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Dear Howard,

Re: Proposals for the Development of the British Water Polo Championships – Document dated July 2011

The above document was discussed at this week's meeting of the BWPL Committee. BWPL acknowledges that great strides have been made in British water polo in the build-up to the Olympics and you can be assured that we will continue to give full support to any move that ensures the domestic game maintains an upward trend of development up to and beyond 2012. However, having taken into account comments made to us by some of our most senior clubs (examples are given below), we consider the plan approved by your committee on 2 July to be seriously flawed.

Firstly, I must express our disappointment that no attempt has been made to consult with BWPL. This is despite the fact that, at two meetings with David Sparkes and one with Ken Fussell, we were assured the League has a key role to play in the "process" of development. Radical change requires the support of those people directly affected – the 50 or so clubs that we represent. Sadly, there appears to have been no attempt to talk to people at the water polo coalface. To make matters worse, the proposal document was circulated with extremely short notice of the deadline for comment and at the height of holiday season. We have contacted as many of our senior clubs as possible to gauge their reaction. The absence of lead officials on holiday means that, even now, some clubs will have had no opportunity to review the document.

In general, it appears to us that the list of objectives is admirable in most respects but, in reality, no more than a wish list that answers few questions – for example, who pays for the inevitable increased costs of a significantly expanded British Championships programme? (The assumption is that it will be the clubs. And the message we get from them is that their support would probably not be forthcoming).

One of our clubs comments that the tone of the document “smacks of central control of a sport rather than developing a vibrant, vicarious and developing sport.” It is difficult to argue with that interpretation when the plan includes elements such as the forced migration of players to “commandeered” clubs; clubs obliged to accept these players at the expense of existing home-based players (the very players who in the first place helped their club qualify for the British Championships). Worst of all, perhaps, we are informed that it would “plainly be desirable . . . if the clubs were able to agree on the changes proposed” but that, if not, “BSWPC will need to draft rules to make it happen.”

Surely, if the senior clubs in the country do not endorse and support a proposal, it should not be forced upon them! Also, if the BSWPC’s stated intention is to implement this with or without club support, what is the purpose of consultation?

Is there an alternative? Whilst we cannot support the proposals in their current form, we suggest this dual approach (in view of the LEN qualification process already established for women’s water polo, these comments relate mainly, but not exclusively, to the men’s game):

- Reinststate the British Championships to its original form where qualification is derived from finishing positions in the BWPL and registrations continue from the BWPL. This would allow the best clubs to compete against each other in a domestic, club-based finale event, at the same time providing valuable information for national coaches on developing players.
- Follow up with an inter-regional event – comprising anything from four to nine regions and constructed to mirror the Australian inter-State competition (where players revert to their region of origin) and include a limit (or not) on numbers of foreign players. The regions to be based on the existing ASA model or comprise combinations of adjoining regions or indeed the formation of a number of artificial (but geographically complete) regional teams (including Scottish and Welsh involvement). *It is this event that would determine LEN entry*, on the basis that a registration process could presumably be established to meet (i.e. circumvent) LEN qualification rules. The regional approach would encourage the spread of best practice from the WCP by basing regional training at leading clubs. It would also create a

genuine competition where allegiances count for something and there is an opportunity to build local support, sponsorship.

It is our view that the already de-valued British Championship (2010 winners Bristol were bolstered by a strong contingent of Welsh players) would be even less of an attraction if based on the pick 'n' mix of players envisaged in the BSWPC proposals.

A sample of comments from some of our leading clubs:

The proposal supports an elite 15 to 20 men and women players at the expense of the elite competition for the top eight teams (100+ players) for both men and women. We might be put in the position of changing the whole club structure to cater for 8-10 players who are left in the squad post-London 2012.

If we qualified for Europe via the British Championships but were obliged to include three or four outside players at the expense of our own up-and-coming players, I do not believe my club committee would agree to finance the venture.

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The maintenance of clubs and their competition needs to be balanced and supported by the production of performance teams to enhance GB water polo and for athletes who are capable and willing to have a (part-time) career as a water polo player, similarly for officials, coaches and administrators who are willing and capable to commit themselves to this career/lifestyle.

The option to play home and away in a British Championship is attractive and a positive move, but only if it is with clubs. Otherwise, why would anyone look to raise money, support etc. for a group of people who do not live in the area of the club, have nothing to do with the club, and will play against them in a couple of months; and the (local) players who have played for the team are dismissed in favour of GB players parachuted in.

The concept of a "fixed winner" of an event with a manufactured team (the GB national team) winning every year is anathema to sport. No country which seeks sporting excellence dispenses with the key element in sport, namely

competition. There is complete contempt for the views of the 1300 or so players and 50 clubs at the top leagues.

I shall be most interested to receive your detailed comments.

Yours sincerely,

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Chairman

BWPL

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