**COVID-19 AND OFF-ROAD MOTORCYCLE SPORT OPERATIONAL PLAN**

The MRA Board of Directors have been working to respond to the current coronavirus crisis and this document outlines the Directors current thinking in response to the pandemic.

The impact of this crisis is unprecedented and will have wide-reaching ramifications for off road motorcycle sport and all its participants in Ulster & Ireland.

Our main priority is to safeguard the future of the sport in a safe and responsible manner, representing the interests of all our members, while protecting the security and stability of off-road motorcycle sport as an organisation.

During the initial suspension period our main concern has been to protect the health and well-being of everyone involved in our sport, while taking a socially responsible position to comply with all lockdown restrictions imposed by the NI Executive/UK & Irish Governments.

We recognise that this has had a significant impact on individual livelihoods and businesses that rely on events for their main source of income.

We are working to develop contingency plans for the resumption of training, practice, and competition activity at the earliest opportunity, in line with whatever Governmental restrictions remain in place.

To deal with the short, medium- and long-term implications of this crisis, we have produced this operational plan to provide an overview of how we intend to manage the process at each stage.

This is split into three distinct stages; Response, Resumption and Recovery, to summarise how the MRA aims to meet the challenges presented by the pandemic as the situation continues to evolve.

We appreciate that it may take some time after the initial lockdown restrictions are lifted before full competition activity may begin again. While it is not possible to predict specific timescales for when these different stages can be implemented, we want to be ready to start training, practicing, and racing as soon as it is safe to do so.

With considerable uncertainty as to how long this crisis will last, future planning for events remains extremely challenging, however, social distancing restrictions that are likely to remain in place post-lockdown will limit our opportunities to run a ‘normal’ calendar of events, even when sport is able to resume.

Flexibility will be the key, with a gradual return to action, which will inevitably be low key and small scale to begin with, as it remains unclear when larger gatherings will be permitted, at least stage Five of the Executive timetable.

Our focus will therefore be on getting activity up and running at local level initially, with the co-operation of Clubs, building up to national level, within any limits on capacity or travel and fully compliant with all social distancing measures.

**Stage I – Response**

The MRA started to monitor the outbreak in early March, and following a meeting at Stormont with SportNI, NI Sports Forum and the Department for Communities on 16th March attended by most sporting Governing Bodies in Ulster, the Directors took the decision to suspend all activity from midnight the following day March 17th, indefinitely, as the Directors felt this was the safest and most socially responsible measure to take to support the NHS and keep our members safe.

The UK Government announced the national lockdown restrictions on Monday 23 March, followed immediately by the NI Executive.

**Major Impacts**

• A significant loss of income for the MRA and affiliated Clubs from Single Event Licences, registrations, and insurance during the suspension period.

• Members have been unable to ride during the lockdown, which will necessitate a phased resumption of activity and indeed resumption of Championships.

**Key areas for Consideration**

• Social distancing will be a fundamental consideration for the resumption of training and competition activity. This will be dependent on NI Executive, Irish & UK Government restrictions that remain in place.

• Training and Practice is a safe, individual non-contact sport and provides a naturally social distanced activity, so in theory it should be easier than competition to manage restrictions effectively.

• The MRA will need to work closely with clubs/venues to establish regulated and controlled environments that will enable training and competition to recommence as soon as it is permitted.

• A phased approach to the resumption of activity is likely, which will need to be managed in stages to allow people to practice, before competition can restart.

• If travel restrictions remain in place, any training, practice, or competition activity may have to be within limited distances initially, potentially building up to regional level in due course.

• The event calendar will have to be flexible, based on a phased resumption of sport, including the need to control or limit the number of fixtures and competitions.

• Officials and Steward will need to be considered carefully, to ensure that their safety is not compromised, in compliance with social distancing measures.

• Any organisers, officials and participants who fall into the ‘at risk’ category, whether through age or health issues, must still be shielded in the short to medium term.

**Measures to facilitate resumption**

Several measures are under consideration that will help to facilitate the resumption of training, practice, and competition activity, dependent upon any future social distancing restrictions and potential limitations on public gatherings. These measures will enable the MRA and affiliated clubs/venues to control and regulate competition environments within set capacity limits, if necessary.

• Limits to the number of competitors on site at any one time. Exact numbers would depend on NI Executive, Irish & UK Government advice and other restrictions that remain in place.

• To allow adequate provision for social distancing between competitors.

• Strict limits at events on the number of people per bike allowed to attend on a 2:1 ratio;(one extra parent, guardian or career will be allowed to attend to support U16 rider)

• No spectators to be allowed to attend competitions to control capacity, including friends or family, unless they qualify as the one person permitted in addition to the rider.

• Changes in processes to ensure that all competitors, officials, and operational personnel remain the required social distance apart through all phases of competition.

