



# Navigating the Future

The five year strategic plan  
for sailing, windsurfing and  
boating in Northern Ireland



The RYA Northern Ireland  
is the National Governing  
Body for the sports of  
sailing, windsurfing  
and powerboating in  
Northern Ireland.

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# Introduction

## We are proud to present the refreshed strategy for sailing and boating in Northern Ireland, *Navigating the Future*.

The original *Navigating the Future* strategy was launched in March 2023 following extensive consultation across the sailing and boating community. This process included online surveys, as well as in-person and online workshops, all of which played a key role in shaping the direction of the strategy. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the clubs, volunteers, coaches, officials, parents and sailors whose commitment and dedication to the sport have been instrumental in enabling significant progress in its development and growth.

Progress against the strategy has been monitored on a regular basis. At the halfway point of the five-year cycle, in September 2025, a comprehensive review was undertaken by the staff and Board. This review considered a number of factors, including:

- Progress and achievements to date.
- Challenges experienced.
- New or emerging issues affecting sport, clubs and the wider sailing community.

Following this review, the Board and staff agreed that the Strategic Aims and Foundations established in 2023 remain the right ones. However, changes to the medium- and long-term goals were required, reflecting a clearer understanding of what is working in practice, the capacity of the sport at all levels, and the need to remove some duplication.

## From page 17 of this document, the main changes to the strategy can be seen. These include:

- A reduction in the number of goals, reflecting a clearer focus on the priority areas that will best support the development and growth of the sport.
- The introduction of progress indicators to better track, demonstrate and communicate where progress is and is not being made.
- A summary of progress achieved to date.
- Improving Diversity remains a core Strategic Aim and organisational priority. However, rather than being addressed in isolation, diversity is now embedded across the goals and progress indicators within the other Strategic Aims and Foundations.

There continues to be outstanding work taking place to develop and grow sailing across Northern Ireland. At its heart, the strategy remains focused on celebrating the sport, the people and places that make it possible, and its rich local and national heritage. There is much to be proud of, and we remain committed to ensuring that everyone who helps make the sport happen at every level, from grassroots to the world stage, feels valued and recognised for the role they play.

**Gavin Watson** | Chair  
**Greg Yarnall** | CEO



Gavin



Greg



# How was this strategy developed?

Nearly 100 different voices have had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the latest RYA NI Strategy, through:



Reviewing progress and insight



Learning conversations and one on one interviews



Club and Training Centre surveys



Webinars



Staff and Board workshops



Check and challenge sessions with clubs, training centres and volunteers



# What do you mean when you say 'Our' strategy for boating?

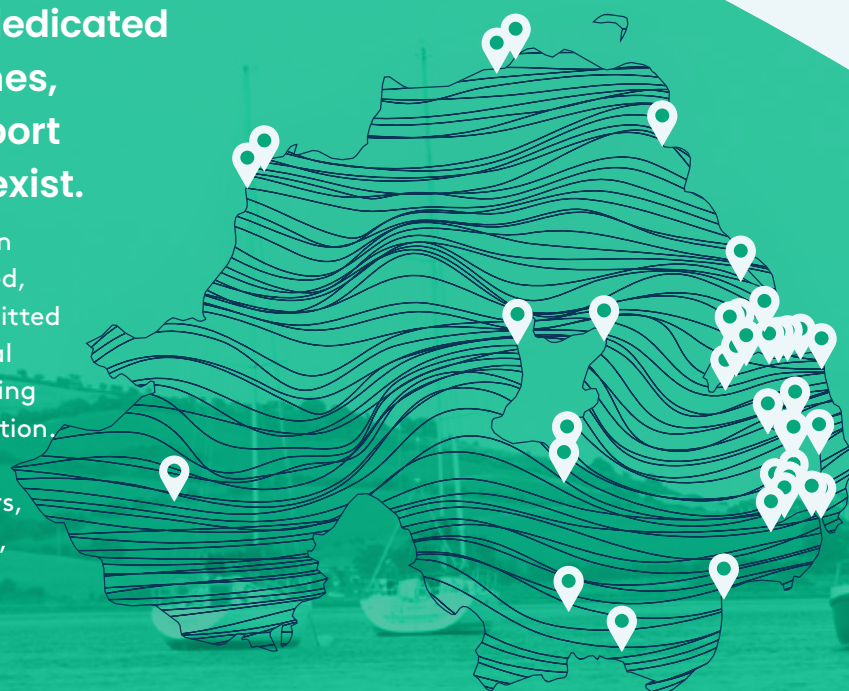
**By 'our' we mean everyone involved in making the sport happen in Northern Ireland.**

