

What is the Point of Order

A Guide to Napo AGM

This guide explains how the Napo Annual General Meeting operates. It is intended to help members to follow the proceedings and to enable members to take part as fully in the meeting as they would wish to. If any part of this guide, or of the AGM, remains unclear please contact Steering Committee.

The Annual Report

The Annual Report is a record of Napo's work in the 12 months up to August. It is sent to members before the AGM by the General Secretary. Inaccuracies in the Report can be removed by members asking for a specific paragraph(s) of the Report to be 'referred back' (ie not accepted as part of the report). Committee Chairs/ Conveners or other persons responsible for that section of work have the right to argue against 'referral back'.

Accountability

Questions about the work of Napo as described in the Report and on wider issues can be asked in the 'accountability slot'. A panel of Officers, Officials and national committee representatives will answer questions previously submitted in writing by members. The Chair may also allow questions from the floor at her/his discretion.

Motions

Following the completion of formal business, motions will be debated under 'Committee slots'. Committee slots will be taken in the order shown on the Notice of Motions and will consist of the top voted motion in the ballot relevant to that Committee. Thereafter the remaining motions will be debated in descending order of popularity as determined by the ballot of members in August.

Statements

A variety of circumstances can arise both before and during the AGM which may require formal comment by Napo. Such comments are usually presented to the AGM in the form of a statement or report. They are normally given in writing and all or part of them can be 'referred back'. Verbal statements can only be referred back if they are key statements intended for inclusion in the minutes.

The Quorum

The AGM is Napo's supreme policy making body. In order to debate and form policy the AGM must be quorate. AGM is quorate when 150 full and professional associate members and representation from at least 15 Branches are registered not later than a date fixed by the NEC.

Sessions are quorate when 150 full and professional associate members are present in the hall.

Those attending the AGM are asked to make sure they are in the hall at the advertised start of the morning and afternoon sessions so that the work of the AGM can start and other members are not kept waiting.

Speaking at the AGM

Members who want to speak at the AGM are expected to use one of the microphones.

For speeches on motions these are at the front of the hall on rostra marked 'for' and 'against'. Additional microphones are available throughout the hall for questions and points of order from members. There is also a microphone at the front of the hall with easy access for members with disability.

Before speaking you need to get the attention of the Chair. Say 'Chair' into the microphone. When you have been acknowledged, give your name and branch before speaking, making a point or asking your question. Every effort will be made by those chairing the meeting to be consistent in the way they interpret the constitution and standing orders and to help members take part.

The microphones mean that inexperienced speakers come across well. A prepared and read speech can be just as effective as experienced oratory. Do not be deterred, it is important that different members contribute to debate instead of a few regulars.

Probably the most important points to remember are – don't rush and keep it simple.

Monitoring

Napo is committed to combatting racism, oppression and discrimination. In recognition of the role of language and behaviour in promoting these, both are monitored during the AGM.

Monitoring guidelines approved by the NEC have been circulated to all members.

Napo is also committed to promoting full equality and diversity for all members; you are asked to bring to the attention of the monitoring group or a member of the Officers' Group any matters which you think inhibit the implementation of that commitment.

Rules for Debate

The rules for debate are called standing orders and can also be found near the back of the Constitution booklet. These are similar to other unions, but speakers on motions or amendments are taken in turn from the 'for' and 'against' rostrum after the proposer and seconder have introduced the motion. Queue early if you want to speak. In order to balance the debate or to keep to schedule, the Chair may determine the number of speakers in any debate. If this is done the Chair will encourage waiting speakers to try to ensure a balance including race and gender and will try not to exclude new speakers.

The Constitution

The constitution is Napo's book of rules. It can be found in your conference pack. It contains the objects and structure of the union. It also contains the Standing Orders which rule debate. Although the Chair will attempt to use these rules flexibly, they are the framework which ensures consistency and fairness in the proceedings.

The main things to know about Napo AGM Standing Orders

1. The Chair

Keeps order and runs the debate in accordance with Standing Orders. In order to facilitate the wishes of the meeting the Chair will sometimes seek to determine the view of the meeting before making a decision as to how the meeting should proceed. Occasionally the Chair will need to make a ruling about some aspect of the conduct of the meeting. A ruling by the Chair stands unless challenged and overturned by the meeting. It can be challenged by not less than four members but two-thirds of the AGM must vote against the ruling for the challenge to overturn the ruling.