**Stage II – Resumption**

The MRA has been looking at options for the resumption of training, practice, and competition activity once the lockdown restrictions have been eased. These will be in accordance with Government Guidelines and only implemented when it is deemed safe and appropriate to do so.

Careful consideration will need to be given to the welfare as well as the health and safety of our members and all participants. There will need to be a gradual and phased approach when the sport restarts, considering all social distancing, travel, and hygiene requirements.

This is intended to help provide a guide to our members as to what type of activity is likely to be permitted as lockdown restrictions are eased, as well as provide a clear structure for the resumption of events.

Training/Practice: We are keen to get people back racing as soon as possible, not just in preparation for the resumption of sport, but also for the proven benefits it has for mental health and physical wellbeing. Conditions of this phase will rely upon government restrictions on non-essential travel being relaxed to allow people to train/practice.

Once clubs can re-commence activity, there will be potential to restart some limited activity including training and practice. The Directors do not envisage this happening until Stage Five of the Executives plans are achieved.

Racing. It may take several weeks before competitive activity can resume. While it is not possible to specify exactly when this restart date will be, there are likely to be several restrictions and social distancing measures still in place as per Executive Guidelines.

However, with the right controls implemented, our clubs/venues can provide the safe and regulated environments that enable competitive activity to begin as soon as the Executive gives the green light to proceed. At this stage we would envisage that events will resume at local level only initially, building up to national activity, to minimise unnecessary travel across the country.

Clubs will need some time to adapt in order to accommodate new regulatory restrictions, which may include some restructuring to the format of events, such as limits to the number of people on site, the number of competitors allowed to participate.

Attendance at events will be primarily restricted to riders, officials, and club personnel at this stage, with a strict ratio for additional support. No spectators will be in attendance in the short to medium term, so larger events will not be possible while these restrictions remain in place.

Technology will need be utilised wherever possible to facilitate online entry and more advance checking processes and provision of information between clubs and competitors, to minimise contact on the day. Venues will need to complete risk assessments and verify that they can adhere to all additional health and safety regulations.

Officials and Clubs will be issued with additional guidance with regards to scoring and results protocols.

The final phase will see the competition calendar restored, as much as possible, but this will very much be dependent on what restrictions remain in place with regards to the number of competitors permitted and whether championships, even in a stripped back basic format, are going to be feasible within social distancing parameters. In the short to medium term, it is unlikely that sports will be permitted to host larger scale events, due to the numbers of spectators and competitors normally in attendance.

2020 Championships

Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus outbreak it will no longer be possible to reschedule and complete most competitions due to take place during the summer season.

The MRA Board of Directors have been working on alternative options with the various sport committees for a full resumption of the sport and have reviewed major off-road fixtures for 2020 to determine how we can best provide a clear competition structure for members. The central consideration during these discussions has been to ensure that competition pathways are provided for all riders, at all levels, but that these plans are likely to change and evolve as the situation progresses over coming weeks and months.

With considerable uncertainty as to how long this current crisis will last, future planning for competitions remains extremely challenging.

Social distancing measures that are likely to remain in place post-lockdown will limit our opportunities to run a ‘normal’ calendar of events, even when the sport is able to resume.

As the UK/Irish/NI Executive strategies and wider societal impact becomes clearer, MRA Directors will continue to review and evolve our competition structure and programme, within the limitations imposed.

We remain committed to taking a flexible approach to ensure that opportunities are provided for all riders, at all levels, between the resumption of competition and the end of the year.

**Stage III – Recovery**

The ambition is to get the sport back on track at the earliest opportunity, although again it is difficult to be definite at this stage as to exactly when that will be. Certainly, our main objective would be to start the new calendar year on 1 January 2021 as normal, proceeding through to the culmination of our winter season.

However, know that many of the social distancing restrictions may remain in place until a vaccine for the virus is found, in which case we will need to adjust to a ‘new normal’ for the foreseeable future. There is a clear risk that there could be a second or third wave of the virus over the next 12 months, which would necessitate a further lockdown period. It is vital therefore that we retain a high degree of flexibility within our plans to adapt to changing circumstances over the weeks and months ahead.

There is unlikely to be a ‘light switch’ moment that enables normal competition and Championships to return to the same operational model that applied before the outbreak. We will therefore work closely with all of groups to determine how we can best support a phased return to action and remain in regular communication throughout to respond to events as they happen.

The financial impact of this crisis will be significant for everyone involved in the sport, membership, registrations, and insurance have understandably already taken a substantial hit and it is going to take a while before numbers recover to pre-crisis levels. Even then, considering the wider socio-economic impact, the motorcycle sport sector is likely to have a reduced number of participants due to financial uncertainty. Our priority is to ensure that the organisation and the sport remains viable and sustainable long term.

It will take some time for our sport to fully recover, even when activity is able to resume, but the MRA Board is committed to critically assessing all costs and operational overheads to ensure that all aspects of the organisation remain efficient, effective and affordable.

