

Dear EHPU,

CIVL appreciates the concern of the EHPU on the subject of accidents in competitions. I can guarantee you that the FAI Executive Board, the CIVL Bureau and CIVL Delegates all share your anxiety, and we are acting accordingly. I hope that by now EHPU members, through their CIVL Delegates, or directly from the Minutes of the Plenary meeting in February (see www.fai.org/hang_gliding/meetings/plenary), have more information on the wide reaching initiatives that CIVL has put in place.

Improving safety at competitions is CIVL's highest priority. We have Working Groups investigating various aspects and we are calling on experts throughout the industry. Following the outcomes of these initiatives we intend to act swiftly and positively. For example, even before the next World Championship takes place, we expect to be able to make a major step forward in the area of regulations covering hang glider pitch stability, a subject on which we know you share our concern .

Meanwhile, other actions are already underway. For example, CIVL and EHPU are already cooperating to ensure that accident data are collected and shared. This will give us all valuable insight into the causes of incidents, and those which arise most frequently. As I am sure you appreciate, only a few of these factors are likely to be exclusively related to competition flying.

CIVL is doing its utmost to improve safety wherever it can have real influence. If the answers lie in restricting flying equipment and scrutineering, we can put rules and resources in place. If 'task setting' or the timing/location of competitions is an issue, then expert advice can be sought and guidelines created. Raising the pilot qualification criteria, reducing numbers, setting higher standards for organisers, are all within our remit.

It's not so easy to tackle pilot attitudes to risk-taking, but rest assured we will be insisting that harsher penalties are applied to pilots who take stupid risks, endangering themselves and others, and who bring the sport into disrepute. The Sporting Code already grants us the power to exclude offenders from our competitions. CIVL will in future require Organisers to penalise incidents of dangerous flying, and pilots who disregard warnings. CIVL is firmly committed to eradicating irresponsible behaviour of this nature.

Hang gliding and paragliding are 'high risk' sports and it is a fact of life that the media will focus on an accident or fatality, whether in a high level competition or

in recreation. But we accept your point that they are likely to receive more adverse publicity when they occur in high profile events.

We are always most interested in the opinions of other parties as to how safety can be improved. We welcome the opportunity to work together with all governing bodies, whether national or international, competition or recreation-oriented, on measures to improve safety at all levels in our sport. For this reason, we would appreciate your help in finding out more about what initiatives EHPU members are undertaking at their respective national levels to address these critical safety issues.

You write about a root-and-branch reform of the entire competition scene. The issues are complex, and differ between hang gliding and paragliding. But we certainly share your concerns about the financial and regulatory consequences of the current accident rates, and are not opposed to radical reappraisal, especially now that we seem to have the support of more leading pilots. Resources and effort should be pooled, not only between CIVL and EHPU, but with your counterparts representing other parts of the free-flying world. We trust you will continue to encourage your members to pursue the quest for greater safety in our sport and share their results with other bodies, including CIVL. We will of course, continue to keep you informed of progress within CIVL.

Yours sincerely

Flip Koetsier
CIVL President