REVIEW OF UK POWERBOAT RACING

This review was commissioned by the Board of the RYA, to whom it is addressed. It deals with the organisation and governance of the sport, not with the technical intricacies. It is for the RYA to determine how much of it to implement, and when.

My warmest thanks to the dozens of competitors, officials, supporters, critics and promoters of powerboat racing, who gave me their time and thoughts unstintingly during many hours of interviews and meetings. I am especially grateful to the RYA staff for their patient explanations and their speedy and factual responses to my enquiries. The pre-review survey they carried out was a valuable barometer of opinion among clubs, competitors and supporters.

Individually and collectively each contributor helped to shape this report and its conclusions. Errors of fact or interpretation are mine.

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The Counsel of Experience

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Summary

Powerboat Racing (PBR), under the auspices of the RYA as the National Governing Body (NGB) has been a contentious sector of the RYA’s business for fifty years, but no major change has taken place to alter the relationships between participants and the RYA. It was brought into high relief by the cost of the 2014 settlement of the Ridd v RYA claim.

Following the settlement the Board decided to conduct a review to ensure that the RYA is not subject to an unacceptable level of risk that could affect all its members in future. The review examines aspects of liability, risk, safety, training and the RYA organisation, and makes recommendations for their improvement.

PBR is a high-energy, close-proximity, fiercely competitive marine sport in which the number of participants has been in steady decline for several decades. Like most marine sports it is run by volunteers; its importance to participants and supporters is indisputable. However, the Ridd settlement highlighted the risk to the RYA as a whole because of its extensive involvement in the operation and delivery of PBR events.

Implicit in the decision to conduct the review was the question of whether the RYA should continue to be the NGB for the sport and whether that represents an acceptable option for the vast majority of its members. The review concludes that, while the present situation cannot continue, there is no quick and responsible exit open to the RYA.

The general conclusion of the review is that the RYA should take a number of steps to separate itself from the operational delivery of the sport and instead focus on safety, training and standards of performance, much as it does for sail racing (SR). In doing so it will respond to the clearly expressed opinions of participants. This will require clear leadership, good communication, and a temporary injection of resources.

Once this process is well established the RYA can either turn its attention to promoting and growing the sport, or to the creation of an independent NGB.
What’s in the review?

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1: The context

PBR is a niche sector of highly competitive marine sport under the purview of the RYA as the NGB. The disciplines are categorised broadly as Jetsport, Circuit and Offshore. As a motor sport it has significant differences from most of the marine sports for which the RYA is the NGB. However, it shares with them the characteristics that it is mainly run by volunteers aiming for professional standards.

PBR is governed at international level by the Union Internationale Motonautique (UIM), which in turn delegates responsibility to the RYA as the UK national authority. This has been the position for over 50 years, since the demise of the Marine Motorsport Association.

The UK rules mirror but do not replicate the UIM rules. Unusually for marine sports, competitors must have a licence appropriate to the discipline and level at which they compete. Though some UK competitors race under non-UK licences, it is not possible to hold more than one national licence at the same time.

As with other extreme sports PBR is a technically sophisticated, high-energy pursuit that has many inherent dangers; mistakes in driving hard projectiles conveying fragile bodies at high speed and in close proximity can be deadly. Competitors understand and formally acknowledge this. It is exhilarating and exciting and when run to a high standard, the dangers are minimised. As with all extreme sports, the challenge is to manage reasonable safety measures in such a way that they do not eliminate the element of risk and excitement.
PBR has much in common with air racing, or motor sports such as rallycross. Innovation in ultra-light and foiling technology in SR has created some parallels with PBR, tragically illustrated by the death of Andrew ‘Bart’ Simpson during America’s Cup training in 2013.

Incidents and accidents in PBR are frequent; there have also been serious injuries and fatalities over the last decade: Sorceror 2005 (the accident in which Ben Ridd was severely injured, leading to the 2014 settlement); Sleepwalker and Harwich 2009; Powerboat PI 2012. These are dealt with in section 5, Safety.

In underlining the RYA’s extensive involvement in, and responsibility for, the organisation and delivery of the sport the Ridd settlement highlighted the RYA’s exposure to liability as the NGB. This is radically different from its role in SR where clubs and class associations carry out the corresponding tasks. Reducing the RYA’s operational involvement in PBR resonates with the expressed views of many participants and reflects its role in relation to SR.

