

Mass Limits and the Calendar

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The rule regarding maximum take-off mass in IGC-sanctioned championships (SC3A-4.2.1) has been the subject of discussion for a long time.

While the rule itself has been controversial, there has been general agreement that its recent volatility (three changes in the past six years) has had negative consequences for our sport. Glider manufacturers, pilots, and contest organizers are all interested in a stable regulatory environment, an environment which includes sporting regulations.

In order to address this concern, the IGC Bureau have recently announced a proposal to update the mass limits rule and to impose a stipulation that the rule will not be changed for at least ten years.

Assuming ultimate acceptance of the proposal, the normal course of events for this agenda item will be as follows:

March 2005 (year one) – Approval for consideration

March 2006 (year two) – Rule approval

October 2006 – Rule becomes effective with publication of SC3.

Of course, the proposal may be defeated at either Plenary meeting, and it may be modified or withdrawn by the Bureau at any time.

However, assuming the rule is approved, the earliest its benefits will be felt (in the northern hemisphere) will be the northern summer of 2007, and the earliest World Championships to be affected will be WGC 2008, nearly four years from now.

This is too long to wait. Two years can easily be saved.

If the rule were to become effective immediately upon approval (March 2006), it would have the following direct benefits:

1. It would give designers and manufacturers a much-deserved development framework without further delay;
2. It would provide long-term continuity. The results of the 2006 competitions would be justly comparable to the results of future international championships;
3. It would relieve WGC 2006 of the controversy that has plagued the last three (at least) World Championships.

The traditional reasons for waiting until October to enact new rules include:

The delay allows the Bureau time to decide on the “final language,” and allows time to amend and publish the revised Sporting Code section;

it reduces the number of incremental changes to SC3;

it allows affected parties time to adjust to the new rules before they become mandatory; and

it allows FAI an opportunity to incorporate the changes in their publications.

These reasons seem archaic in the information age. Furthermore, since this is a Bureau Proposal, the final language has probably already been determined.

It is my opinion that the Bureau’s proposal should include language that would cause the new new mass limits rule to go into effect immediately upon acceptance by the Plenum.

There is precedent for this: the last time a change to Annex A took place with immediate effectiveness was March 2004. It was the mass limits rule.