

Summary of the Meeting

Context:

This was one of a series of meetings (“the ballast marathon”) organized to explore solutions to the ongoing *ballast issue* in paragliding competitions — the excessive use of ballast by lighter pilots to compete fairly on medium-sized wings.

Main Presenter: Daniel (invited by Julien).

Topic: “Weight Classes as a Solution to the Ballast Problem.”

Key Points from Daniel’s Presentation

1. Rationale for Weight Classes

- The issue: lighter pilots often add large amounts of ballast to match performance of heavier pilots using larger gliders.
- Weight classes could remove the need for excessive ballast by letting pilots compete against others of similar total flying weight.
- The idea has been discussed for years but never implemented.

2. Comparisons with Other Sports

- Motorsports and horse racing are poor comparisons because external energy or animal performance dominates.
- A better analogy: *downhill skiing* — uses potential energy from height and converts it into speed, similar to paragliding’s glide from altitude.
- Other sports have natural body advantages — e.g., height in basketball, limb length in swimming. Not every sport is fair to every body type.
- Therefore, weight categories (like in boxing) are an accepted way to level the playing field where body weight gives performance advantage.

3. Proposed Structure

- Start with at least **one “lightweight” category**, perhaps defined as **under 100 kg total flying weight**.
- Possibility later for more divisions (e.g. < 80 kg, < 70 kg).
- Scoring would mirror female and junior categories:
 - Lightweight pilots appear in *overall ranking* **and** a separate lightweight ranking (i.e. can win two medals).

- Could be applied to Category 1, Category 2, and possibly World Cup competitions.

4. Implementation Approach

- Use **glider certified weight ranges** for classification (simpler and harder to cheat) rather than pilot body weight.
- Announce categories well in advance (e.g. one year) so pilots can adjust and buy suitable gliders.
- Do **not immediately change ballast rules** — give freedom for pilots to choose whether to fly up a class.

5. Expected Benefits

- Reduce extreme ballast use.
- Increase inclusivity and participation (especially lighter pilots and women).
- Encourage manufacturers to design high-performance small gliders.
- Provide fairer options without removing competitive freedom.

Key Discussion Points and Objections

- **WPRS Ranking Impact:**

- Concern that separate categories could dilute or distort the *World Pilot Ranking System* (WPRS).
- Daniel: lightweight results should still count toward the *overall* ranking (like female/junior categories).
- Malin: disagreed — for fairness, each weight class should have its own WPRS top ranking rather than being blended into a single “overall,” otherwise lighter pilots will always rank lower overall.

- **Number of Weight Classes:**

- Malin and others suggested that to *truly solve the ballast problem*, several classes (perhaps every 10 kg band) are needed so that no pilot must fly more than ~25 kg above naked body weight.
- Daniel preferred a phased approach: start with one lightweight class and expand later based on data.

- **Ballast Limits:**

- No immediate ballast restriction planned — Daniel believes pilots should choose their level.
- Malin argued that the ultimate aim should be for each pilot to have at least one class where they can fly *without ballast* if they choose.
- **Implementation Feasibility:**
 - Easy to verify via glider certification tables.
 - Could start with Category 2 competitions immediately; higher-level comps later after proper data and announcements.
- **Effect on Manufacturers:**
 - Would create market pressure for better small-size gliders and lighter harnesses.
- **Testing and Equalizers/MRT:**
 - Equalizer (drag-based) and MRT (Mathematical Race Time) systems are still being tested as alternative solutions.
 - Weight classes could be a simpler *interim* measure while those systems mature.
- **Future Outlook:**
 - Possibility for sub-70 kg category if needed.
 - Discussion on whether to eventually combine or replace with equalizer systems once reliable.
 - Final meeting scheduled to discuss ballast-limit enforcement via actual scales.

Pros and Cons of the Weight-Class Proposal

Pros

1. **Reduces excessive ballast use**
 - Lighter pilots no longer forced to carry unsafe ballast amounts to compete fairly.
2. **Fairer competition**
 - Pilots compete against those with similar wing loadings, reducing natural advantage of heavier pilots.

3. Safety improvements

- Less ballast = safer takeoffs, landings, and reduced impact in crashes.

4. Inclusivity and participation

- Encourages more light pilots and women to enter comps; more accessible sport overall.

5. Manufacturer innovation

- Creates demand for high-performance small gliders and lighter equipment.

6. Simple to verify

- Easy rule enforcement by glider certification weight range — no complex measuring or subjective checks.

7. Interim bridge

- Allows progress while more complex equalizer/MRT systems are tested.

✖ Cons

1. Does not fully solve ballast issue immediately

- With only one “lightweight” class, very light pilots may still need ballast; partial fix.

2. Complex WPRS implications

- Current ranking structure assumes one overall winner; multiple classes would require rule and software changes.

3. Risk of diluted prestige

- More podiums and classes could reduce value of “overall champion” title in some peoples minds.

4. Implementation lag

- Needs at least a year’s notice and updates to scoring systems, competition rules, and pilot profiles.

5. Unclear definition of limits

- Thresholds (e.g. 100 kg, 90 kg) still arbitrary without extensive pilot-weight data.

Conclusion

The union meeting leaned toward **supporting the creation of at least one lightweight category** as a *first step* toward addressing the ballast problem, with flexibility to expand later.

However, participants were divided between:

- those favoring a **gradual introduction** (Daniel's view), and
- those wanting a **comprehensive multi-class system** from the outset (Malin's view).

Further **data collection via website profiles and surveys** will guide the next vote after the final meeting, which will discuss potential ballast limits and final proposals for 2026 implementation.