



ISORA Pre-AGM Summary: Key Discussion Points & Proposals

September–October 2025

Executive Summary

This discussion group explored ways to sustain and grow ISORA offshore racing amid declining participation. The mood was constructive and forward-looking, with strong support for volunteers. Key challenges identified included calendar congestion, perceived unfairness in scoring, crew pipeline issues, and geographic imbalance.

Importantly, a significant portion of the fleet—the “silent majority”—appear content with the existing style of racing. Their views, though less vocal, are crucial for balanced decision-making. There is concern that changes made for their own sake could inadvertently worsen participation, especially if they do not reflect the needs and preferences of the broader fleet.

1. Race Schedule & Format (Primary Concern)

- Previous AGMs have emphasized that most racing should be achievable within a weekend, reflecting the practical constraints faced by most participants. Many members, particularly those with limited holiday time, are concerned about proposals for longer races at a distance from home ports, as these require delivery, racing, and return delivery all within a tight Friday evening to Sunday afternoon window.
- There was a call for longer more complex races
- While multi-race weekends can be popular, they have not always been supported by our fleets for example Strangford. The Arklow weekend was, however, popular.
- The fleet is not all universally aligned with the idea of longer or more distant races, and any changes should carefully consider the impact on participation and accessibility.

Current Issues

- Calendar is overcrowded (15+ weekends), clashing with other events and creating burnout
- Single-race weekends are high effort for limited reward
- Reach-dominated courses lack appeal and advantage certain boats
- Delivery logistics are burdensome for fleets (Liverpool-based boats especially)
- Heavy May/June emphasis; thin coverage in August
- It was emphasized that previous AGMs have called for most racing to be achievable within a weekend, reflecting the practical constraints faced by most participants.



- Many members, particularly those with limited holiday time, are concerned about proposals for longer races at a distance from home ports, as these require delivery, racing, and return delivery all within a tight Friday evening to Sunday afternoon window.
- Others want longer races of a more complex nature.

Proposals for 2026

Multi-Race Weekends (Strong Support)

- Format: Coastal Friday evening → Offshore Saturday → Coastal Sunday morning
- Allows crews to commit once rather than multiple times; increases camaraderie and post-race socialising
- Target: 3 such weekends per season = 9–12 races without calendar sprawl
- However, experience has shown that while race weekends can be popular, they need to be properly supported by the whole fleet.
- Any changes should carefully consider the impact on participation and accessibility.

Tour-Style Series (Featured Suggestion)

- Single start/finish port with multiple races over Thursday–Sunday (or similar)
- Host ports rotate: Dun Laoghaire, Pwllheli, Holyhead, Conwy, Liverpool, Belfast, Isle of Man
- Reduces logistics; attracts regional participation; establishes different venues
- Again, the need to balance innovation with the realities of crew availability and travel constraints was highlighted.

Longer, More Challenging Races

- Add 150–300nm offshore races (beyond current reach-dominated 50–100nm events)
- Examples: Pwllheli–Round Isle of Man circuit; Holyhead–Tuskar–back; Inishtearaght
- Better conditions for skill differentiation; longer weather windows; more memorable events
- There is concern that not all members are able or willing to participate in longer races, especially if these require significant travel or time away from home.

Seasonal Progression

- **Spring:** Coastal warm-ups and short races
- **Summer:** Mix of longer offshores and multi-race weekends
- **Autumn:** Championship series with extended-duration events

Consensus Points

Any changes to the race schedule and format must be carefully weighed against the preferences of the broader fleet, many of whom value the current structure and the ability to race within a weekend.



2. Scoring System (Contentious but Productive)

While some members have raised concerns about the complexity and fairness of the current system, many in the fleet are satisfied with the status quo and do not see a pressing need for radical change.

Any adjustments should be carefully considered to avoid alienating those who are content with the existing approach.

Current Approach (CHIPS High-Point System with Weighting)

- Awards points based on boat numbers in each race. Spreads the available points throughout the fleet.
- Different weighting for different race lengths and types
- Discards allow boats to miss events and still compete for championship
- It is important to note that while some members have raised concerns about the complexity and fairness of the current system, many in the fleet are satisfied with the status quo and do not see a pressing need for radical change.
- Any adjustments should be carefully considered to avoid alienating those who are content with the existing approach and should be compatible with the capabilities of the scoring system 'Saiwave'.