No single factor makes the RYA responsible for the actions of others within the powerboat racing community and no single step will remove that responsibility. A number of factors tend to confirm that the RYA is the organiser and controller of PBR and these are addressed in the review:

- Provision of insurance
- Course approvals
- Event approvals
- Approval of officials
- Approval of trainers
- Competitor licensing

So long as it remains the NGB, the RYA cannot shed ultimate responsibility for the sport; any alternative NGB would be in the same position. But especially in the present context in the UK, where personal insurers tend to drive litigation, this review recommends that the RYA should take proper steps to mitigate and balance the risk with that arising from other marine sports for which it is the NGB.

2: Options for the RYA

Four options were considered: the first two are rejected; the third is recommended; the fourth is a possible intermediate step towards separate accountability or independence. The RYA Board considered these options and strongly favours option 3: Delegation and Decentralisation, to be implemented speedily and in good order, with option 4 to be revisited in due course.

X 1: Why not just carry on?
- The present situation is insupportable for reasons discussed in the review.
- The Ridd outcome revealed exposure to risk and liability that is not tolerable.
- The current financial costs of PBR are excessive and inequitable for the rest of the RYA’s constituencies.
- The backlog of safety recommendations not fully implemented from historic accident reports reveals weaknesses in PBR organisation and governance.
  - The noise level from discontented participants is a major distraction and a risk to the RYA’s reputation.
  - The status quo means continued decline in some aspects of the sport, especially the Offshore discipline.
X 2: Why not walk away?

- This could not be done quickly or simply.
- It will require unwinding from the UIM regime, as well as from the relationships with clubs and individuals.
- For competitors to be able to take part in international racing or national racing of international standard, an NGB is required.
- There is no alternative body ready in the wings, though this and other avenues could be explored.
- Without an authoritative NGB there will be more unregulated and inadequately managed racing, with more potential for accidents.
- Without the legitimacy the RYA conveys to harbourmasters as well as inland water-owners and landowners, some events will not be permitted.
- The reputational damage to the RYA of being seen to walk away from PBR will be worse than the present low-grade guerrilla war of words.
- There is no clear desire in the PBR community to disengage from the RYA. Even among the most critical comments, only a handful of those who responded to the pre-review survey (6% = 6) proposed this.

√ 3: Or... delegate and decentralise

Most of the required expertise is in the clubs, class associations and promoters. They clearly wish to be more influential and this should be respected in any future scenario. Self-regulation is the norm in sports including SR, as well as business and industry.

- Many administrative and regulatory functions now carried out centrally should be delegated to clubs and event operators, as in SR.
- Specific action will be required to continue to raise awareness of safety issues and secure the implementation of safety measures locally.
- The RYA’s role in insurance will be to negotiate standard policies that can be purchased by individual clubs or events, as in SR. Clubs will be free to negotiate insurance independently.
- A new financial model will be required to accommodate changes in charging for insurance, licences and other administration.
- The change may exceed the resources of some clubs; collaboration and some consolidation may follow. The RYA should assist with mergers.
- The costs of PBR to the RYA and participants should be kept under review.
- Additional effort will be required to work through regulatory, administrative and procedural tasks as they are handed over.
- The role and number of national committees will be radically changed.

? 4: An arm’s length option

- A further option would be to set up a subsidiary newco and appoint the company directors. This would somewhat reduce the RYA’s exposure, though it would be a shadow director and could still be subject to claims.
- The RYA would appoint the company directors, whose terms of reference would include appointment of members of any committees by competence.
- The newco would have to operate as a going concern. This could only be achieved by initial loans from the RYA, but the discipline of balancing costs and income with loans would push finances towards an economic level.
- This model is widely used elsewhere to separate assets and activities. Sail Training International, for example, operates the Tall Ships Races through several limited liability subsidiaries, some of which are responsible for a single event where the risks are judged to be exceptional.
- If this path is not selected at present, many of the benefits could still be taken by requiring the same disciplines, even without the newco structure.
3: How big is PBR?

Participation in regulated PBR has been shrinking steadily. A paper written in 1976 observed ‘...in 1969 there were 1,200 licensed drivers – in 1976 there are barely 600.’ Thirty years later in 2006 there were 477 full licence holders (equating to individual competitors) across all three disciplines; in August 2015 there were 300. With minor blips the ten-year trend as represented by licence holders has been downward in all three disciplines.

The number of clubs is not an indicator of the size of the sport. 7 Circuit racing clubs are listed in PB2 2015; there were 93 Circuit licences. 43 Offshore clubs were listed, while there were 142 licences: some of these coalesce around events with no geographical base; some have physical facilities; some are dormant until they organise events.