Likewise, we will do whatever we can to ensure that our clubs, organisers, coaches, and officials can get their income streams back to sustainable levels as soon as possible.

It may well be a long journey ahead, and with no specific timetable it is difficult to calculate what will be required at this stage or predict when revenues may return to the levels seen before the pandemic.

We need to ensure that we have sufficient resources in place to manage what is likely to be a gradual return to normality but will do whatever we can to practically support all of our stakeholders during the recovery period.

**Guidance for Clubs**

With Clubs being unable to meet, they must be aware of the changing, and changed environment in which they will have to operate, for example:

* Signage must be displayed reminding participants to follow the Government guidance with regards to washing hands and social distancing.
* Toilets to have signage detailing the current Government advice with regards to social distancing and hand washing.
* Sanitizers to be provided at signing on, toilets, changing rooms. Regular cleaning/sanitising of common areas must be carried out by the organiser.
* Government guidelines must be followed always with regards to public gatherings- number of participants.
* When hiring equipment / clothing a process must be in place to ensure that the equipment is sanitized after use, all clean kit must be stored in a sealed container.
* Marshals-  each Marshal point must observe social distancing measures of single manning.  Marshals are required to wear PPE (face masks / gloves).
* First Aiders and Medics need to comply with social distancing and are required to wear PPE (face masks / visors / gloves)
* If possible on-line entries and payment must be encouraged. Contactless payment only should be accepted onsite.

**Signing -on at the venue**

* Pens will NOT be provided in the Signing-on Office – competitors must bring their own pens.
* Competitors must always form an orderly queue keeping a minimum of 2 meters away from each other.
* Only one mechanic/helper per competitor will be permitted.

**Competitors**

* Spectators will not be permitted
* If a competitor or anyone in their party has any of the symptoms of Coronavirus i.e. a new and continuous cough, a sore throat, or a temperature above 37.5C then please stay at home and follow the latest Government guidelines.
* If you or anyone in your party has been in contact with anyone who has the symptoms of Coronavirus, has tested positive or is currently awaiting the results of a Coronavirus test then please stay at home and follow the latest Government/NI Executive guidelines.
* Cash will not be accepted. Only Contactless Card Transactions will be accepted, pre-payment via online entry is preferred.
* Competitors must ensure that social distancing is always observed including in the Toilets.
* Everyone is encouraged to use the hand sanitizers that are available around the site regularly.
* There will be no catering available on site initially anyhow, please bring your own food and drink, and take your litter away with you.
* All vehicles on the car park to be parked an appropriate distance apart to ensure social  distancing.
* Own clothing must be worn at all times.
* If a competitor or any of their party develop any symptoms of Coronavirus while at the venue, then please return home at once and follow the latest government guidelines on what to do next. Please do NOT go to the venue Medical Centre or Ambulances.
* Travel to and from the circuit/venue would be dependent on current UK/Irish Government & Ni Executive advice / guidance in place at the time.

Clubs will also have to put the following into practice at least:

* Use of signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing frequency, avoid touching your face and to cough or sneeze into your arm
* Provide regular reminders and signage to maintain hygiene standards
* Provide hand sanitiser in multiple locations in addition to washrooms
* Set clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets to ensure they are kept clean and social distancing is achieved as much as possible
* Enhanced cleaning for busy areas
* Provide more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection
* Replace hand dryers with paper towels in handwashing facilities
* Minimise use of portable toilets
* Sufficient provision of automated hand sanitising dispensers in public places
* Regular cleaning of high contact areas, gates, handrails etc.

These guidelines are neither exhaustive or conclusive and are subject to revision under the NI Executives five step plan.

**Practice Facilities**

For clarity, the MRA do not own or operate any commercial practice facilities and therefore these facilities are able to make their own protocols regarding their businesses and employees, however, we would expect that any responsible track owner and operator would complete a COVID-19 Risk Assessment and contact their Local Council before re opening for business, we would envisage this will not be possible until Stage 4 is achieved at the earliest, but the MRA will NOT be issuing permits until Stage 5 has been reached, we would advise everyone to follow the published Guidelines.

**Summary Response**

* Suspension of all permit events until NI Executive Step Five, whenever that may be.
* Regular updates to guidelines and advice for members, in line with government restrictions
* Detailed contingency planning for the resumption of training and competition activity
* Review fixtures calendar and produce revised schedules for resumption of activity
* Define the social distancing measures that will be required for training and competitions
* Survey organisers and officials to understand who will be ready and available for resumption
* Intention to re-establish a full competition calendar for 2021
* Training and education programmes restored
* Revision of single event licence protocol and late entry protocol
* Membership and registration recovered to pre-pandemic levels by end of next year.
* Safety of our members, competitors, officials, marshals and First Aid personnel is our over arching concern, so please help us to get our sport back to life again.

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***On behalf of the MRA Board of Directors***