

Orienteering Membership in Australia

Licensing Paper

This paper is designed to provoke discussion about our current membership and event fee structures. While states may initially turn off the idea, especially those with high numbers of non-member participants, I ask that people think about what is being proposed, as this paper is even more relevant for states/events with high numbers of non-members. Note that this cannot be implemented by Orienteering Australia and must be adopted by each individual state.

The Problem

Orienteering Australia has relatively low member levels and has shown relatively low growth in the last five years¹. In addition, non-members easily outnumber members at many events, particularly minor events². So people are keen to orienteer, but we are not capitalising on it. Further, I don't believe we are as pro-active in converting participants to members as we could be. Orienteering needs growth for a number of reasons including:

- Increasing the volunteer base upon which orienteering is heavily dependent
- Remain a competitive sport attracting participants
- Meeting ASC and funding body obligations and targets
- Spreading the financial load of the sport over greater numbers
- Increasing access to people for publicising orienteering news/event/happenings.
- Providing greater incentive for sponsors to become involved in the sport
- Allowing a greater number of Australians to benefit fully from what orienteering has to offer.

The overall structure of membership and event fees has changed little since the sports inception in Australia. Meanwhile, other sports have continually challenged themselves and reaped great increases in participant and membership levels. We need to provide participants (there are quite a few – well over 8000) with greater incentive to become members. I believe 3 basic options are open to us at this time.

Status Quo

We can go along with the status quo, but this has not been overly successful so far.

Differentiating Event fees

In many, but far from all events, non-members are charged slightly more than members for participating in a single event. Increasing the difference may provide incentive, but it may also turn people off the sport, repeatedly paying significantly more. Nor does this approach encourage clubs/states to be proactive in attracting members.

¹ Growth between 2000 and 2005 was under 10%, but total members actually decreased 23% between 1993 and 2005 - Statistical summary of orienteering activities in Australia, 2001-2005.

² Members account for less than 47% of the number of registered participants across Australia – Statistical summary of orienteering activities in Australia, 2001-2005.

Licensing system

Essentially, a licensing system can be viewed as a form of compulsory membership, but in this case, a short-term membership. Details of how the system would work are described below. The benefits of this system are viewed as being:

- Encouragement for newcomers to participate regularly over an extended period
- An effective process to identify and target newcomers
- Gives newcomers better exposure to the full benefits of membership
- Encourages clubs to become more pro-active in recruiting members
- A fair system
- A self-funding system with the potential to increase membership and financial income

Selling the System

Licensing is a means of assisting us meet the escalating costs of insurance (ALTHOUGH IT DOES NOT PROVIDE PERSONAL LIABILITY INSURANCE) but more importantly, ensure newcomers get the most out of our sport. Coupled with a newcomers pack, the license would form a value for money package.

Other sports with effective licensing systems include cycling, mountain biking, rogaining and athletics.

Examples fees from other sports (adult)

	Orienteering	Athletics	Mountain Biking	Adventure Sport
Yearly Membership	Uringa + OANSW includes magazine \$53	Glenhuntly + Athletics VIC \$185	Cycling Australia \$132	None
Minor event	Sydney summer series \$8	Glenhuntly event \$10	CORC event \$10 + \$15 day membership VIC State series \$25	AROC: \$240 (team 3)
Major event	Nationals \$38	City to Surf \$30	MTBA Nationals \$70	Geoquest \$395 per person
		Sydney Marathon \$143	Mont 24h \$400 (team of 4)	

The point is I think we can afford to charge more without concern we are outpricing ourselves. The sports above may have overheads to pay, but so do we. Mainly mapping, controls and timing systems! The sports above, with the exception of perhaps athletics, also has significant travel costs, and much greater equipment costs than, at least foot orienteering.

A Solution – how it works

Participants should hold a license to compete in an event (a license is implicit in a full membership) – but you can take out a 3 month license (similar to other sports, cycling has day only memberships for \$15 plus the event entry fee).

License can be purchased at any event, excluding the need for non-member fees at event (reduced administration here)³.