**With a focus on:**

## **The People involved in making the sport happen**

**At the core of the new strategy is people, because without the dedicated volunteers, instructors, coaches, and officials who make the sport possible, it simply would not exist.**

Our top priority is to ensure that every person involved in the sport feels valued, appreciated, and supported in their efforts. We are committed to providing ample opportunities for personal and professional development, and to fostering a culture of inclusivity, respect, and collaboration. For the purposes of this strategy, 'people' encompasses volunteers, coaches, instructors, technical officials, board and staff members, and anyone else who plays a role in bringing the sport to life.



## **The Places where the sport happens**

**Places, facilities, and equipment are paramount to successful delivery of activity.**

For the context of this strategy, when we use the term 'places', we are including Affiliated Clubs, Recognised Training Centres, Sailability Clubs or anywhere else where the sport takes place.

We are acutely aware that these are challenging times, with rising energy and equipment costs. We recognise these obstacles, and a critical aspect of this strategy is finding ways to enhance collaboration and communication between all stakeholders, so that we can maximise funding and resource opportunities. By working together more effectively, we can ensure that the places where our sport occurs can continue to thrive and grow.



## **The Pathways that allow people to enjoy, develop and engage in the sport**

**Connected pathways are a critical element to the delivery of the strategy in Northern Ireland.**

Pathways involve entry, development in and potentially exiting one or more elements of the sport. Historically this has been attributed to performance programmes, however, we see this as pathways through the sport for any participants, volunteers, coaches and officials.

People need clear opportunities where they can engage, learn or develop in their chosen area, whether it is competitive, recreational, participating, or in support of activity. Transitions are a key part of this, where people look to move through various stages of learning and development.

We see the development of appropriate and more flexible pathways as crucial to the continuing success of the sport in Northern Ireland, which will include better understanding the lived experiences of a range of participants to help influence how pathways are developed.

While we understand that not everyone will be directly involved in every aspect of our strategy. By uniting under this shared vision and aligning our work against the longer term goals, we can create a thriving and sustainable future for the sport in Northern Ireland.



# Vision

**‘An active community working together on or around the water, where everyone has a place.’**

## Mission Statement

**Supporting communities to create fun and inclusive environments, empowering individuals to develop and succeed through their chosen pathways, all while fostering a love of being on or around the water.**

## Vision

### What does the vision mean?

#### ‘An active’

As part of the new strategy, Navigating the Future, we will prioritise finding ways to encourage people to become more active or to rediscover their passion for the sport. We are committed to identifying ways to motivate qualified individuals to take on active roles in their communities, while also providing support and guidance to those who are currently pursuing qualifications or considering doing so in the future. Our strategy will also focus on revamping our pathways to ensure that we have the right kinds of activities and initiatives in place to engage people more frequently and more meaningfully in the sport.

#### ‘community working together’

The core of the strategy is centered on fostering a sense of community amongst those involved in the sport, working collaboratively towards shared objectives. By leveraging the collective skills and experience of individuals across Northern Ireland, positive change can be achieved. It is clear that the aims set out in this strategy cannot be delivered without a concerted effort from the entire community, working together to overcome any obstacles that may arise.

#### ‘where everyone has a place’

A key part of this strategy is about identifying and then addressing why there is a gender disparity in the sport, alongside how participants and the sports workforce can be more representative of the population of Northern Ireland. When deciding what to focus on and how access to the sport is addressed, it will be led by understanding the lived experiences of those we are aiming to reach, working together with under represented groups to find solutions.



