

July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011

To: Swim Nova Scotia

From: Bedford Beavers Swim Team

### Proposed Nova Scotia Summer Swimming Competitive Structure

The Bedford Beavers Parent Association upon receiving the Draft copy of the Proposed Nova Scotia Summer Swimming Competitive Structure in May 2011 distributed the proposed changes to the entire club membership along with the booklet "Long Term Athlete Development Canadian Sport for Life a Sport Parent's Guide". We asked for feedback from parents, swimmers, and officials within our club as to their views on the changes. The club held a parent information night that was attended by 30% of our families. The proposed changes were discussed in terms of effect on swimmers and their families and also on how a change to the current structure would affect the club.

The executive spent the month of July speaking with parents and answering their questions with regards to the proposed changes. Many families wrote out a formal response to Swim NS and I have included their letters and questions at the end of this document for consideration and discussion at Swim NS.

The Bedford Beavers Executive cannot endorse or support the proposed changes to the Summer Swimming Competitive Structure as we feel the structure cannot succeed in our short summer season.

In order for a change of this magnitude to be implemented all summer clubs should in fact have equal access to all the resources required to run the proposed changes. This is currently not the case. Small/large clubs, urban/rural clubs all face varying degrees of challenges in obtaining and retaining our summer swimmers. If this program were to be introduced as proposed the split between small clubs and large clubs would widen. How can a small club in rural Nova Scotia compete against an urban club that has resources such as access to a pool during the winter months?

The Goals of Summer Swimming as stated in the draft document are to promote and develop a swimming program for youth that develops their swimming skills, and develops the swimmer as a person, while maintaining a fun, and social environment. We feel that the current program does this for its participants.

The proposed changes to Summer Swimming are not reflected in the above statement. How can we maintain a fun and social environment when we are segregating swimmers based on their ability? You cannot ask a teenager to compete against children years younger than them. How does this help them develop as a

person? How does this help them socialize with their peer group? How does this allow them to develop their swimming skills, when in fact they most likely won't be swimming at all?

Our goal as a club is to help every swimmer pursue the level of competition that they feel they can accomplish in our short summer season. The current system allows each individual swimmer to compete at a level in which they are comfortable. The current system allows peer groups to stay and progress together. The example given at the President's meeting in May was relating the swimming program to a basketball program. I cannot recall 9-year-old basketball players being allowed to participate in a game with 14 year olds. Every sport progresses their athletes based on age.

To discuss the specifics as found in the draft document.

1. Qualifying standards for Provincial access.
  - a. In our opinion the qualifying standards of the 400m Free and 200m IM are unobtainable in such a short summer season. Our current summer program that highlights a swimmers strengths is more inclusive and in line with our goal as a summer team. If a swimmer only qualifies in one stroke for provincials, this is celebrated as an achievement, and we are likely to retain that swimmer for another year. This same swimmer in the new model would be excluded from the provincial championships.
  - b. The focus of the qualifying standards is for the swimmers that progress into the proposed age group levels. How can a swimmer accomplish these standards in a six to nine week season? In reviewing our winter training registration the majority of swimmers who participate are in the 7-10 age range. Our older swimmers are not in the pool during the winter months to maintain their competitive swimming conditioning. Not all summer swimmers participate in sports during the 'off' season and so they are not maintaining their aerobic capacity, which means every summer many swimmers are *starting* their aerobic conditioning.
  - c. How can Swim NS include swims of these lengths when not all clubs have access to a pool in the winter?
  - d. Our club is currently in discussions with HRM as to the amount to pool time we rent. HRM has taken three training hours from our club this year to allow the community of Bedford increased access to the pool. Due to the success of the 'open swim' times our club is predicting that they will be losing more hours in the upcoming years. It is my understanding that most clubs in the summer swimming league face pool access issues. How can any club implement new longer distances with less pool access?

- e. When reviewing the requirements to obtain access to the Age Group Provincials we feel there is a group of swimmers that will miss out on competing at Provincials. What will happen to the swimmers who move out of Novice but do not obtain the required competencies to qualify for Age Group Provincials? They do not get to participate at all at Provincials as they are not 'fast' enough to swim with their age group peers, but they are too 'fast' to participate with the Novice group. What is the point of moving into age groups from Novice level if the swimmer knows they can't reach the next competency level? Which means they won't gain admission to Provincials.
2. Novice Swimmers
    - a. Our club has issue once again with the 'open age group', for the same reasons stated above.
    - b. Asking the Novice swimmers to participate in the 'lunch hour provincials' is not an incentive. Who will be watching and cheering on these swimmers while the age group teams, officials, and coaches are on lunch break? How many volunteer support staff do you think teams have to accommodate the 'mini-provincials' within 'provincials'?
  3. Participation Level
    - a. The idea of no DQ's sounds like a very positive experience until the swimmers try to move out of participation level only to discover that although they didn't receive a DQ, they were still not doing proper technique. Swimmers need to see consequences to their actions. Receiving a 'report' of their errors is not the same as receiving no time immediately following a race. Hockey players don't get penalties after their game they get them the moment they happen. How will swimmers learn to improve if they aren't given immediate tangible feedback?
  4. Inclusion. Our current mandate as a club is to make every swimmer feel welcome and celebrated for their ability. In our program every swimmer will achieve Personal Best times and will be allowed to enjoy their achievement with their peer group. Asking us to split our age groups based on ability is demoralizing to the swimmers. In the current system all swimmers regardless of ability proceed to the marshaling area together. The swimmers enjoy being with their peer group. Over the course of every summer swimmers of similar ability and AGE meet and talk and improve as a group. Asking our club to separate our age group swimmers by skill will demean them, and families have indicated they will not allow their children to participate in a sport that would separate them from their peers.
  5. For many of our family's summer swimming is not their first choice of activities. Although many of our swimmers enjoy the summer swimming program we realize we are competing against many other sports. If we make

access to our Provincials too hard to obtain we will lose swimmers to sports that are more inclusive.

6. There is a real concern about running two swimmers per lane for some races. This would be first a safety concern for our swimmers, but has Swim NS thought about how many extra timers we would need to accommodate 12 swimmers in the pool at the same time. Our team cannot think of a swim meet in recent history where the host club was not calling out looking for enough timers and scribes needed to start the swim meet.
7. Volunteer organizations. The only people getting paid in summer swimming are the coaches. Every club is run by a dedicated group of volunteers. This same group of volunteers is currently maxed out in regards to their available time and energy they can spend on summer swimming. The new swim model would require many more volunteers, and our club is predicting a loss in swimmers and their families because of the new program. Not to mention the senior volunteers of our club who will not be around to help guide new members.

It is unfortunate that this response is so focused on the negative, but to add the two or three items we like about the new proposal would seem disingenuous after reading our concerns.

When Swim NS discussed at the President's meeting a year ago that they were looking into changes for the summer season our executive feels they were misled by Swim Nova Scotia's actual intentions which was a complete overhaul of the current system. Swim NS gave the Presidents at that meeting the impression that they would be reviewing the current program and making suggestions on how to improve it. If Swim NS had informed clubs about their full intention to change the summer swimming program so drastically there would have been more participation from clubs.

Our club is not willing to sacrifice the swimmers we currently have on the team to help Swim NS build a new grass roots summer swimming program. Isn't the whole point of youth sport to encourage staying active for life. How will this be accomplished if Swim NS is willing to lose current swimmers in favour of 'new' swimmers? This new proposed summer swimming program has brought to our attention that Swim NS is not in tune with the current goals of our swim club and for this reason and those mentioned in this letter are why we can not support the changes as outlined in the draft document.

Sincerely,

Bedford Beavers Swim Club