



File: IRSA Guidelines for Committee Decorum V7-1

# IRSA Committee Guidelines on Decorum

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## Introduction

A number of documents provide rules and guidelines for the conduct of business in IRSA and IRSA committees and sub-committees. The intention of this document on "Decorum" is to provide some guidelines, not provided in these other documents, on how IRSA wishes to do business and thus on how IRSA Officers and supporters should go about IRSA business.

The IRSA Constitution provides some rules for the General Assembly and the conduct of the Executive Committee. It provides for the structures of the IRSA EC, EC Committees, and other IRSA committees and sub-committees.

The IRSA Regulations provide some rules for communication channels, conduct of officials, the general conduct of the Executive Committee, the IRSA Committees, and other IRSA committees and sub-committees.

The IRSA Guidelines on the General Assembly provide more detailed rules for the conduct of a formal GA.

The IRSA Guidelines on Committee Meetings provide more detailed rules for the everyday conduct of IRSA EC, IRSA Committee, and sub-committee meetings.

Rules documents generally use the words "shall" and "may" to specify what is mandatory and what is permitted. This document uses the words "will" and "should" to specify intentions and values respectively.

## Overview of IRSA values of transparency and consultation

A common hierarchy of stakeholder rights and authority lists these components:

- Has no involvement (ie is not a stakeholder or interested party of any kind)

- Is informed
- Is consulted
- Contributes to decision jointly
- Makes decision solely.

The rules and guidelines documents mentioned earlier are mainly concerned with making decisions. This document on decorum is concerned with giving information to and consulting with stakeholders, and with the general manner of conducting business in the IRSA on-line discussion forums.

## Transparency

Transparency is about giving information and being informed. Wikipedia equates transparency with disclosure, clarity, and accuracy.

- Disclosure: Positively sharing information rather than evading giving it.
- Clarity: Limiting the use of technical or complicated terminology, limiting the use of overly general or vague terms, and avoiding ambiguity.
- Accuracy: Eliminating spin, bias, hype, exaggeration, embellishment, and distortion.

*The EC, committees, sub-committees, and officials should, to the fullest extent possible, operate transparently.*

## The Chatham House rule

As part of the IRSA EC's desire for transparency, the EC discussion Forum is open for reading by all Officers of the EC and by all Members of EC committees and sub-committees. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, with freedom comes responsibility, and in this case Officers and Members should use this freedom with the responsibility specified under the Chatham House Rule (<http://www.chathamhouse.org/about/chatham-house-rule#>).

*Officers and Members are generally free to use the information they may read in the IRSA Forum, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the author(s), nor that of any other Officer(s) or Member(s) involved, may be revealed.*

## Consultation with stakeholders

Consultation is a discussion with all stakeholders. When presented honestly and undertaken sincerely, all parties should understand that being consulted is a form of participation in decision making but is not the same as having authority or rights to make decisions.

*The EC, committees, sub-committees, and officials should, to the fullest extent possible, consult with all stakeholders and be seen to be consulting with all stakeholders.*

## Professional conduct

In contributing to a decision, in discussion or debate, a distinction is commonly made between "the person" and "the behaviour". While behaviour can be accurately described in a variety of ways, ranging from objectionable to exemplary, a person is always respected and their motives neither questioned nor judged. Apparently it was Bernard Meltzer who said,

“you should disagree without being disagreeable”. Similarly, although misattributed to Voltaire, his quote, “I may disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it” places the focus on what is said and not on the person saying it. You are free to think what you will, but what you say is your behaviour, and should be as respectful of others as you would wish them to be of you. In particular, remarks concerning anyone’s motivations are out of order.

In common vernacular, you should play the ball, and not the player.

*Conduct in the EC, committees, and sub-committees should be respectful. In particular, taunting, baiting, trolling, ridiculing, and the like should have no place.*

## Proposals are the basis of IRSA business

The business of IRSA is to propose and undertake actions which further its objects. A proposal should invariably be a suggested solution to deal with a perceived problem.