# Values

## What you can expect from us

We have set out a series of values and what these mean to us. These values will serve as the foundation for everything we do and will guide our behaviours, actions and decisions as a team.

These were not decided by sitting round a table, but through informal conversations about what was important and inspiring to people involved in the sport.

We believe living these values will enable stronger relationships with people, places and partners to be built and lead to a vibrant and successful future for the sport in Northern Ireland.



**Approachable  
& supportive**



**Visible**



**Brave and  
adventurous**



**Transparent**



**Passionate  
and proud**



**Embracing  
equality**

## Approachable and supportive

We want people to feel comfortable reaching out for support, whether to a member of staff or Board or another volunteer, coach, instructor or official. We will work hard so that this is easy to do and ensure that support mechanisms are in place for everyone.

## Visible

We want to be where the action is happening and believe that we learn the most when we get out from behind desks and are on the ground engaging with the People and Places involved in making the sport happen. Sometimes this will be out at events or club activity, other times it will be about bringing people together and enabling conversations to happen.

## Brave and adventurous

We will be brave in testing and innovating new ideas that can help develop, diversify or grow the sport, replicating the behaviours we see every day across the sailing and boating community. From a new participant getting into a boat for the first time to an Official venturing abroad for their first international event, the people involved in the sport are constantly pushing themselves to grow and improve and we will endeavour to do the same.

## Transparent

We will be open and transparent about the decisions we make and how we make them, being honest about what we can and can't do. Transparency will promote better decision making and allow for constructive feedback and continuous improvement, ultimately leading to better outcomes for the sport.

## Passionate and proud

We will be proud of the sport, the achievements and milestones reached by **People and Places** and **passionately celebrate Northern Ireland and the heritage of the sport in this country.**

## Embracing equality

We will do more work to understand the diversity, or lack of, that exists in all areas of the sport, so we know where progress needs to be made. Where there is an under representation in our sport, we will take positive action to influence change.