Key Concerns Raised

- **Opaque & counterintuitive:** Non-specialists struggle to understand; seems unfair that fewer boats = fewer points
- **Paradox:** In tough conditions, fewer boats turn up—yet they receive *lower* points despite showing courage
- **Distortion:** Races outside the "Irish Sea zone" carry lower weighting, disadvantaging boats committed to major events (RI, D2D)
- **Championship decided early:** High number of discards means winners can be determined by early in the season. (*this has not actually happened, and the series is always decided on the last race*)
- There is a risk that frequent or complex changes to the scoring system could create confusion or reduce engagement among those who are already comfortable with the current format.

Proposals for Change

Option 1: Simplify to Low-Point (Appendix A)

- Straightforward 1st = 1 point, 2nd = 2 points, etc.
- Statistical analysis (from 2024 results) shows final rankings would remain largely unchanged
- Easier to communicate; transparent



Option 2: Equal Weighting for Offshore Races

- Remove differential weighting across offshores; all offshore races score equally despite length.
- Preserve weighting only to differentiate offshore vs. coastal
- Rationale: Race length should be consistent; conditions on the day cannot be predicted at AGM

Option 3: Performance-Based Adjustment

- Award bonus points for winning by significant corrected margin (borrowed from British Rowing model)
- Rewards dominance; discourages bunching at top
- More complex but fairer in close seasons

Option 4: Condition Factor

- Retain high-point system with weighting for race type
- Race committee (or independent advisors) assigns a "condition factor" on race day to reflect difficulty
- Rewards bravery in tough weather

Consensus Points

- **Do not** revert to pure low-point system (seasons would be decided too early)
 - Change is needed but must remain simple and rules-compliant
 - **Recommendation:** proposed changes should be modelled, tested for compatibility with scoring programmes, clearly communicated, with the understanding that most of the fleet may prefer minimal adjustments.
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3. Crew Pipeline & Participation (Long-Term Sustainability)

Issues

- Crew availability is the #1 limiting factor; many skippers have deep crews but cannot accommodate everyone
- Younger sailors lack pathways into offshore racing
- No structured mentoring or buddy system
- Limited intra-fleet visibility of what offshore racing looks like
- While new initiatives to broaden participation are welcome, it is also recognized that the current system works well for many existing crews. Changes should enhance, not disrupt, the positive aspects of current participation.



Proposals

Mentoring & Buddy Programmes

- Formalise crew placement on experienced boats for coastal races and offshore races (model: RORC crews)
- Pair novice skippers with experienced skippers for technical and safety guidance
- Partner with sailing schools on both sides of the Irish Sea

Training & Coaching Days

- Host pre-season skills workshops (navigation, heavy-weather tactics, crew roles, safety)
- Try-boat days and social events to build community
- Record webinars for asynchronous learning

Marketing & Storytelling

- Assign rotating race reports: one skipper/crew per event writes 200–300 words + photos
- Pitch stories to Afloat, Y&Y; leverage social media
- Highlight pathways (e.g., Mark O'Connor's Mini Transat success)

Emerging Participation Models

- Support double-handed racing (growing segment; 4+ confirmed boats; possible Wolf Head variant)
- Lightweight coastal series ("ISORA Lite") for boats not yet ready for full offshore
- Pursuit races with flexible start times to suit different boat types and tides

Any new participation models should be piloted carefully to ensure they complement, rather than replace, the established racing culture that many members value.

4. Rules & Fairness

Crew Limits (Offshore vs. Coastal)

- **Current:** IRC certificate + 1 (offshore); +2 (coastal)
- **Issue:** Skippers cannot accommodate all crew; insurance/liferaft capacity may be affected
- **Proposal:** Consider IRC certificate + 2 for offshore; unlimited for coastal
- **Counterpoint:** Safety regulations (liferaft capacity, manufacturer CE limits, insurance) safety and rules will always trump crew preferences
- **Consensus:** Liferaft capacity is the binding constraint; follow World Sailing and insurance guidance; AGM to vote

Sails (Extra Spinnakers)

- **Current:** +1 extra spinnaker allowed (RORC prescription to IRC)
- **Rationale:** Avoids repeated certification if one is damaged or ferry transport is difficult



- **No strong objection** identified; status quo appears acceptable

Round Ireland Inclusion

- Currently not included in overall ISORA championship; weighting debate
- **Proposal:** Include RI prominently; consider it a premier event with full weighting
- **Rationale:** ISORA members commit to it; it represents pinnacle of offshore challenge
- **Objectors:** outside the geographical area of ISORA. Could distort the season points. Non-attendance will deter participation in the whole season.