Meanwhile data from the RYA membership database shows that about 21,000 (20%) record their primary interest as being in various forms of non-competitive motor boating, including sportsboat, personal watercraft and rib. About 1,200 (1%) state that PBR is their primary boating interest, slightly fewer than the next largest group whose main interest is canal and river cruising. This contrasts with about 37,000 who said their primary interest was yacht cruising and about 7,000 who state yacht racing as their first interest.

Balancing the need to support a minority pursuit with the interests of most of its membership will remain a challenge. Some respondents to the pre-review survey said:
- RYA should take more interest in powered sport: it’s all rYa I suppose.’
- ‘RYA... is too focused on sailing and I feel there is a real divide in what is required for a motorsport as opposed to a leisure pastime.’

In tacitly accepting the evolution of the present position, the RYA has also accepted a high level of risk to the majority of its members, on behalf of a small number of members who are adherents of a specialised sport. It is right that it should take appropriate steps to mitigate the risk.

4: Insurance and liability

The RYA has over many years provided insurance cover for PBR which is extended to affiliated clubs to cover their events. The policy covers public liability for competitors and clubs, personal accident for officials and medical malpractice for medics, para medics and the Medical Panel. The costs are recouped via a charge to clubs.

Provision of this insurance is one of the bundle of factors tending to confirm that the RYA is the organiser and controller of PBR. Work is underway to negotiate a standard policy with the RYA’s broker at a reasonable premium, which clubs can buy directly, or if they prefer, negotiate cover with alternative brokers. The RYA Board aims to have this in place by 1 January 2016 and to give notice to clubs as rapidly as possible.

There is concern that, without RYA control, there will be no restriction on the minority of drivers who just want to race and are prepared to take the risk of doing so un- or under-insured. Given participation by unlicensed drivers in unregulated events such as rallies and poker runs, which are often de facto racing and which will probably continue, this anxiety is justified. A tiny minority of respondents to the survey –three in all - do not feel the sport needs to be governed at all.
There is a small group who simply want to go as fast as possible whatever the risks. One survey respondent said: ‘You are all so scared of death that you have created a new death, that of the sport, via boredom... People seem to forget that the attraction of this and other motor sports is taking it to the edge.’ This was a minority voice: the majority appear to want to race fast and safely and go home at the end of the day. Restraint will in future reside in the clubs rather than in policing by the RYA.

5: Safety

The organisers of the sport have a duty towards the safety of participants, officials, spectators and the public. In that role, the RYA will continue to act as the custodian of safety standards, but in future the clubs, event managers and competitors will be responsible for implementing them.

To draw a line under past accidents the RYA should complete implementation of the recommendations of the three investigations: Sorceror 2005, MAIB; Sleepwalker and Harwich 2009, MAIB; Powerboat P1 2012, RYA.

Although considerable progress has been made it has not been fully documented against the investigation reports. Consequently it is not auditable and the RYA cannot demonstrate that it has made the changes within its powers, or if it has decided against implementation, the reasons why. The key recommendations are now being assigned green/amber/red ratings for implementation and documentation.

That a backlog of safety recommendations remains from past accidents is a serious concern and a major risk to the RYA, both in law and reputation. The Board and Council have previously made commitments to implement these, but must follow this through by ensuring delivery. The current complexity of committees has not facilitated progress.

At present the RYA is responsible for approving events and courses. Given the extent of knowledge and expertise among the clubs and promoters, and the shared desire for devolution of decision making, the RYA should cease to call-in and approve events and courses. The period over which this will be achieved and the transitional steps are for consideration. The RYA should continue to offer access to advice, constituting expert panels as required, but the decisions will ultimately rest with the club or promoter.

Other aspects of safety management in PBR give cause for concern.
- Many event risk assessments are weak and imprecise; there are examples of good practice in PBR that can provide useful lessons.
- Incident reporting is often late and inexact, making it difficult to identify important common themes. As in many other settings, near-miss reporting is often neglected, though this is the most fertile ground for learning and preventing major accidents.
- It is difficult to keep systematic safety management fresh for repeated events, but this is essential for anticipation and avoidance of major accidents.

Part of the future role of the RYA should be to identify and share examples of good practice in risk assessment, incident reporting and systematic safety management, and to offer advice and training to clubs and event organisers.

