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Finke to re-join the Australian Off Road Championship?

Finke Desert Race President Antony Yoffa welcomed yesterday's announcement that the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport (CAMS) wants the Tatts Finke Desert Race back as a Round of the Australian Off Road Championship.

CAMS issued a statement saying it intended to work on re-instatement of the Tatts Finke Desert Race to the Championship as quickly as possible.

CEO of CAMS David Morgan said in the statement that the Finke is one of the iconic Australian races and is a marquee event on the Australian Off Road Racing Calendar.

"This is welcome news to the Finke Desert Race and its many competitors, sponsors and supporters" said Antony Yoffa.

"We withdrew our expression of interest to be included as a Round of the Championships for 2012 as there were a number of conditions we were not prepared to agree to", said Mr Yoffa

Issues of concern over proposed event agreements had been raised both in late 2010 and again in late 2011 with CAMS officials by Finke organisers yet the same agreement was put forward according to Mr Yoffa.

"In order to protect our event sponsors and suppliers, we felt we couldn't sign the Agreement".

An invitation was extended to the Finke committee by CAMS in late November to attend a meeting in Melbourne to negotiate a resolution for 2012 however Finke organisers declined the offer to attend.

"Given the reluctance of CAMS to respond to our concerns, we considered it a costly exercise to fly to Melbourne to discuss issues that we had already provided comment on yet had no response".

The Sea Lake Mallee Rally was subsequently announced as Round One of the 2012 National Championships last week and it is understood to have been offered a two year arrangement.

The statement released by CAMS yesterday comes less than 48 hours after the Finke President phoned David Morgan and on behalf of organisers from Finke, Hyden in WA and Baroota in SA and offered to meet with CAMS to discuss the 2013 season as soon as practical.

"It seems strange that CAMS would release a statement going over old ground, when we, as a group had offered to work positively with CAMS on the 2013 season", said Mr Yoffa.

“If Sea Lake has been offered a two year contract, I don’t see how Finke can be back as a National Round before 2014.”

The news that the Australian Off Road Championships has included Sea Lake as a Championship Round on the same weekend as the Finke Desert Race came only days after Finke organisers returned from Guangzhou. They had participated in the historic signing of a Memorandum with a Chinese Off Road Club that will see a team from China compete in the 2012 event.

Involvement of the Chinese in Finke 2012 has enormous potential to open up the sport to another market which in turn produces positive tourism outcomes.

“It is disappointing that news of the withdrawal of Finke from the National scene and the subsequent awarding of a Round to Sea Lake has overshadowed this big announcement”, said Mr Yoffa.

The 2012 Tatts Finke Desert Race will be run from the 8-11th June in Alice Springs. Further details on the event can be found at www.finkedesertrace.com.au