

PR 106 - FINA Athletes Committee meets in Hangzhou (CHN)

FINA Communications Department

The FINA Athletes Committee met in Hangzhou over the past two days, alongside the 14th FINA World Swimming Championships (25m), and discussed plans to further develop all aquatics disciplines while making sure that athlete voices are heard within FINA's decision-making processes.

Key among the responsibilities of FINA Athletes Committee members is the task of engaging with other athletes during World Championships events in each aquatics discipline and Hangzhou has been no different. *"It's still early in the competition, and understandably the swimmers are focussed on competing now, however sentiment is positive around both the increased prize money and the work that FINA is doing on social media and through FINA Live, to directly raise the profile of athletes,"* said Penny Heyns, two-time Olympic gold medallist and Chair of the FINA Athletes Committee.

Some of the points high on the agenda were that of the introduction of Athlete Committee elections in 2021 as the democratic nature of athlete representation grows as a priority. Expanding athlete representation to every National Federation was also discussed and the Athletes Committee is currently developing a document with guidelines to assist athletes and their federations to both establish and maintain mechanisms for effective engagement:

"The wellbeing of athletes includes so much. While some athletes at the top may be focused mainly on expanded competition opportunities, which is entirely reasonable, we are also looking at athlete wellbeing in its entirety including safeguarding, injury prevention, mental health and dual career programmes to make sure that aquatics athletes can be as successful out of the water as they are in it," considered Heyns. *"The scope of responsibility is large and one that requires us all working together for the benefit of all athletes, especially those who face more difficulties in making their voices heard."*

With an established platform for athlete engagement, FINA has been successful in making sure that aquatics athletes are already leading a wider conversation throughout the Olympic Movement. In the Hangzhou meeting plans were discussed to make sure aquatics disciplines are well represented at the forthcoming IOC Athletes Forum where the development and practical application of the Athletes Declaration (Charter of Athletes Rights & responsibilities), developed in collaboration with FINA athletes as well as several other IF representatives and recently endorsed by the IOC session, will be discussed.

The FINA Athletes Committee has developed a strategy which was further refined to focus on three key areas or pillars, namely that of Governance and the strengthening of the athletes voice within FINA structures, Representation with a focus on improved communication between the committee and aquatics athletes in general via social media platforms and Athlete round table discussions proposed for FINA World Championships Gwangju 2019, and Development & Support focussing on Athlete wellbeing, health and education. Furthermore, with Heyns recently appointed as athlete representative to WADA's vital Compliance Review Committee (CRC) FINA Athletes Committee members are especially focussed on key

issues like the protection of clean sport.

“For nearly 30 years, athletes have been a formal part of FINA’s decision-making processes, and we have been fortunate enough to have some great champions giving back to our sport in this way: from Donna de Varona to Janet Evans and Alexander Popov,” said FINA President Dr Julio C. Maglione. “FINA will continue to welcome the engagement of aquatic athletes of every level and from every background in FINA’s governance; they very much remain the motivation for all our work around the world.”