6: Current organisation and friction

By contrast with the rest of the devolved RYA organisation, PBR is highly centralised and bureaucratic, a legacy unchanged for half a century. A huge volume of communications passes through the PBR office and the committees. Its role has evolved into that of regulator and policeman, very much at odds with its relationship to SR.
The McKinsey review (*RYA Organisation and Governance 2002*) aimed to simplify the RYA’s structures, eliminate dual reporting lines and reduce ambiguity. But the RYA left PBR as a direct report to the CEO, where today it consumes disproportionate time and attention. The McKinsey recommendation that national committees should be composed by competence was implemented for all the principal sectors except PBR.

Discontent within the sector, and between racers and the RYA is not new. The 1976 paper by the then deputy secretary of the RYA also commented that ‘The present system has created a deep schism between competitors and administrators. The drivers...claim that rules are made for the benefit of those who administer, without any regard for the overall good of the sport itself.’

RYA staff working on PBR must have some knowledge of the sport and PBR managers have had a history of active participation, including the current manager and her predecessors. Bizarrely, this exposes them to accusations of partisanship and worse. All of the RYA’s past and present PBR managers have been vilified by some participants, who have recently used social media to make outrageous comments and assertions. The pre-review survey also evoked some toxic comments, which discredit their writers.

As participation shrinks, in some areas the loudest voices grow louder and more insistent. The practice has arisen of haranguing the RYA and pushing disputes over apparently small matters to the highest level. Except for the convenience of the pathway to the top, there is little rational justification for occupying so much senior staff time with copious detail.

### 7: Rules of racing

The PBR rules are in three volumes, PB1 Offshore, PB2 Circuit, PB3 Jetsport; they are densely written and highly technical. Although a considerable amount of work to simplify and de-duplicate the rules has already taken place and PB2 Circuit Rules show the benefit of this, much work remains to be done on PB1 Offshore Rules. For Offshore and Circuit, it would be helpful to eliminate differences between the RYA rules and the UIM rules as far as practicable.

The Jetsport rules set out in PB3 are largely those of the International Jet Sports Boating Association, while the training programme is set out by a separate body, the Jet Sport Racing Association. While it would clearly be tidier to have all PBR disciplines operating under one international governing body, the present arrangements work adequately and there is no overriding reason to change in the immediate future.

There is a considerable amount of common content between the rule books; rationalising what is common content and what is unique should be pursued. The RYA Racing Rules of Sailing 2013-2016, which set out common rules across all SR classes in a single volume, are a helpful comparator.

In the Racing Rules of Sailing, the RYA Racing Charter sets out standards of behaviour and sportsmanship, which could be usefully adopted for PBR. Its first principle for SR includes the following: ‘The sport welcomes all participants; it relies largely on self-compliance and self-policing.’ Under the new arrangements, this should be the future ethos of PBR.

The RYA’s current stance of enforcing the rules is no more popular than the previous regime, which was thought to interpret them more liberally and was criticised with equal severity. There is a narrow path between consistent application of international, national and class rules, and pushing competitors into unregulated racing.
In its capacity as the NGB on behalf of the international governing body the RYA will continue to be the custodian of the rules of racing. But it will in future rely on the clubs to implement the rules. It should be for clubs to certify that the rules have been followed; this will no doubt also be of interest to insurers. In managing the rules the RYA should continue to recognise the views of the majority of participants, and not respond only to the loudest voices.

Specially constituted expert panels should advise the RYA on the content of the rules, which will require some modification. Arrangements for dealing with protests will continue as at present, though the method by which appeal panels are nominated will need revision.

8: Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is irksome to the PBR community and it is burdensome to the RYA. The pre-review survey showed this clearly. In response to the question ‘Is there anything else you would like to share with us’ competitors ventilated their frustration in comments such as the following:

- ‘Listen to the racers, they are voting with their feet. RYA is currently destroying the sport as it is out of touch.’
- ‘I also feel very strongly about some of the more silly rules, such as having to apply every year to be able to keep your race number.’
- ‘I have found in the last two years changes to national rules and regulations via the RYA and Circuit Racing Committee have been inappropriately applied at club level and have resulted in drivers giving up the sport.’
- ‘I feel competitors should play a bigger part in discussing rule changes to do with classes they race, such as these Snell helmets, steering cable upgrading, full face helmets.’
- ‘Cut red tape, make it easy for the return of weekend warriors.’
- ‘I would request a drivers’ forum at least once a season to air views as this would work as a good release valve.’
- ‘Rule changes have been issued with only a few weeks to the start of the practice/racing season. How are we supposed to comply when some require major modification to hulls?’
- ‘Another point is how slowly the RYA deals with matters that arise over a season, to ask that a procedure is put in place so that any issues that require RYA intervention can be dealt with before the end of that racing year.’
- ‘The RYA should be administering the wishes of its members similar to the way sailing is run.’

