call for the duration of a stay.

At committee level you are looking at economy flights, a four-star hotel, shuttle transport of one kind or another, some meals (or better) and the \$100 or so per diem. During my time helping FINA on media matters there have been times when I have rejected the per diem and times when I have accepted it as a way of covering costs that I would not otherwise have had—and I have done all of that with the full knowledge of those who employ me as a journalist.

In addition to the "essentials", the system includes the costs of something that many in the wider world might consider to be a very odd place indeed. Imagine in your own work situation that you are called to a meeting to discuss a technical aspect of the latest production line, magazine, fashion shoot or show, etc., etc. Not too uncommon to get a folder with information in it and you might also be treated to a sample, a soap, a book, a token of thanks for your attendance and contribution. In the media world, I recall an environment in which your attendance was expected as part of your job, for which you were being remunerated.

Remunerated most are not beyond that aforementioned per diem in FINA world but very well looked after they are. On arrival at a FINA hotel during a major meet, a letter awaits telling you where and when you can pick up your kit. Kit? Now, if you happen to be an official about to take on 5 to 8 days or more of officiating duty, you will need your official clothiers, with event sport logo on, enough sets for changes, all good and well. Those people are there to work in a specific way in a specific field—and they work hard and they make an essential contribution to the show and the sport.

However—beyond pertinent questions such as "does a member of a committee whose work is totally unrelated to world s/c swimming or the specific event and discipline in question really need to be in Doha for the duration of the event"—precisely why someone in my position (and in the positions of the bulk of committee members there to attend one meeting that might stretch to a day of activity) would need the following is beyond me: 1 blazer, 1 business suit (tailored and fitted, with a tailor on call for adjustments if required), 2 polo shirts, 2 leisure trousers, 1 hoody, 1 pair of shoes, 2 ties, 1 bag, 1 watch, and 1 book.

You can imagine that for some it might well have felt like checking into Hogwarts (and that in a country listed in an official European Union report as a place where two-thirds of all children live below the poverty line).

I confess: I kept one tie, the suit I wore at a dinner (I had nothing suitable with me) and the watch I gave to another (I never wear a watch). The rest I left for the hotel maid to take, the bulk of it all simply too much to carry home, let alone explain to my wife what the hell I was doing bringing a sponsored wardrobe home with me.

That list is not just a one-off: it happens at every event you attend (the list is sometimes a little smaller but not by much) and it is bestowed upon all committee members whether they want or need it or not. The cost of it all is covered by the kit partner (in the past Speedo, from Doha for a few events hence it will be Arena—the sports kit part of the above is what they supply not the rest) and the hosts and other partners (the ties and suits, watches, etc.).

When I indicated I did not need any of the 'stuff' and why I "failed" to return my 'measurements' to FINA HQ, I was told "you should be proud to wear a FINA blazer". Quite so but working media asked to help make sure journalists work in good conditions and asked to provide advice on what FINA can do to improve its status have no place wearing a FINA blazer and "should" is a big word. Right now, the actions of leaders in FINA ought to provoke all involved in the machine to question whether they are proud to be a part of what is done in their name.

Here is the mission statement of the Conference in Doha:

Our mission is to provide a platform for the global Aquatics family and business leaders to come together to network and share best practices, to encourage greater engagement in aquatic sports and elite performance across all FINA disciplines.

Best practices? Great aim. Too many the moments when FINA has fallen shy of that in various ways. And most of that comes down to the system of decision-making.

Let's be clear: I see no harm in the odd polo shirt and the likes given out to people who make a fine contribution to world Swimming and give of their own time and energy but beyond that there is simply no need to include in the costs of hosting major events expenses that have no place in good governance. The latter, to my mind, includes creating an environment in which the thing most prized is the message delivered that might help FINA steer itself in the right direction—not the t-shirt or the privilege of all-expenses paid trips to major events around the world and trinkets that contribute to a bill of half a million dollars or more just to move the "FINA Family" to the likes of Doha and keep it there for upwards of a week.