5. Geographic & Logistical Balance

Concerns

- Programme is biased toward Pwllheli/Dun Laoghaire; Liverpool-based boats face 100+ mile delivery legs
- Isle of Man underutilised despite iconic Midnight Race heritage
- Northern Ireland (Belfast, Bangor, Strangford) largely absent
- Proposals to rotate venues or expand geographic reach should be balanced against the demonstrated preferences and participation patterns of the fleet.

Proposals

- Rotate start/finish ports year-on-year across regions (Dun Laoghaire, Pwllheli, Holyhead, Conwy, Liverpool, Belfast, Douglas)
- Re-establish tour weekends to Liverpool (ferries, trains, marina partnerships)
- Explore Belfast Lough, Strangford Lough, Isle of Man, Arklow, and other suitable venues; coordinate with regional clubs
- Highlight Isle of Man Midnight Race (117 years' history; potential flagship event)

6. Scoring System Deep Dive (Technical)

Stephen Tudor provided detailed explanation:

- High-point with weighting allows coastal (3-hour races) not to distort offshore championship
- Weighting reflects race length *declared at AGM*; conditions on the day cannot be predicted
- Races outside the Irish Sea (e.g., Round Ireland, D2D) were previously weighted lower to protect boats unable to compete in them—this was a past AGM decision
- IRC rules compliance is mandatory; ISORA cannot unilaterally override World Sailing or National Authority regulations



Possible Compromise on Weighting:

- Standardise weighting across all offshore races (e.g., all score equally)
 - Differentiate only between offshore and coastal
 - Simpler and fairer; removes perception of "premium" vs. "secondary" offshores
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7. Event Affordability & Social Inclusion

Issues Raised

- Prize dinner cost (€95 per person) may deter young crew; black-tie dress code adds expense
- Long-distance travel, accommodation, and ferry costs burden crews from outlying regions
- Efforts to improve affordability and inclusion should be mindful of the fact that for many, the current arrangements are acceptable.
- Note: although considered expensive the Prize-giving evening is a sell-out and oversubscribed.
- Any changes should aim to lower barriers without undermining valued traditions.

Proposals

- Consider lower-cost dinner option or tiered pricing for students/junior crew
 - Emphasis on social value alongside competitive value
 - Recognise that cost barriers limit youth participation
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8. Social Aspects & Community

Key Insight

- ISORA's greatest strength is crew camaraderie, post-race gatherings, and sense of adventure
- Past bumper weekends (e.g., 2011–2012 Liverpool/IOM tours) remain vivid for participants
- Multi-race weekends and tour formats naturally foster this
- However, not all members are seeking more social or extended race formats, and the association should continue to offer opportunities for those who prefer the existing style of racing.

Recommendation

- Actively programme social time into schedules
 - Encourage club partnerships to host crews; arrange pre-race dinners
 - Celebrate wins and participation publicly
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9. Future Vision: Expanded Offshore Offering

Strategic Proposal (Chris Power Smith et al.)

Rather than operate multiple short races across the Irish Sea, consider a **tiered, integrated offshore championship**:

- **Premier Races** (Annual): Round Ireland, D2D (via coordination), Inishtearaght
- **Signature ISORA Races**: Iconic new race(s) around Isle of Man, Tuskar, or Rathlin
- **Feeder Races**: Multi-race weekends and medium-distance races building to premier events
- **Championship**: Unified points table under umbrella organisation

Rationale: Attracts comparable entries to Fastnet/Middle Sea Race; leverages volunteer efforts across multiple race organisers; elevates ISORA profile.

Implementation: Would require collaboration with DBSC, club committees, and potentially RORC; expanded volunteer base.