These and other comments may include inaccuracies and contradictions but it is important that they are acknowledged. They represent how the organisation of PBR looks to participants, many of whom feel that decisions are beyond their reach and influence. This perception is the more regrettable since the RYA is an organisation of its members and in relation to PBR, as to SR, can only act with their consent and support.

The present arrangements do not recognise the reality that just as in SR, though experts come together in the PBR committees, expertise is actually distributed among the clubs and class associations. Decentralising decision making and devolving responsibility to clubs will bring PBR into line with SR and will better acknowledge and value the knowledge of participants.
9: Committees

For so small a sector, the supercargo of PBR committees and panels is out of proportion in numbers and membership to the size of the sport, a legacy of a different era. The committees de facto make decisions and rules in the name of the RYA. Committee business is highly technical and almost theological in its detail. Technical discussions must take place but they are inappropriate for national lead committees and have not been a useful source of advice for the RYA about the future development of the sport. They hungrily consume the time and attention of the diminutive PBR staff.

The tendency to push issues upwards is reflected in the length and density of agendas of the lead national committee, the Powerboat Racing Committee (PBRC). A form of ‘convection’ can take topics round several loops before resolution; with infrequent meetings there can be long delays. The present status of the PBRC and the discipline-specific committees, effectively taking operational decisions on the RYA’s behalf, tends to further confirm its involvement in operational matters.

During 2016 the RYA should forensically review the role and status of the committees. It should be clear that the lead committee resulting from this scrutiny is giving policy advice to the RYA rather than acting on its behalf. Similarly, any technical committees that result from this scrutiny should clearly be giving advice to event organisers and participants, rather than instructing them to do or desist.

There is a significant exception. The Medical Panel is an essential element of competitor licensing, and as discussed below this function will remain with the RYA as part of its delegated authority from the UIM.

Committee members are volunteers, experts engaged with minutiae who often find it hard to focus on the bigger picture and it is not reasonable to ask them to do so. For some, committee involvement represents deep commitment; for some it is a long term hobby that has enabled them to be engaged with the sport. The recommendation of appointment by competence rather than representation should now be acted on.

Changing from representation to competence-based appointment will result in turnover. In the pre-review survey, 35 respondents said they would be interested in being a member of committee, while 10 said they had previously been a member and would be interested in re-joining. This suggests a basis for recruiting and training a new cohort of members of technical committees.

10: Leadership

The absence of clear leadership and vision in PBR is a cause for concern and part of the reason why it has lost direction. While there are clubs and promoters such as Powerboat GP (Circuit) http://www.powerboatgp.co.uk/ and Powerboat P1 (Offshore) http://www.powerboataot1.com/ that are developing successful and financially viable models, the fractious nature of the sector means that on their own they will not be acceptable as the leaders for PBR as a whole.

A shrinking racing population correlates with smaller classes, clubs and supporter groups and a narrowing focus of participants. Tribalism unintentionally but inevitably excludes newcomers. This in turn tends to further reduce the ‘gene pool’ - sometimes literally, since in some clubs and classes whole families are the core adherents.

A major task for the sport as a whole is to make itself attractive, understandable, and accessible to anyone. At present it is shrouded in technicalities, specialist language and
tribal behaviour, which excludes rather than welcoming new entrants. As PBR has diminished in size and popular appeal, it has become both inward and backward looking, instead of learning from other sectors and looking to the future.

Unlike SR, powerboat racing has very few contemporary heroes who lift the spirits of all participants and the public, irrespective of their discipline; leadership must come from elsewhere. A fresh start is required and the RYA should create a new lead body to provide advice to the Board, to replace the Powerboat Racing Committee. Its members should be appointed according to their competence and the skills they bring to the table. These should not be restricted to powerboat racing, or even to marine sport.

Desirable skills and experience include:

- High energy, close proximity sport such as air racing or motor sport
- Respected PBR practitioner
- Commercial events and venues
- Fan engagement, marketing and promotion
- Relevant small-scale marine industry
- Regulation and compliance
- High-level training in amateur sport
- Youth development and recruitment

It is unlikely that public advertising alone will produce the right mix of candidates, so proactive recruitment and talent-spotting will be needed. Whatever their backgrounds, members of the new body will require induction into the complexities of the sector.

11: Future role of clubs

In the decentralised model proposed, clubs, class associations, event organisers and promoters (all of which can have the same status in the RYA canon) will take on all the operational and delivery responsibilities currently exercised by the RYA committees and panels, with the limited exceptions identified elsewhere in this review.