There are those who will eat at official tables for much of the time and will be lucky to spend a couple of hundred dollars on food during their stay, which translates to a gain of \$800 or more. It can certainly be argued that such recompense is fitting for those doing a daily job during their time away from home and other work but that is not how it is accounted for, not how it is presented and far too many are those who attend a meeting and then do, well, not very much for days on end. Hard to object to recompense for those who sweat on deck, who work up in the stands on the words, the stats, those who collect the quotes, those who contribute directly to the show and so on.

But not bad \$800 pocket money for the privilege of staying in a swish hotel in an exotic location and watching several days of world-class swimming in between sessions in the VIP lounge—with nothing much but shopping in the hours in between.

The bulk of those who sit on committees are directly or closely linked to their national federations; some sit on other committees, serve on

other bodies related to their federation and the international federation in some way (continental bodies and the like). They spend a fair amount of time in the company of similar people on the same tour. They become part of the system and the system rewards them—not with the trinkets of tour (though there appear to be a fair few folk who value such things highly) but with the mere fact that they remain on the tour, remain on the beat, continue to get access to a world they would not have access to if they were not part of a family largely made up of "volunteers" (of a kind quite remote and different to all those folk who turn up at the local baths to help at the local gala many weekends the world over).

It all seems very normal to many involved. Staying in the club is attractive. A fair few of those who hail from political sports systems that allow them access to a world of privileges and travel and the company of world-class athletes that they simply would not have access to beyond the realm of "sports volunteer" may see themselves reaching the top table one day and moving up a tier on the scale of privilege—and they may even stretch their ambitions to the dizzy heights of the IOC. They include people who now get to vote at FINA Congress. The dynamic, even if were not the case in reality and practice, is open to accusation of cronyism and conflicts of interest.

We will avoid naming people in this explanation: it is not our purpose to single out anyone for blame, rather it is to note weakness in the system that contributes to decisions that place FINA between a rock and a hard place with no place for its image to hide.

How does the above contribute to bad, not best, practice? Among answers:

- very few, for fear of rocking boats and losing position and status and place on the train, are prepared to stand up and say "stop", we should not be doing this;
- very few are prepared to stand up and say "No, we can't agree this here, just we two or three - surely the whole Bureau should decide on where our top honor should go, like it says in the Constitution";
- very few are prepared to say "we need to ask the Bureau why the three questions and issues we asked them to consider 10 months ago remain on the shelf; (Were they even heard?)

- very few are prepared to say "we need to ask the Bureau why decisions were taken and moves made in the direct realm of our responsibility without any reference whatsoever to our committee?";
- very few are prepared to demand that answers be given.

For without answers to those questions, the next ones are: what's the point in us?; what is the point in the expense of us?; are we simply here to deal with the small things that could be dealt with in two minutes on a Skype call without the need for meetings and vast expense?; and if so, are we just a facade that allows FINA to say that all it does is based on expert advice when that simply is not the case?

One of the perceptions at the heart of considering the question "where is the system failing" is that inclusivity and universality is stretched only to the small stuff of standard procedure and being "Family" (and please be happy for all the privilege we afford you even if you haven't asked for it and don't want it and can't accept it for reasons of professional integrity and best practice) but does not extend to seeking the opinion at key moments of minds that might reply: "Don't do that, don't go there, please consider all of these reasons why not".

All of which leaves us with a distinct feeling that the political imperative, hand in hand with influence, power and money, are over-riding 'doing the right thing'.

Examples of where things went wrong:

• **The Death of Fran Crippen**

Today marks the fourth anniversary of Fran Crippen's death. RIP—and prayers go out to his family. All power to the world of the foundation established in his honor.

Nothing compares to the loss of life. The UAE's wish to host FINA Open Water events brought the tragedy back into the headlights of late. On this day, it is enough to recall the events and attitudes that led to a tragedy many in the sport believed was waiting to happen. Enough to contemplate how the system might have contributed to the tragic events this day four years ago.

Shiny suits; records and rules, awards and procedure... different topic but they are bound on four levels:

1. They were moves made by few without consultation with the many.
2. They were moves made against the wishes of many leading voices.
3. They were moves that left FINA open to accusations that it had acted in contravention of its own rules.
4. They were moves that have long-term consequences.