10. Quick Wins for Post AGM

- Form three working groups:
 - Calendar & Format (propose 3–4 options)
 - Scoring (model 2–3 systems; present trade-offs)
 - Crew & Marketing (outline mentoring pilot; media plan)
 - Publish draft 2026 calendar skeleton with multi-race weekends and new race concepts; invite conflict checks
 - Run one mentoring/open day and one online safety webinar
 - Trial rotating race reports (assign volunteers per event; publish weekly)
 - Clarify IRC & safety rules in writing; document AGM decisions
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11. Outstanding Questions for AGM Vote

- Adopt multi-race weekend format for 2026 (yes/no)?
- Approve tour-style series rotation (yes/no)?
- Change scoring system? Which option: Low-point, Equal Weighting, Performance-Based, or Status Quo?
- Increase crew limits to +2 offshore / unlimited coastal, status quo (yes/no)?
- Include Round Ireland in championship with full weighting (yes/no)?
- Launch mentoring & training pilot (yes/no)?



- Support double-handed racing variant (yes/no)?

12. Financial Impact & Sustainability

Overview

Any proposed changes to the race programme—whether in format, duration, or geographic scope—must be evaluated not only for their operational feasibility but also for their financial implications. The association’s ability to maintain affordability, secure sponsorship, and cover rising costs is essential to long-term sustainability and inclusivity.

Key Considerations

Cost Coverage: Extended race formats (e.g., multi-race weekends, tour-style series) may require additional resources—race management, safety oversight, and logistics support. These must be budgeted to avoid placing undue burden on host clubs or volunteers.

Tracker Costs . Our biggest cost by a long shot is the tracker line rental and data

Trophy Provisioning: An expanded race calendar will necessitate additional trophies and awards. This cost should be factored into any programme expansion and may require targeted sponsorship or reallocation of existing funds.

Without extending the programme the existing Trophies will require replacement, and this should be factored in to our financial thinking going forward.

Entry Fee Affordability: Maintaining low entry fees is critical to participation, especially for younger crews and boats from outlying regions. Any increase in race offerings must be balanced against the risk of pricing out segments of the fleet.

Sponsorship Strategy: A proactive sponsorship plan is needed to support new race formats and social events. Opportunities include:

- Naming rights for new races or series
- Branded trophies or merchandise
- Hospitality partnerships for post-race gatherings
- Youth and mentoring programme sponsorships

Tracker Sponsorship Opportunity

The live tracking system is central to ISORA’s race management, safety oversight, and spectator engagement. However, it represents the single largest recurring cost in our operations. To ensure sustainability and maintain affordable entry fees, we propose developing a dedicated sponsorship package around this asset.

Why It’s Attractive to Sponsors

- **High Visibility:** Sponsor branding can be integrated into the tracking interface, race reports, and social media updates.



- **Tech Alignment:** Ideal for companies in data analytics, marine technology, telecommunications, or GPS innovation.
- **Audience Reach:** Real-time tracking engages not only participants but also families, fans, and media—offering broad exposure.
- **Innovation Narrative:** Sponsoring the tracker system positions the company as a supporter of cutting-edge race management and safety.

Suggested Package Elements

- Naming rights for the tracking system (e.g., “Powered by [Sponsor Name]”)
- Logo placement on tracking maps and race dashboards
- Mentions in race briefings, results, and post-race communications
- Option to sponsor additional tech enhancements (e.g., mobile app integration, analytics dashboard)

Recommendations

- Establish a Finance & Sponsorship Working Group to model costs and identify funding opportunities.
 - Include a cost-impact assessment with any race format proposal brought to AGM.
 - Explore tiered entry fees or bundled race packages to support affordability.
 - Engage existing sponsors early to align support with new initiatives.
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Conclusion

ISORA faces a crossroads: maintain the status quo and accept declining participation, or adapt calendar, formats, and rules to meet evolving member expectations whilst honouring the association's heritage. The discussion group has identified concrete, actionable proposals grounded in respect for safety, rules compliance, and community.

It is essential that any changes are made with full consideration of the silent majority who are content with the current style of racing, and that the association avoids change for its own sake, which could risk further declines in participation.

A working-group approach will allow for thoughtful deliberation but will result in no decisions being made at the AGM or after the AGM having due regard to cost implications.

Gratitude to volunteers was unanimous and sincere. The challenge is distribution of effort and alignment with member desires.