One scenario was summed up by a respondent to the survey: ‘Each discipline should be run by its own mandated clubs and be administered by the national authority.’ This has superficial attractions but on closer inspection it turns out to be much less attractive. It would require extra staffing and resources for an entirely new system of inspection of ‘mandated’ PBR clubs; it would add to the total cost. Especially in the fractious state of Offshore, no single club would be likely to gain acceptance from the others. It would also reinforce the RYA’s liability by implying that clubs are safe and competent. This is not a warranty offered to SR clubs and there is no good reason to do so for PBR clubs.

PBR clubs will continue to be able to affiliate to the RYA, although this does not confer any form of approval. Clubs and other bodies, both voluntary and commercial, will be able to apply for recognition as RYA Training Centres. A considerable number of the ~2,400 RYA Recognised Training Centres offer recreational powerboat training and certification - as yet only two offer powerboat race training.

In the transition to devolved arrangements, it will be important to value the models of best practice already in use by clubs and other providers, rather than assume that everything must be created from scratch. Current RYA advice such as the 2015 template and guidelines on Offshore events, and the RYA’s general advice on legal aspects of race training and event management, should be part of the basis of a good practice package.
12: Training

The rules and advice on all the PBR disciplines emphasise training. This is an exacting sport, high-energy, high-speed, run in close proximity. By contrast, training can be diffuse, inconsistent, and over-reliant on experience and informal ‘apprenticeships’, with emphasis on not having accidents rather than on proven skills. For Circuit racing, junior training is described in PB2, and for Offshore in the 2015 Race Training Requirements. Both lack clear statements of attainment and records of teaching and assessment.

It might be thought that formal training would deter new entrants to the sport. On the contrary, experience in other fields shows that well-defined training with clear standards and progression, obvious entry points and pathways encourages participation. PBR training does not at present compare well with the demands of land-based motor sports or even elite sail racing.

Nor is it easy for newcomers to discover how to access training as part of their entry to the sport. By implication all PBR clubs offer training, but in all disciplines it is difficult to find out where they are and how to enrol for a recognised course. Although it is easy to find RYA training centres that offer recreational powerboat courses, finding powerboat race training requires a treasure hunt.

Most of the training and assessment of PBR competitors is by peers. This can deliver acceptable results, though with the pool of expertise restricted in some areas and shrinking in others, it is inevitable that inherited and outdated practices and assumptions are less likely to be challenged and there can be little guarantee of consistency.

Developing a training programme will help to secure consistency of skills and competence. It should be resolutely pushed forward. There are at present only limited resources for rigorous training and testing in the classroom and afloat, to an approved syllabus. The RYA should aim to increase the number and availability of recognised centres offering PBR training until all PBR training can be through them.

Where clubs want to develop RYA training centres they may choose to introduce charges for training services, or use commercial providers to deliver training under their auspices. It is likely that some groups of clubs will wish to co-operate or even amalgamate to share the burdens and benefits. In the immediate future some clubs may be unable to become RYA training centres, though they should be given every incentive to do so. Their training officers should be able to apply for accreditation.

13: Licensing

Unusually among marine sports, PBR competitors require licences to participate. There is no parallel in SR. Most of the categories of licence have specific standards for experience and competence and it has undoubtedly helped to make PBR a safer sport. It is common to most high-energy sports and helps to protect competitors, officials and spectators.

Licensing is part of the UIM framework delegated to the RYA as the national governing body. In effect, the RYA certifies that a competitor is competent to race; it is one of the factors tending to confirm the RYA’s ultimate responsibility for PBR. Licensing is fundamental to PBR and the RYA does not intend to shed this responsibility. As discussed above, the Medical Panel will continue as a part of the licensing process.

As the RYA passes control of PBR to the clubs, licensing will remain an important function. Verifying an entrant’s eligibility to race will rest with the club or event organiser.
and will be part of the race report provided to the RYA. Since unlicensed racing or racing in unregulated events leads to disqualification from national and international events, clubs will have to be meticulous in checking, recording and reporting.

Event (ie one-off) licences are not part of the UIM framework, but were intended to make it easier for occasional competition without the cost of a full licence. They rely on self-certification by the competitor and sign-off by the Officer of the Day at an event. For a period until 2014 they were increasingly used as a cheaper route to participation by experienced competitors, undermining their purpose. The RYA will monitor trends in Event licences and will consider whether they should continue to be available.