2. Steering Committee

Decides the order of business and announces it at the beginning of each session. It is also responsible for enabling the compositing of similar motions and ruling on emergency motions. Steering Committee decisions can be challenged and overruled by the AGM but this process can be confusing and time consuming so should only be used in extreme circumstances. Members of Steering Committee are available for consultation throughout the AGM. Steering Committee can be found in a room close to the conference hall at any time during AGM business. They are always willing to assist members and will make an arrangement whereby they can be contacted outside AGM business hours if necessary.

3. Motions

The Committee, Branch or member proposing a motion may withdraw it from the AGM at any time up until debate on the motion starts. This is done by informing the Steering Committee. Once debate has started the motion belongs to the AGM; it alone can decide to withdraw it at this stage.

Proposers of motions may speak for up to six minutes (that's a maximum, not a requirement).

They also get up to three minutes to reply to the debate at the end. This is known as the 'Right of Reply'.

Other speakers, including proposers of amendments, are limited to a maximum of three minutes.

The seconder of a motion can formally second and reserve the right to speak later in the debate.

A system of green and red lights and buzzers are used to indicate time. The green light and first buzzer comes on 30 seconds before time runs out. The red light and second buzzer means a speech must finish. The timekeepers allow time for applause and interruptions if these happen. The number of speakers in any debate is decided by the Chair. If there are no speeches against a motion the vote is generally taken immediately after the motion has been seconded.

Don't forget to queue early if you want to speak and you may negotiate to speak with others, if numbers of speakers are limited by the chair.

4. Amendments

After a motion has been proposed and seconded any amendments are debated. They are taken in order starting with the one that would have most effect on the original motion; where that does not apply they will be taken in the order they would appear in an amended motion. When amendments are being debated the rostra for speeches are reversed, the amendment is proposed and seconded from the 'against' microphones.

5. Constitutional Amendments

Constitutional amendments are treated in the same way as motions. Amendments to constitutional amendments are treated in the same way as amendments to motions.

6. Compositing

Where the proposer and seconders of similar motions agree, their motions can be put together into one motion with the help of Steering Committee. This work is undertaken in the days before the AGM commences. Composited motions will be published at the AGM.

7. Interruptions

If you think something is wrong then address the Chair, saying: '*point of order*' – it can be done at any time. Go to the microphone and say '*point of order*', give your name and branch. If the Chair gives permission, raise the point of order and quote the section of the Constitution or Standing Orders which refers.

If you think more information is needed then: '*request for information*' – at a convenient time (eg between speeches) go to a microphone, say '*request for information*', give your name and branch, and if the Chair gives permission, ask for information. Information cannot be given like this, only requested. You cannot ask for information after the final speech of debate.

8. Closing the Debate

If you want the debate to end and haven't already spoken in the debate, go to a microphone and propose, without a speech, either:

- a. '*next business*'. There will then be a vote on this. If you get a majority, then the AGM goes to the next item of business without a vote;
- b. '*closure*'. If you get a majority, then the original proposer replies to the debate and the AGM votes on the motion.

The Chair will call for a seconder to any of these proposals from the body of the meeting.

9. Adjournment

If you want the debate or the meeting adjourned and have not spoken in the present debate, go to a microphone and propose:

'*The adjournment*'. You will need to speak on why there should be an adjournment and for how long. The proposer of the motion being debated will be able to reply to the proposal to adjourn before the vote is taken.

10. Emergency Motions

Can only be debated if:

- a. The matter has arisen since the closing date for motions to the AGM;
- b. It cannot be dealt with in any other way;
- c. It is so important that it justifies the rearrangement of other business.

Emergency motions should be given to Steering Committee who decide whether they fulfil all three criteria. If the criteria are not met Steering Committee will explain their reasons to the proposer or seconder and may be able to offer some advice. Steering Committee announce their decision on the emergency motion as finally submitted to the AGM. If they do not confirm that the motion is an emergency the proposer may challenge their decision, addressing the meeting briefly on this point only and Steering Committee's decision can be overturned by a simple majority of the AGM.

Emergency motions are debated under the same rules as motions. However, they cannot be amended.

11. Suspending Standing Orders

This means setting aside one or more of the rules which govern conference procedure (see Appendix A of the Constitution).

It should only be done if a matter of urgency arises and if Standing Orders would prevent discussion. Go to a microphone and, after giving your name and branch, propose the suspension of a standing order giving its number. You need a seconder and need to tell the AGM the reasons why they should support you and for how long the suspension should last. Two-thirds majority of the AGM is needed.