• **Shiny Suits**

The Speedo LZR Racer was approved without scientific testing at the say of three people; the Bureau did not consider the issue, nor vote on it before new technology entered the pool on race day. By then, it was too late to pour it out of the pool and 22 months of woe followed. Result:

- 22 months of woe, crisis, controversy and hurt, athletes used a pawns and people who would otherwise be as one in their love of swimming no longer in agreement
- a ban on bodysuits and non-textile materials that set the clock but not the swimmer or swimming on fast-forward. The catch-up is still being felt far and wide and that will not change for some years to come.
- a system of checks and balances based on science and testing, with suits approved for racing labelled as such by FINA, each manufacturer obliged to pay a fee for submission of apparel for testing and approval (or not).

• **World Records—when the rules can be overlooked**

The case of the 1500m world s/c standard set by Lauren Boyle came into focus this week past when FINA approved the standard after saying that facilities/pool rules and its minimum standards did not apply when world records were set, even though the official application form requires "All FINA Rules" to have been met. It is now more than two weeks since this journalist sent the following note to FINA that sought to get a sensible answer to a pertinent question before rushing to print:

"...could you go back to the TSC and ask them this: If facilities rules do not apply to world records, does that mean that world records can be set in pools of any condition not specifically stated in the world-record application procedure?"

This is a really important question because if what they suggest is correct, then FINA standardization of facilities is sunk: you cannot insist on FINA rules being applied to all registered/qualification meets when it comes to standards but then ignore facilities rules if a world record is broken. That makes no sense.

Nine days after that note was sent, New Zealand swimming issued a press released to tell the world that FINA had approved Lauren Boyle's standard (great swim, and absolutely no fault of her own the circumstance delivered by those who run her sport in New Zealand) despite her swim having been swum in a pool that did not comply with FINA Minimum Pool Standards.

Now, just how hard can it be for any of the following people asked by a journalist (and a member of FINA's Media Committee at the time) to provide an answer to come up with one in a period of more than two weeks? (For regardless of ratification, the question stands and remains unanswered.)

- *Technical Swimming Committee* (the people who decide on swimming rules and have - or ought to have - a big say in underwater cameras and the like)
- *Bureau Liaison*: Dale Neuberger, USA; Carol Zaleski, USA; Kiril Todorov, Mexico; Soeren Korbo, Denmark (one of those who did see a shiny suit before one was poured into the pool); Ricardo de Moura, Brazil; Jiawei Yuan, China; Virendra Nanavati, India; Shigeo Ogata, Japan; Andrea Thielenhaus, Luxembourg; Andriy Vlaskov, Ukraine; Olugbenga Lawal, Niger; Daphne Bird, South Africa; Jerzy Kowalski, Poland; Christer Magnusson, Sweden; Ryan Arblaster, Australia; Jose de Deus Benitez, Puerto Rico (events sub-committee); Jose Arias, Guatemala (esc) – GUA. *and*
- Lesley Huckins, New Zealand—a member of the TSC who will doubtless want to know how a New Zealand referee signed a form that stated "All FINA Rules" had been complied with when many observers have clearly stated that that was simply not the case; and if she does not wish to know that—because she believes that all is well—then could she perhaps answer my question: how is it that all events held under FINA Rules must meet FINA Minimum Pool Standards but when a world record is set such considerations are irrelevant? That is a direct issue for the TSC.

• **The FINA Order**

Of all the committees listed and members named in the *FINA Handbook*, one stands out as absent

(beyond its inclusion in the rundown of which committees are official): Awards. The handbook states that the Awards Committee will consist of five members. We assume that these five are the five who make up the Executive at the helm of the Bureau but that may not be so—no list appears that I can find.

Consulting the Handbook of rules provides no greater clarity: awards are listed as the responsibility of the entire Bureau under the *Rights and Duties of the Bureau*. Which leads us to the question: who decided to honor Putin? And from that we step to "why?" and then to the following:

- Was the majority of the FINA Bureau neither consulted nor informed of the award until after it was a *fait accompli*?
- Was no consideration given to pre-Crimea controversies, such as the death of Anna Politkovskaya—and more pertinent to swimming, was Russia's current doping record and count even raised as a question when considering whether to honor a Russian leader—and what messages that might send?
- Did negotiations with Putin's office predate the Crimea conflict and the woe that followed?
- Was it appreciated that handing the award to Putin this month might go down as controversial—and if so why did it go ahead?
- Was it a case of there being no pulling back at a time when Russia is about to host the World Championships in Kazan next year and Russian funding is far more important than doing the right thing?