14: Race officials

The race officials are volunteers approved by the RYA, who help to secure safe and fair racing. As the RYA’s role in relation to PBR changes, their role will become more significant. Currently the principal roles are Officer of the Day, Safety Officer, Race Secretary, Time Keeper, Scrutineer, Measurer and Commissioner. Under the future arrangements, the role of Commissioner will no longer be required.

 Provision of insurance for officials’ contingent liability tends to imply that they are agents of the RYA; from January 2016 they will be covered by the clubs’ public liability policies rather than by the RYA. The RYA will also discontinue the personal accident insurance it has provided for officials; this cover is very limited, so officials would in any event have been well advised to purchase their own.

During the course of the Ridd claim, the officials involved in the race in question experienced a period of uncertainty as to whether they would personally be subject to the claim. The RYA should review the legal status of officials and clarify that they are generally acting on behalf of the club or event organiser; this should be clear in revised documentation.

The RYA’s system for approval of officials should be reviewed, especially given the variability noted below. Once an official is approved, at present there is no requirement for update training or a re-test. While approval is effectively for life the sport continues to evolve; not only do the rules and technologies change over the course of time, but the competence and practices of officials may change also. With no continuing development programme and little refreshing of the pool of officials, it is likely that knowledge and practices will lag behind the development of the sport.

Training and assessment of officials leading to approval by the RYA is by experience and peer-observation. The standards of attainment or ability to exercise knowledge are open to wide interpretation and there is no common yardstick. Without clear standards, race organisers cannot know whether the officials on whom they rely are competent; nor can the RYA. Performance matrices used in the past should be revisited. The RYA’s role in future should be to provide formal training and assessment, and facilitate contact between event organisers and officials assessed as competent.

It has been suggested that there is a limited supply of officials, though about 90 are listed in PB1 Offshore alone. Recruitment is mainly by a ‘tap on the shoulder’ or by self-referral. However, there has been no open, concerted recruitment and selection of new recruits. 30% of the 93 competitors responding to the survey would consider training as an official.

The pathway to becoming an official has evolved over time, but it does not have a clearly defined and documented framework of skills and attainment, by which it is possible to show that one official’s skills are equal to another’s. This was pointed out in
the RYA *Powerboat P1* accident investigation report, which also observed that there is limited scope for revising old, or learning new, skills. The implication, borne out by observation during this review, is that the practices, focus and competence of officials are variable.

The pre-review survey invited respondents to say whether the roles and responsibilities of race officials are clear to them. Almost 90% said they were, though a small number were uncertain about which official is in overall charge of the event.

During the review, conversation with officials also revealed some differences in perception about their respective roles and authority, as well as differences in practice. There may be several pathways to securing safe racing but to know whether all routes are equally good, they need to be mapped.

**15: Documentation and registry**

As it does at present, the RYA will continue to act as the central registry for documentation, including licensing of competitors, approval of officials, race and incident reports. The vast majority of survey respondents (80-90%) would use electronic communications for PBR; all, of course, responded to the survey electronically.

Paper documents are now scanned and electronically stored, but cannot yet be searched. The present mix of electronic and paper records should be replaced with entirely electronic reporting to a central database. This should be viewed as a resource to the sector rather than principally to the RYA; it will be an important step to make it usable by clubs and event organisers.

Ultimately this would give authorised users the ability to check the licence status of entrants, the qualification of officials, or to scan accident reports for trends or recurring incidents, for example. It would also enable some tasks to be automated, such as reminders for submission of race or incident reports. It is a significant piece of work and should be scheduled for action as the RYA’s resources permit.

**16: Financial model**

The net deficit on PBR is projected to be ~£90,000k or about £300 per competitor. Membership of the RYA is included free in competitor licence fees, an opportunity cost to the RYA of ~£50 per licenced competitor. Changes to insurance arrangements will impact on this and a new financial model will be needed, which is outside the scope of this review.

The Ridd settlement costs are assumed to be one-off and there is no prospect of PBR generating sufficient income to fund them. In spite of the settlement, the RYA’s insurance premiums are not expected to rise.

In the medium term of 3-5 years under the current financial model, general costs and income would remain in substantial deficit. Staff costs have been reduced by the redundancy of an administrative post, while other measures such as reduction in UIM delegations are under consideration. These measures will not balance the books.

It is believed by some participants that insurance, licences and other charges are excessive, especially by comparison with other European NGBs. It is suggested that the difference is explained by the extent of insurance cover and service quality by other NGBs, together with the current £/€ exchange rate, but this deserves further scrutiny.
Meanwhile, the PBR income and costs are not published and there is nothing to counter the belief that charges are excessive. The RYA has confidence in its own financial management so there seems no good reason to withhold them.

