



XXXIX ICF ORDINARY CONGRESS Pattaya, Thailand

Secretary General Report

It is a pleasure and honour to write to you as the new ICF Secretary General after stepping back into the world of canoe sport after five years at the International Olympic Committee.

Olympic Movement

During these five years I lead the development of Athlete365, a global community for elite athletes and their support network. Athlete365 is now central point of the IOC and wider Olympic Movement direct-to-athlete engagement strategy. Developing Athlete365 allowed me to further understand the Olympic Movement and build strong relationships from within the Olympic House.

It is these strong relationships, deep understanding of the Olympic Movement and wider sporting world from my time at national, international federations and with an Organising Committee of the Olympic Games that I will look to leverage for the benefit of the ICF – *Always Moving Forward!*

Message of Unity

With three board meetings, an executive committee and two major events since rejoining the ICF, I have certainly had to call upon my knowledge and experience during an intense but extremely enjoyable eight-week jump back into the world of canoe sport which combines with this the XXXIX ICF Ordinary Congress in Pattaya, Thailand.

It is the Congress that I am most excited about as it represents a special opportunity to connect to unite our community and benefit from a collective togetherness as we exchange ideas and discuss our shared passion for the progression of the world of paddle sports.

Since starting in September, I have already had the opportunity to connect with the wider Olympic Movement at the International Federation President and Secretary General briefing from the Thomas Bach IOC President, and more recently at the ANOC General Assembly in Korea.

At both touchpoints with the Olympic Movement leadership, the message has been clear with an overwhelming call for unity and optimisation across all sports as we seek to work together to move beyond these difficult financial and political times.

Develop through collaboration

The launch of *Fit for Future* at this congress marks a new beginning for our sport and underlines the ICF's openness to listen, and our deep understanding that we must work as a collective from local clubs to international competitions to truly enhance the position of paddle sports across the globe.

[Always moving forward](#)

Many of you have already had the opportunity to discuss and play an active role in the development of *Fit for Future*, underlining our desire to unite and optimise every area of paddle sports through a collaborative approach.

Aligned with the current global context, *Fit for Future* provides a framework for our operations and from this we will develop a series of flexible action plans that will support and build a stronger future for our sport.

Athletes Voice

During the Congress you will hear from the Chair of our Athletes' Commission, Bridget Hartley (RSA). I wanted to take this opportunity to raise the importance of the Athletes' Voice and to ensure that over the coming years we look to increase the representation of athletes at the decision-making level across our sport. Each continental and national federation should look to ensure an athlete representative with a voting right sits within your executive.

Progressive Season

2022 has been an incredible season for canoe sport, with 34 major events across our ten disciplines. These events have reached new highs in terms of fan engagement both on-site and online, and it was an honour for our sport to host IOC President Thomas Bach at one of our most treasured and historic venues, the Olympic Legacy course in Augsburg, Germany, for the ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships.

It was great to also hear about his interaction with our athletes during this event, including Jessica Fox (AUS) who he recently appointed as a member of the IOC Athletes' Commission.

Development and innovation

I am also pleased to write about the new multidiscipline entry-level boat for flatwater racing that is being developed with the goal of becoming the starting point for every paddler's competitive journey. This boat is currently in the testing phase and has received positive reviews from beginners to top athletes. The prototype boat will be available to view in Thailand and is being considered as the boat to be used at the Youth Olympic Games Dakar 2026.

Inclusion and equality

These innovations are supported by our global development programme. Here, we continue to strengthen our continental federations and ensure dedicated development teams focus on providing equipment, identifying talent and continuously strengthening our coach network, with a particular focus on supporting female coaches.

Four aspiring female coaches, Mexico's Adriana Valderrama Morones, South Africa's Bridgitte Hartley, Hungary's Sara Timea Seprenyi and Chinese Taipei's Sherry Chen were each nominated by their national federations and the ICF to participate the IOC WISH programme, a programme that provides pathways and opportunities to increase the number of female coaches at the top level of sport.

Always moving forward

Our inclusive approach is also being strengthened through new partnerships. Recent examples include the signing of MOU with the African Olympic Committee to promote canoeing across the continent and the ever-expanding opportunities for para-athletes with their recent inclusion in the Canoe Marathon World Championships in Portugal.

Sustainable, safe and fair

As a proud member of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, we are constantly looking for ways to make a positive impact on our climate through optimised event calendars, offsets, event impact reduction, and campaigns for the global paddling community to play an active role in protecting the planet.

Our strengthened partnership with the ITA and our continued commitment to safe sport are also fundamental to the success of our future. I would also like to bring to your attention the recent approval at the IOC Executive Board for the Strategic Framework on Human Rights, this outlines five focus areas of equality, safety, livelihood, voice and privacy and defines the respective remit of those within the Olympic Movement.

Professional Team

I would also like to give a special thanks to the professional team in Lausanne, it has been an incredibly challenging year, yet your leadership and drive has enabled the ICF to continue to excel – thank you.

I look forward to meeting all our membership in Thailand and I hope you enjoy the new and enhanced format that will allow us to collaborate and exchange ideas through our workshops.

Richard Pettit
ICF Secretary General