Another FINA mess. Setting aside the controversial nature of a leader engaged in conflict and presiding over a nation with an appalling doping record on its hands right now, the bigger questions are:

- Should FINA have embroiled itself in politics?
- Should FINA award state leaders at all, given that there are many candidates who were in power when pool building policies were set in place and FINA events were hosted?
- Has FINA got any business linking its athletes and realm to a world of global politics and conflict?
- Did the President of FINA, Julio Maglione, and others agree to honor Putin without full and formal consolation with the Bureau as a whole?—Or did they do just that?

- Did the FINA Bureau discuss the proposal to honor Putin before a decision was taken and talks commenced with Putin's office?
- Were Bureau members given the chance to oppose the move?
- If not, did any Bureau member insist on the matter being discussed at Bureau level the moment they got wind of it, regardless of any decision and move that may have already been made?
- Did any Bureau member, on hearing that Putin was to be honored, take the issue back to their national federation for "the view from the floor"?
- Did any Bureau member stop to consider whether it might be wise to consult pertinent committees for feedback?
- Did anyone involved stop to ask "is this really a wise thing to do"?
- Did anyone ask "do we really have the right to represent the world Swimming community in this way"?

We may get answers to some or all of that in time but as things stand, it appears that very few people took the decision and moved the decision to the final act of shaking hands with Putin and granting a controversial politician who sparked sanctions and tension well beyond his own borders (regardless of who anyone may blame for any of what has unfolded) a moment of shiny publicity at a time when such things are in serious short supply to him among many nations that form some of the most important players in the world of Swimming.

• **Committees as Window Dressing**

The Putin case simply highlights, in a very public way, a common occurrence in the realms of FINA: committees are too often a facade for appearing to do the right thing, appearing to consult, appearing to prize and value expertise so that FINA can function well. What actually happens is that when a small number of people want to move in a certain direction but feel that that might meet opposition from committee members, committees appear to be treated like the wife who is the last to know that her husband is cheating on her.

Set aside the heights of decisions such as those on Putin and shiny suits for a moment. The trouble is engrained and inherent in a system that uses committees in three ways: for legitimate business in partnership with FINA staff and is the backbone

that keeps FINA standing; as a convenient way of engaging people in the "FINA family" in a way that is apt to make it hard for some to speak, act and vote independently; and, as such, as window-dressing.

• **An Example of Bypassing Consultation**

In the last week in late November, FINA's Aquatic Conference was to have included a media seminar. It was last January when we, members of the Media Commission I resigned from last week, were informed that the seminar would take place and that we would all be called on to attend and play a part. I, alongside several others, was asked to speak at the event. It was only in the fallout of my committee resignation last week that I discovered that the seminar had been cancelled. When? Had no one thought to tell us?

It was also on that same day of my resignation that FINA issued a press release informing the world about a young reporters scheme of 10 trainees who will, supposedly, work in the media area in Doha in December at world s/c championships to extend their education.

Back in January, we had discussed a similar young reporters scheme that had been organized at a regional event in 2013. Positive messages were accompanied by several reasons why journalists urged FINA to proceed cautiously. Those reasons were legitimate. The scheme, proposed by the AIPS, the international association of sports journalists, for Doha was not discussed by members of the Media Committee nor since our January meeting had anyone sought to ask us what we thought about having trainees in the mixed zone and working in areas reserved for professional journalists and journalism (just as areas are demarcated for athletes, coaches, teams, officials, broadcasters, VIPs and so forth, for good reasons).

No-one had bothered to ask journalists steeped in the world of swimming: how can this work, how best to help.

These examples may well seem trivial to some—and in some ways they are—but they reminded me of the number of times that has happened since I joined the Media Committee in 2009. On one occasion, the entire digital media policy of FINA

was discussed at a meeting of some committee members. Most members were neither invited to the meeting nor even informed that the meeting—the first scheduled for the committee that term—was to take place. We learned about it some months later.