Comments from the pre-review survey include the following:

- ‘National entry fees were not good value for money considering the limited time on the water.’
- ‘Explain to everyone where the cost of their licence fee goes. This seems to be everyone’s biggest gripe against the RYA. It needs to be more open about the cost of insurance, health and safety and risk management.’
- ‘I appreciate acutely that the RYA always runs the department at a loss but it does need to become more efficient. Licences and all of the other costs and time commitments needed to get a licence are just too onerous/expensive.’
- ‘The cost of a licence and entries to events is unsustainable. Compared to other countries in the UIM family why is it that the UK competitors have to pay at last 60% more than anyone else?’
- ‘How does everyone else operate economically when we as the UK get ripped off? Go on, publish the accounts from the last 10 years.’

Relative to the costs of hardware, fuel and maintenance, fees and charges appear to be a modest part of the cost of competing. However, it is always difficult for people involved in one part of any service or system to see the cost of the whole: PBR has in fact been subsidised for many years. Even so, the view seems to have grown up among some participants that the RYA should be like the NHS – free at the point of delivery.

17: Promoting PBR

Until the measures above start to take effect, and the RYA has decided whether to remain as the NGB for the sport, it is not realistic to assign resources to promotion. In any event, raising the profile of PBR will largely depend on external resources, of which commercial sponsorship is the most likely.

The RYA Manifesto asserts that it ‘promotes and maintains safe, responsible recreational boating’. The terms of reference of the current PBRC assign it responsibility 'to promote all forms of powerboat competition'; any NGB would expect similar obligations.

In spite of the small size of PBR, the RYA has given good exposure in its own print and electronic publications, though these are mainly seen by its 100,000 members. In recent years the sport has not re-ignited public excitement or media interest. The RYA should nevertheless give its unequivocal support to the promoters who are developing successful commercial models.

At all levels in PBR there is anxiety that there are too few young entrants to be the competitors and champions of the future. Though there are some successful junior classes in both Circuit and Jetsport, the age profile of regular competitors is generally increasing. Without resources to promote, recruit and equip newcomers, the trend will continue. The Honda RYA Youth Rib programme emphasises safe boat handling and produces highly skilled graduates, but it does not readily connect with PBR. rya.org.uk/programmes/hondaryayouthrib/Pages/default.aspx

PBR has been overtaken by other sports that have achieved a higher profile and more commercial or official backing. Many PBR events are small, at local venues without spectator facilities. Marathon events are not spectator-friendly ashore and have also lost their fascination for TV. Yet the 2015 America’s Cup World Series, which took place during this review, demonstrates that it is still possible for extreme marine sports to attract public attention, media coverage and sponsorship.
There are some conspicuous and encouraging models: P1 and AquaX are complementary forms of powerboat and jetsport racing on the sea close inshore, backed by onshore events that pull in spectators. Powerboat GP operates on enclosed waters and creates a similar spectator experience. Both are commercial operations, though they have required tenacious backers with deep pockets to develop them. Each has succeeded in different degrees in securing external sponsorship and selling TV rights. Each has introduced rigorous competitor standards. The same route is open to other groups within PBR, such as Thundercats, which epitomises the spectacular aspects of the sport, though it is not yet commercially viable.

Promotion and regulation can be uncomfortable bedfellows: the regulator must be even-handed while promotion has to be selective. Once largely freed from the policing role and with a clear path, the RYA should select a partner to carry out promotion. This could be an agency, a publisher or a successful PBR organisation.

Once it is clear that change is underway, the RYA should seek seed funding to:
- Run an initial campaign to communicate a fresh start and signal confidence.
- Analyse successful models and identify the elements to be promoted.
- Develop a publicly intelligible narrative for the sport, improving the accessibility and quality of the RYA and other websites.
- Promote selected elements - disciplines, classes, skills, or safety - to stimulate greater participation, commercial sponsorship and public interest.
- Recruit prospective sponsors and incubate partnerships, aiming to make promotion and profile self-sustaining.
- Dignify classic PBR disciplines for which there is little immediate prospect of development.
- Honour past PBR heroes and what they achieved without today's technology.

Footnote: the pre-review survey

During early July all past and present PBR officials, clubs and competitors were invited to respond to an electronic survey. Response rates were similar to the norm for this kind of survey: 15% of clubs, 24% of officials and 14% of competitors. It does not provide statistically reliable data, but even so it is an invaluable source of opinion from the sport.