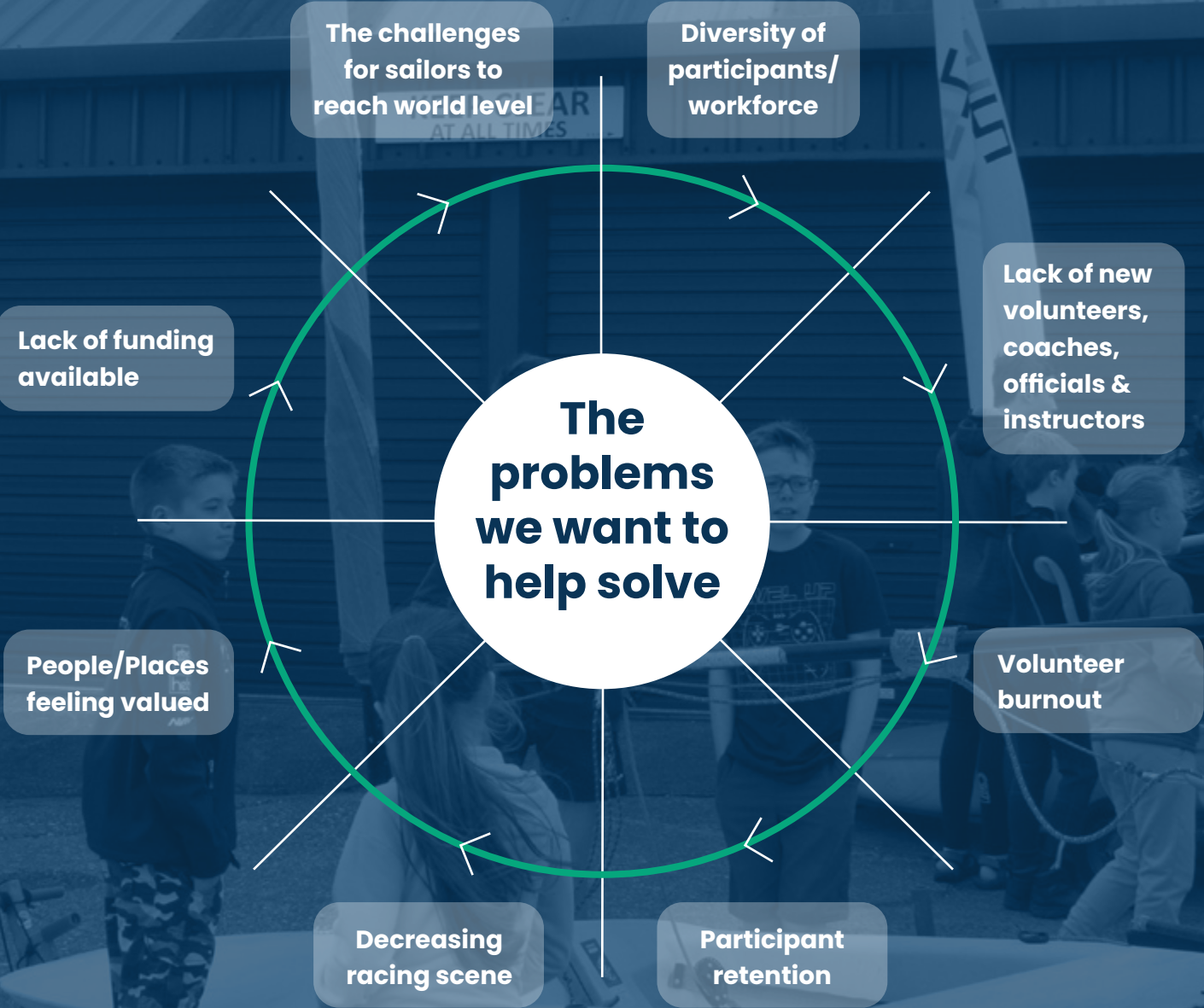


# Challenges

Whilst developing this strategy we listened intently to the challenges being faced and the experiences of a range of people involved in the sport, which ranged from club volunteers, to instructors, to coaches or officials, as well as participants and/or their parents.



The most common challenges across these groups are:





# Opportunities

**We are excited that despite the challenges we face, there are plenty of reasons to be excited for the future of the sport and the opportunities for us to grow and succeed in the coming months and years.**

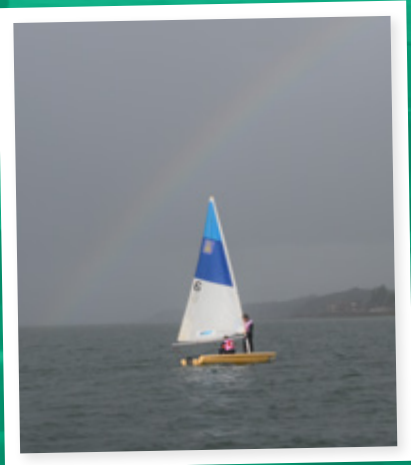
**First and foremost, there is a fantastic network of people and places, that are committed to seeing the sport prosper in Northern Ireland.**

If the people and places in the sport are connected more often, working towards collective goals, we have an amazing opportunity to build on the incredible heritage that exists in NI. For a relatively small nation, NI has consistently punched above its weight, producing multiple Olympians, European or World Champions, world renowned officials and those that have gone on to have successful voluntary or professional careers in the sector.

We have a fantastic suite of programmes to engage new, or retain existing people in and are part of an organisation (the RYA) that is respected globally, where access to resources and tools can support some of the leading people in the world in their respective fields that are from or live in NI.

Finally, we want to highlight the opportunity for continued development of the people and places in the sport. None of this strategy will be delivered without people and we are committed to investing in those that want to work alongside us to achieve the aims set out in this strategy.

By working together, being prepared to try new things and being clear about what we want to achieve we can aspire to set standards that other home countries or countries worldwide aspire to.





