

Lausanne, July 20, 2011

To:

- FIS President, Mr Gian-Franco Kasper
- FIS General Secretary, Mrs Sarah Lewis
- FIS Council Members
- National Ski Associations
- Mr Günther Hujara
- Mr Atle Skaardal
- Prof. Erich Mueller
- Mr Bernhard Russi
- Ski manufacturers

Ski industry position regarding new specifications for skis

Reference is made to the publication by the FIS on July 18, 2011 of the new specifications for ski equipment to be used in FIS ski competitions.

The members of the SRS representing the manufacturers of skis wish to express their reservations as to (i) the process which led to these new specifications (ii) certain aspects of their content and (iii) issues which will arise in connection with their implementation.

Firstly, regarding the process, the ski manufacturers underline that they have agreed to participate and have actively supported a process of controlled testing as they are very much in favour of measures improving safety.

They have been and still are of the opinion that such a process must be the basis for the determination of equipment regulations. This had not been the case in the past and has led to wrong or ineffective decisions.

However, to form a valid basis, a test process must be sufficiently complete to support the results and also, crucially, to verify possible negative implications.

The manufacturers are of the opinion that this was not the case. The downhill prototypes were for example only tested in specific conditions, which are not sufficiently representative and in which notably the potential for so-called risk of "boot-out" resulting from the concurrent narrowing of the skis and lowering of the standing height could not be properly evaluated.

Thus, the new specifications have effectively been decided on the basis of a process, which is in principle valid but which has not been conducted fully. The decisions have been made in a rush and with the risk, which materialised in the past, not to be fully adequate or, worse still, to possibly create new sources of problems. The whole point of the process, which has been initiated with the support of the industry, was however to avoid just such a situation. This advantage has now been lost in the haste with which the process was conducted.

Secondly, concerning the content of the specifications, the ski manufacturers would first like to underline once again that they fundamentally agree with the principle that changes to the equipment specifications can and have to be considered and implemented when they significantly contribute to safety.

In this respect, the manufacturers do support the most relevant change, i.e. the determination of a maximum (narrower) width of the skis instead of a (broader) minimum one (which was imposed as safety measure only a few years ago).

Furthermore, the manufacturers also agree with the principle of an increased minimum radius in skis for speed disciplines and Giant Slalom.

Finally, and although they consider that length is not a parameter, which is per se of high relevance, they also do not question the new length regulations.

On the other hand, the ski manufacturers have fundamental objections to two modifications of the specifications, namely the lowering of the standing height in speed disciplines and the extreme change in radius for GS skis.

With regard to standing height, the manufacturers are of the opinion that the concurrent lowering of the standing height and the narrowing of the skis is creating a potentially increased risk of so called "boot-out", i.e. falls due to the shoes touching the snow laterally. Given the type of slopes on which the tests were performed, this risk, which will be more significant in steep hard-turning slopes (typically Kitzbuehl), has not been and could not be properly evaluated.

The ski manufacturers consider that it is therefore hazardous to decide such a change, which, on the other hand does not bring a decisive advantage. Furthermore, the remaining standing height will hardly permit to properly affix a binding on the skis and this, in turn, results in an increased risk of damaging the skis and, in extreme cases, of the bindings tearing off.

With regard to the radius of 40m for GS skis, the issue is a different one. Over the last twenty years, skiing has become attractive again thanks to carving skis. While the manufacturers do not challenge an increase in the radius, to set it at 40m is bringing the GS skis twenty years back and so far from the skis presently used that it will cause a loss of relevance of competition skis and will affect the overall attractiveness of alpine competition skiing for the younger generations which carving had reintroduced to skiing. .

The ski manufacturers are of the opinion that a radius of 35m would have been a reasonable solution taking into account in a balanced way the interest of increased safety and preserving the attractiveness of sport. Given the limited impact of the difference between 35m and 40m shown in the tests, the application of 40m is not appropriate.

Thirdly, with respect to implementation, the application of the new specifications implies a huge manufacturing effort. Several thousand pairs of skis have to be changed. This will represent a huge task for the ski manufacturers and a huge burden on the teams and on the skiracers and their families.

While changes can practically be implemented for the next season at top level (World Cup and Europa Cup), it is almost certain that the application at all levels and the resulting demand for new skis will not be covered. Therefore, an implementation by stage would be the only reasonable solution.

Such implementation by stages has also to be put in perspective with the fact that, despite what is often suggested, equipment specifications are by far not the most relevant factor in connection with safety.

To give an illustration, the time difference between the tested prototypes and the existing skis during the test courses was measured in fractions of seconds. Measures regarding course setting can easily have an impact of several seconds.

While it is announced that new specifications are presented as part of a wider project to improve safety, the ski manufacturers note with regret that the only measures which seem to be rushed are the ones which affect equipment and that, so far at least, no other concrete measures seem to be forthcoming.

The ski manufacturers are strongly concerned that the measures, which have been issued, are not completely adequate and will raise significant implementation issues. They appeal therefore to the FIS and the other stakeholders to reconsider the small reasonable adaptations, which the ski manufacturers consider as necessary in the global interest of the sport.

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