If there was good reason to discuss media policy without the presence of journalists, then the Media Committee should at least have been informed that that was the case. No problem in noting the potential for conflict of interest. But that probably wasn't the reason—and no reason was given.

It was like organizing a young coaches clinic without consulting the Coaches Committee; or changing the conditions under which athletes will work without mentioning it to the Athletes' Committee; and so on.

Two other notes from the Media Committee trail:

- A man from Oman was appointed to the group. He came to the first meeting, explained that he knew nothing about media, vowed to learn and then left early. We never saw him again. That should not happen—and neither should political appointments.
- A new chairman was proposed for the group in the past year: We successfully fended a suggestion that spoke to nothing more than political favor from the highest table in the sport and thus avoided having a chair that was not from the media world and could hardly speak a world of English, the business language of FINA (not the man's fault—lovely chap, genuinely so, but a man better-suited to the Legal Committee one day when they need someone—not Media).

The Bureau as Window Dressing?

Against the above backdrop and given the private testament of Bureau members that they have not been consulted when certain big issues have first been raised and considered, the above leaves us with a more disturbing possibility than a media committee being overlooked.

The Bureau is being overlooked, one could quite easily conclude. Otherwise one would have to conclude that the Bureau is happy to be overlooked and is falling down on some key areas of its

responsibility. Who among those being overlooked is standing up and saying "hold on, can we go through that again"?

Neither the Bureau nor anyone else in FINA is there to serve the president and his men, so to speak: they are all there to serve swimming and a constituency that has obvious key assets—swimmers—and beyond them the other constant that not only works at the coal-face daily but does so well beyond the life of one generation of swimmers - coaches (folk now built into the rewards system of USA Swimming but not into the rewards and awards system of FINA, the money reserved for athletes only).

In the wake of ASCA's call for the Putin honor not to be recognized by the wider world of Swimming, a couple of notes indicated to me that influential federation figures had asked 'what is to be gained by speaking out'? Fear holds the key to the door marked "silence". Those drawn to its false comfort might also ask what is to be lost if we don't speak out.

Concluding note

On a much more serious theme at the heart of an inquiry in Britain this week, I was struck by the words of a victim of abuse who will now sit on the inquiry panel that will recommend change for the future. Her story and those of others are painful to hear. She spoke of things that you would imagine some would find impossible to talk about, so hurtful, so personal, so private the experience.

Asked how she had found the courage to speak out not only in a way that forced her to relive her pain but do so at a time when institutional forces seemed bent on making sure the truth did not come out, she replied: "If we don't talk about it in the open, nothing will change".

A much more serious topic that latter than how FINA is governed but even so, that last quote sums up the spirit in which I hope my consideration of where FINA might be going wrong is taken by all those who have the power to do something about it.

~ fin ~

Upcoming Clinics

(all dates in 2015)

Australia

[ascta Convention 2015](#)

April 27-May 2 • Broadbeach, QLD

Brazil

[10th Brazilian National Coaches Meeting](#)

March 7+8 • São Paulo, SP (Brazil)

China

[ASCA International clinic](#)

February 16+17 • Shanghai

Germany

[DSTV Clinic 2015](#)

May 15-17 • Frankfurt

Hong Kong

[ascta SEA International Conference 2015](#)

February 26-28

India

[ASCA International clinic](#)

January 22-24 • Bangalore

Ireland

[ASCA International clinic](#)

September 26-28 • Dublin

Mexico

ASCA International clinic
March 20-22 • Federal District

New Zealand

[NZSCTA Conference 2015](#)

May 20-23 • Rotorua

Tanzania

ASCA International clinic
April 16-19 • Dar es Salaam

Tunisia

[ASCA International clinic](#)

March 25-27 • Tunis

Trinidad & Tobago

ASCA International clinic
June 11-13 - Turtle Beach, Tobago

United Arab Emirates

ASCA International clinics

[January 29-31 • Dubai](#)

[May 21-26 • Dubai](#)

[September 10-12 • Dubai](#)

[September 13-15 • Abu Dhabi](#)

USA

[ASCA World Clinic 2015](#)

September 7-13 • Cleveland, OH (USA)