# Strategic Direction

We wanted to ensure the direction of travel was clear, whilst also allowing us to adapt as we improve understanding about the priorities outlined in this strategy.

We have set out four 'Strategic Aims' and five 'Strategic Foundations', which have been identified as key areas to help the sport overcome the challenges listed earlier.





# Strategic Aims

The strategic aims of the organisation provide a clear path for decision-making, resource allocation, and operational activities, which enable the achievement of defined medium and long term goals.

These aims were established after extensive consultation with a diverse group of stakeholders who contribute to the sport's success.



## Inspire people to give their time

We will achieve this by:

- 1 Opportunities are being created to grow the number of people that hold qualifications that carry out roles (e.g. Race Coaches, DI, SI's.) within the sport.
- 2 Clubs and organisations have a clear vision for the future that helps them identify workforce needs and interventions are being put in place that supports an increase in volunteering across the club network.
- 3 A programme of learning and development that actively engages volunteers is being provided.

- 4 The People involved in volunteering, coaching, instructing and officiating in clubs and in governance roles are becoming more representative of the population in NI.
- 5 There is a wider pool of coaches in place that are capable of coaching across performance pathways.

### How will we monitor whether progress is happening?

- The number of new coaches/officials/instructors being qualified on an annual basis.
- The number of coaches with the skills and experience to coach NI Sailing Team squads.
- The satisfaction of attendees, i.e. are they benefitting – survey based.
- The number of clubs involved and volunteers engaged in the We're All in programme annually.
- The level of diversity of coaches, volunteers and officials.

### Progress Highlights

25

Race Coaches qualified, including the first ever Race Coach Level 3 course held in NI with 7 participants

≈100

CPD opportunities taken up as part of our Coach Development Programme

28

RYA Instructors qualified, including 5 SI's and 5 Wing Instructors

400

Members engaged over the last two years in our WE'RE ALL IN – Volunteer recruitment programme



3

## Maximise athlete potential

### We will achieve this by:

- 1 There are NI Sailors achieving top 32 and above in World/European competitions every year.
- 2 Participants, clubs and sailors have an understanding and appreciation of the performance pathways, (e.g. not just Olympics), and know 'what it takes' to progress.
- 3 Clubs are passionate about producing high level sailors in Youth and Junior squads that are showing the behaviours required to reach a world/international level.
- 4 There is a wider diversity of participant entering into and staying within performance pathways.
- 5 There are sustainable pathways for mixed disciplines in place at a performance level, e.g. double handed/foiling.

### How will we monitor whether progress is happening?

- The number of athletes on NI Sailing Team squads that are being retained in the sport.
- The numbers transitioning into double handed boats at Junior and Youth level.
- The number of athletes campaigning/being selected for the Olympics each year.
- The % of athletes in Irish Sailing squads that are from NI.
- We see the first ever female NI sailor at the LA2028 Olympics.
- Results at Irish/British Championships and World Level events.
- The number of entries for the NI Youth Champs.
- % of girls in NI Sailing Team squads.



Celtic Cup

### Progress Highlights

NI SAILING TEAM RYA

Launch of the NI Sailing Team

10 sailors

Joined the **double handed FEVA squad**, created for the first time in a number of years

NI Celtic Cup Victory

For the first time ever, NI won the **Celtic CUP** across **all categories**

U23 Worlds Bronze Medal

At the **49er FX Worlds** for Erin McIlwaine and Ellen Barbour and achieved **Irish Carding**

£24.5k Sailor funding

Secured from RYANI, Mary Peters and Sport NI

2

## Improve diversity

Improve Diversity will continue to be a Strategic Aim, but the goals and measures embedded across the other three areas. This will help to reduce duplication of goals.