The outcome of a committee or sub-committee deliberation, or a motion from an EC Officer, should be a proposal – for guidelines, regulations or regulatory change, a process or process change, a structure, etc. The proposal is then debated, amended, and voted on by the EC. Where a proposal comes from a committee or sub-committee, the EC is the independent assessor of that proposal.

A proposal is usually structured into three parts:

- the current situation (background to the problem),
- the problem, and
- the suggested solution.

More complex proposals may have additional sections – such as, detailed background to the current situation, alternative solutions, risks associated with the solution(s), projected impacts of the solution(s), balancing conflicting stakeholder interests, and so on.

*Matters requiring EC decision should be in the form of proposals from officers, committees, and sub-committees. Discussion and debate which is not focussed on a problem and its solution is generally unwelcome.*

## Voting and potential conflict of interest

A member may always participate in a discussion, whatever their interests or however they may be affected.

It is sometimes thought that a member should not vote on proposals which affect them. This is correct in respect of proposals in which the member has a unique financial interest, or a unique personal interest which is not common to the other members. It is mistaken in respect of proposals which may affect the member but in which they have no unique interest as defined because other members could be affected as well.

For example, if a member is a manufacturer of sails and all other members are not sail manufacturers, the member should abstain from voting on a proposal to order a sail. This is because only the sail manufacturer could benefit from such a proposal – he or she would be uniquely affected.

Where other members are or can be affected as well, a member may vote on a proposal which also affects them. For example, if a member is a manufacturer of sails and no other members manufacture sails, the member can nonetheless vote on a proposal which seeks to expand the number of sails a class can have. To state the obvious, this is because the other members can or may also benefit from the proposal – no member is uniquely affected.

If a member is a candidate for a role in a proposal which other members could also undertake, they may freely vote for themselves or for the proposal. If a member is the subject of a vote of no confidence, to choose a more extreme example, they may freely participate in the voting, because other members could also be the subject of such a vote.

*Members should abstain from voting on any matter in which they have a unique interest, either personal or financial. Members are fully entitled to vote on all other matters, including any matters which might affect them but in which they do not have a unique interest.*

## Meetings and sessions

The business of the EC and EC Committees and sub-committees is conducted in what is often called a meeting, but if carried out through e-mail or discussion boards over a period of time, is technically a session. The difference between “meeting” and “session” does not normally affect the conduct of business, except to note that while a meeting usually terminates at the end of a day or at the end of the agenda, a session may continue for as long as there is business to conduct.

*The use of asynchronous electronic communication means that committee members should expect to be engaged with the business of their committee over an extended period of time, which may be months.*

## Some guidelines on forum posts

### Hijacking of forum threads

If your message is relevant to a specific forum thread, do go ahead and make a post in that thread.

If your message has no particular relevance to a specific forum thread but does have relevance or interest to the other forum members, you should not post your off-topic message into that thread; doing so is called “hijacking”. You should start a new thread.

If your message has no particular relevance to the forum or to the other members of the forum, you should send your comment or question to the Secretary or the Chairman as an e-mail. You should not start a new discussion thread or hijack an existing thread.

*Members should post on matters which are relevant to the thread and of likely interest to other members. Members should not hijack threads or post off-topic messages. If the matter is of likely interest to others, start a new thread, otherwise send a private e-mail.*

## Discussion and debate

The business of IRSA is to provide solutions to deal with perceived problems. Discussion and debate in the forum should be oriented towards constructive problem solving. The forum should not be the place for homilies on best practice, counsels of impractical perfection, speeches placing an opinion "on the record", posturing, grandstanding to build an image, defending past errors instead of admitting mistakes, posing apparently innocent questions whose answers are already known, showing reluctance to divulge information that might not support a case, providing one-sided information selected to support a case, making claims that if challenged would seem to put the challenger in a bad light, complaining about present or past matters, raising 'concerns' without identifying solutions, and other tactics and strategies of political operation.