- Newcomers purchase “Local OA license” – example costs \$15, \$25 for family, \$50 for schools, corporate groups.
- This will replace Associate Membership (if the state has one – cases such as SA where country members are provided associate membership may want to consider alternatives⁴)
- 3 months only!
- If participant then decides to join a club, license fee deducted from state membership.
- GROUPS – as long as one member of the group has a license its okay.
- Club memberships may remain as they are in each state.
- For period of license, licensee entitled to state newsletter, e-newsletter and OA e-newsletter (when/if there is one).

For comparison, Benefits of full memberships include

- A year-long license
- Free AO magazine (incorporated in membership fee)
- State newsletter
- Club membership including social activities
- Orienteering coaching and training
- Discounts with sponsors
- Access to state association libraries and equipment (where applicable)

Implementation

While the system implemented demands every competitor have (or be covered by a group) license, appropriate interpretation of this rule should apply. Orienteering MUST remain a friendly and social experience. No legal obligations are being met by the license, it is a means to improve membership and increase income. Clubs, individuals etc could quite easily be seen to ‘cover’ the license at events, or some alternate arrangement be made. It is highly recommended though that whatever individual clubs at an event decide, recording and effective follow-up of the newcomer (including newcomer pack) should remain.

Concerns

What about new-comers? Does it put them off?

Complete new-comers may want to be encouraged through lower fees. The suggestion is for clubs to provide free entry, but keep the license mandatory.

This ensures:

- New comers feel like they are being welcomed
- Contact details are ensured, allowing easy follow-up
- The license can be seen as necessary to assist cover insurance costs
- Clubs have greater incentive to show the benefits of joining, particularly their own club!

³ Appropriate interpretation and flexibility of the rule should be adopted so as not to put people off – e.g. clubs could choose to “cover the license” for entrants if seen appropriate

⁴ Alternatives may be having a country membership (as opposed to associate membership for country members) with existing structures, but including the license as part of the country membership; licenses lasting 6 months in country areas or other alternate options.

Extra incentive for new-comers

I propose that states use part of this licence to pay for new-comer packs and/or following up newcomers to events. For example, those paying a licence at an event could be additionally provided with a new-comers pack. Contents might include:

- General orienteering brochure
- Membership/club information
- Latest issue of state newsletter
- A back issue of the Australian Orienteer
- Event schedule
- Information on where to find the results online
- A page of coaching tips (see OA Coaching tips webpage)

Another advantage – tracking new-comers

The advantage of the license system extends to increased ease of identifying new participants for appropriate follow-up:

- New Members – identified through licensees
- Provided with copies of old state newsletters, old OA magazines, event guide etc
- Email addresses must be collected for newcomers as part of license. Other details include contact phone and postal address.
- Follow up newcomers
- Contact athletes with information
- Feedback form

How about infrequent orienteers? Does it turn them off?

It may do, and this may be a concern. But it may also do the opposite, since individuals have paid a license, they may be more inclined to turn up more often to get their monies worth. The cost is not crippling though. Only time will tell.

Extra Administrative Load?

Well it probably is a bit, but only a little bit and more than worthwhile.

- Competitors complete a specialised or normal entry that has provision for recording that a license is purchased.
- A simple spreadsheet could be set-up to keep track of license date and expiration date.
- A list is then updated weekly and posted on the state website.
- Event organisers then have a simple task of downloading/printing the form to hold at registration.
- At the event, another form is used to record license applications and these are forwarded/emailed to the relevant state officer/professional officer with the event levies.
- This is very little more work than taking memberships and keeping track of who is and who isn't a member.

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- If the state runs a socialfx website like Orienteering Australia, multiple users mean the method of updating the list can be spread amongst a number of people, reducing the administrative load on any one person.
- Administrative load may be increased following-up new licensees but this may be viewed as a more efficient way of attracting members

Summary

States are asked to consider adopting a membership and licensing registration system as an adaptation on current membership structures. It is envisaged this system would increase membership and financial earnings for orienteering in Australia in an even and fair manner. This would be achieved through greater incentive to become a member, as well as a superior ability to track and follow-up non-member participants. The proposed changes would inflict little extra administrative demand and few, if any changes to how participants normally register at an event.

Proposed 10th June, 2006 by:

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