### Progress Highlights

#### Key membership Trends

39%

Female membership has increased from **36.7% to 39%**

15.8%

Junior membership has grown from **12.8% to 15.8%** (Junior Female from **41% to 45%**)

2.3%

Ethnically diverse representation has risen from **0.9% to 2.3%**

RYA SAILABILITY

Launch of the **Sailability Open** – a racing series for Disabled People

6.3%

Members with a disability have increased from **4.2% to 6.3%**

5

The number of clubs reporting actual disability membership data has grown from **1 to 5**





# Re-imagined pathways

## We will achieve this by:

- 1 More participants are being retained through varied participation and racing pathways in place at grassroots level.
- 2 Accessible participation and racing programmes are in place to support more young people to start and stay in the sport.
- 3 Clubs and RYA NI are engaging with members to better understand the lived experiences in the sport, enabling pathways to be shaped accordingly.
- 4 Women and Girls and Disabled People feel like boating is a place for them, they feel listened to and valued, and that issues preventing them from enjoying the sport/ staying in the sport are being addressed.

## How will we monitor whether progress is happening?

- The number of women and girls as club members.
- The number of Disabled people as club members.
- The number of young people (U19's) as club members.
- The number of NEW young people engaged as part of an OnBoard school's programme.
- A racing series for Disabled people is sustained year on year and numbers of participants engaged.
- The numbers involved in racing across our recognised classes.
- Whether people notice a difference in the visibility of W&Gs through our comms channels.
- Numbers in NIST Double Handed squads.



## Strategic Aims

## Progress Highlights

### Double handed programme focus with:

- Purchase of NIST's first ever 29'er to support transition from FEVA.
- FEVA and 29'er programmes introduced into the NIST.

2

Transition days held to support entry into double handed fleets, with **35 attendees (22 Female)**

### Female Focus Camp

Engaging 23 girls aged 12-21 with topics including; understanding female health, menstrual cycles and learning about 'what it takes' to be successful on the performance pathway.

//

**The weekend made me feel so inspired to continue in the sport...**

### Onboard

New schools programme launched alongside clubs, introducing over 150 new young people to the sport.

150

New young people introduced to the sport





# Strategic Foundations

The strategic foundations set, will be the key influencer's and building blocks that enable the organisation to operate effectively and efficiently and will be some of the key drivers that determine whether progress against the strategic aims is made.

These foundations were identified by gathering feedback from the individuals and locations involved in the sport's delivery, identifying areas for improvement and the greatest challenges facing the sport's advancement.

1

## Celebrate the sport

We will achieve this by:

- 1 The people and places involved in the sport feel proud, valued and recognised.
- 2 Women and Girls and Disabled people are increasingly visible across the sport, their achievements are being celebrated and diverse imagery is being used across communication channels locally and nationally.
- 3 We are 'telling the stories' of people and places across the sport that highlight the benefits of the sport, with an insight bank developed to share these across the sailing community.

- 4 The profile of sailors, coaches & official operating at an International Level has been raised and the opportunities to progress can be seen.
- 5 More people are being reached through growing and more engaged social and web-based platforms.

### How will we monitor whether progress is happening?

- The number of social media followers.
- The level of engagement via social media.
- NI Sailing Team website traffic.
- The number of case studies developed each year.
- The number of 'sailing stories' developed each year.
- The number of people being recognised throughout the year for their contribution to volunteering/coaching/instructing or officiating.

### Progress Highlights





2

## Connect and Empower

### We will achieve this by:

- 1 A strong partnership network is in place that is adding value to the delivery of the sport and supporting clubs to diversify the people involved.
- 2 There are mechanisms to bring people together to connect, share good practise and enhance activity across the sport.
- 3 There are forums/committees in place that are adding value to the development of the sport.
- 4 There are close working relationships with the other Home Countries and Ireland to bring people together that improves connectivity and sharing of best practise.

### How will we monitor whether progress is happening?

- The numbers attending RYA NI events and networking events.
- NPS scores and feedback from RYA NI events.
- The number of active partnerships in place.
- The number of case studies being developed each year.
- Engagement levels of Board sub committees.