## Note on committees in IRSA

The IRSA management committee is called the Executive Committee (EC), and is generally comprised of "Officers" elected every two years.

There are three standing Committees of the EC under the Constitution -- Racing Committee, Technical Committee, and Organisation and Policy Committee. The three standing committees are chaired by their applicable EC Officers.

Ad hoc committees of the EC are permitted under the Constitution, such as the M, 10R, and A class committees. Ad hoc EC Committees are chaired by a member of that committee, not necessarily by an EC Officer.

An EC committee can set up sub-committees. Committee members of EC committees or sub-committees are "Committee Members".

The Constitution requires that decisions of EC committees be ratified by the EC before they take effect. The three standing committees have special authority, such that their interpretations (of rules) take effect immediately and are then followed by EC ratification.

The "IRSA Conduct of Committee Meetings" document suggests that matters put to the EC should be proposals from EC Committees. The implication is that these matters should have been considered as proposals within their committees before reaching the EC.

EC Committees and sub-committees could use the procedures outlined in the "IRSA Conduct of Committee Meetings" document for the conduct of their meetings or discussions, but this is at the discretion of the committee Chair.

## Some guidelines for committee Chairs

A committee Chair should identify a deputy, and let everyone know who that is. If no deputy is identified in this relatively informal way, then it would be a function of the EC Chairman to consult with the committee concerned and appoint a deputy as and when such a role became required. This role would be needed if the committee Chair was unexpectedly ill, for example, was on holiday, or if the business of the committee expanded and required a second person to assist with procedures.

In introducing a thread of discussion on an IRSA forum, the Chair would usually provide:

- a statement of the expected timeline and deadlines for proposals, seconding, discussion, voting, and the announcement of results, as may be appropriate, and
- a brief reminder of the rules or processes to be followed.

## Communications outside IRSA

The draft Regulations 2016 suggest that, when taking part in discussions external to radiosailing.org, Officers shall always use their officer designation or title if they are expressing opinions or views that relate to their membership of the EC, or indicate “in my private capacity” if they are expressing opinions or views that do not relate to their membership of the EC.

In practice, any Officer expressing opinion or comment on anything to do with radio sailing is doing so in relation to their membership of the EC. In such a case, an Officer shall recognise their obligation not to interfere with working relationships in or with IRSA or the EC, not to disrupt work in or with IRSA or the EC, and not to provoke violent reaction on the part of anyone or any organisation.

## Dealing with substantive disagreement

The business of IRSA and the EC is conducted through the consideration of proposals – discussing them and voting on them. While an Officer may not be part of the majority which agreed (or disagreed) with a proposal, they should be mindful of their obligation to accept collective responsibility for the democratic outcome; otherwise IRSA and the EC could not function.

Where an Officer finds themselves in substantive disagreement with any action or non-action of IRSA or the EC, their choices are to (a) consider their position as an IRSA Officer, and resign if necessary, (b) initiate counter-proposals and other actions as provided for by the guidelines for the conduct of EC business, or (c) pursue their disagreement by following the escalation procedure below.

## Escalation procedure

A matter of concern should always first be raised with the person or persons directly involved and a resolution sought. In the event that a resolution of the matter is not forthcoming and there is no reasonable prospect of it being forthcoming, it may then be escalated to an appropriate third party.

Where a matter concerns the conduct of an individual radio sailor or a radio sailing club, this should be to the DNM. Where a matter concerns the conduct of a DNM itself, this should be to either IRSA or the MNA as appropriate. Where a matter concerns the conduct of a member of an EC committee or sub-committee, this should be to the Chair of the committee or sub-committee. Where a matter concerns the conduct of an Officer or a committee chair, this should be to the EC Chairman or the EC itself. Where a matter concerns the conduct of IRSA or the EC, this should be to World Sailing (formerly ISAF).