### Progress Highlights

17

**Active Clubs** programmes in 2025 compared to 8 in 2022

60+

**Attendees** at the RYA Connected Conference

50

**Attendees** over the first 2 years at the restarted **Commodore and Vice Commodore** evening

3

## Lobby and Advocate

### We will achieve this by:

- 1 RYA NI are one of the leading sports taking positive action to reduce the carbon footprint in Northern Ireland.
- 2 Clubs are confident that we are acting on their behalf to ensure their voices are heard with key stakeholders, e.g. DAERA/NI Water, Local Councils.
- 3 The Cruising and Environment Committee has a diverse representation from across the sport.

### How will we monitor whether progress is happening?

- The diversity of the C&E Committee, inc. where people are located.
- Our progress to lobby around water quality issues in NI.
- The % of actions being achieved in the RYA NI environmental plan.

### Progress Highlights



Alongside 7 other sports, launched the **Clean Water Sports Alliance NI**

4000+

**Flares disposed** at our flare disposal days



**Flare disposal day**



4

## Strengthen Governance

### We will achieve this by:

- 1 A more diverse range of Board, Committee members and volunteers in leadership positions in clubs and centres exist.
- 2 There is an improved awareness and confidence when reporting safeguarding concerns.
- 3 There is an annual Board training/induction programme in place and Directors feel well equipped to check and challenge.
- 4 There is a strong understanding from staff about what the Board do and vice versa, and they feel comfortable approaching for support or to report concerns.

- 5 RYA NI are more transparent and clubs and members have access to relevant information about finances and how decisions are made.
- 6 Clubs are being supported to learn more about the governance structures in their own clubs/centres and how to manage these effectively.

### How will we monitor whether progress is happening?

- Board and sub-committee diversity levels.
- Board and Staff survey/appraisal results.
- The number of Board updates being shared with the sailing community that includes key decisions being made.
- The number of clubs and Board members accessing governance training.

### Progress Highlights

40% 200%

Re-shaped Board sub committees increasing **female and U25 representation** by **40%** and **200%** respectively

£

Completed transition to **charitable status** to enhance income opportunities

1<sup>st</sup>

First ever **Independent Directors** recruited onto the Board

5

## Attract funding

### We will achieve this by:

- 1 Additional funding is being accessed on an annual basis that supports the delivery of the strategy and diversifies funding streams.
- 2 Clubs are being supported to access grants to improve facilities and/or increase participation/diversity of participation within clubs.
- 3 Sailors on a performance pathway are regularly accessing funding support to support their journey.

### How will we monitor whether progress is happening?

- The amount of sponsorship funding being attracted.
- The amount of grant income being generated.
- The amount of funding NIST sailors are accessing.
- The number of sponsors/partners engaging directly with RYA NI events and programmes.

### Progress Highlights

£118k

Secured for **Sailability** work over the next **3** years

6

**Corporate sponsors** in place on multi year agreements

67%

Increase in **revenue** since the launch of the strategy



Raffle



# How will we know when we have got it right?

**We will prioritise tracking progress towards attitudinal, cultural, and behavioral shifts.**

**We will establish baseline indicators for each of the goals, and ensure that there is a clear understanding of what success looks like and how to measure progress.**



## Progress will be measured through:

- A set of goals for each Strategic Aim and Foundation are in place for the remainder of the strategy period. An operational plan is set annually with actions in place that support the delivery of each goal.
- A new set of 'progress indicators' have been established that will be monitored on an annual basis to track progress.
- A quarterly strategy report will be submitted to the Board to review and check and challenge on progress.
- An annual report will be published detailing successes and progress being made, alongside the challenges and roadblocks against the delivery of the annual operational plan, goals and progress indicators.





Thank you

# Thank you for your support

We express our gratitude to the volunteers, instructors, officials, coaches, training centers, clubs, members, and parents for their contributions in shaping this strategy.

We are excited to continue working closely with you to advance the sport in the upcoming five years.

We would like to extend a special thanks to our key supporters who provided financial resources to support the delivery of this strategy for the sport.



**The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.**

William Arthur Ward







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**NORTHERN  
IRELAND**



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