

From the EAS President



This is my final column as your President; the next message will come from the new President, Laszlo Váradi, who will start his two-year term after the coming General Assembly on May 12, 2006. As I wrote in my first column, about 18 months ago, Laszlo will be the first EAS president with a direct mandate from the membership and this will give him a much stronger position than any of his predecessors and setting out a path for the Society. Before that time, elections give you the voice to express your views on our present performance, and to elect new members, including a new president elect (the future president of EAS for the period 2008-2010)!

If I have to make a balance of my presidency, then it may be characterized by some drastic and revolutionary, but also less visible changes in the structure and operation of the Society. I must confess that I had higher ambitions than the ones we achieved, but at this moment I also realize that the Society had to pass through this period of internal reflection before it can assume its mission with more vigour than before.

First we decided to search for a more market oriented organization of our Conferences, which would guarantee the current scientific quality, but attract more delegates, enable us to move through Europe and to enforce interaction with the industry. We felt that a real expert should help us in this endeavour. Therefore from January 2006 onwards, support for our conference organization will be delivered by the company MF Cooksey which has more than 10y experience in organizing aquacultural events, among them the EAS-WAS joint conferences in Nice (2000) and now in Firenze (2006). The company has European collaborators (Mario Stael) who developed a strong network within the European industry. We believe it will strengthen our position.

Next we decided to outsource our member and financial administration to a company (de Beek) which is specialised in administering non-profit organisations, member based (including European) societies etcetera. A first result of the latter move is that our membership dues will be administered for all members on an annual (read from January to December) basis rather than on a 12months-basis (upon the date of first registration). For new entries who register late in the year, transition schemes will be developed. Both outsourcing decisions will be budget neutral at the worst and bring perspective for considerable cost savings.

These decisions will free staff time from the most bulky and routine procedures which do not add to real member services. This is important because this Board had set ambitious targets to itself. With regard to Conferences, we are exploring the organization of scientific conferences together with a Trade Show, moving the Conference sites all over Europe, and to address Industry focused sessions as a standard procedure within each Conference. MC Cooksey will take up this mission from Firenze 2006 onwards, and the first conferences to be organized under this scenario, are Aquaculture Europe 2007

(targeted in the Mediterranean Area) and Aquaculture Trondheim, 2007. The long lasting relation with the Nor Fishing and the Trondheim location is highly appreciated by us, and so, we have searched for a system in which we can save the best of two: to continue and save our cooperation for the Trondheim meeting, and moving Aquaculture Europe conferences over Europe.

Further, The EAS Website needs considerable modernisation to enable interactive database searching, chat boxes for students, on-line registration for conferences and membership dues. Our magazine Aquaculture Europe needs a stronger profile. A new Editor, preferably with professional experience, will be sought to take the lead in this. We planned a decision about this matter at the end of 2006 (thus for the coming Board).

Obviously this strategy has an effect on the profile of required competences at the office in Ostend. We will need less support in administration and conference organization, and more for the above services. The unfortunate consequence is that redundancy of two employees became unavoidable. Both staff members have worked with great commitment and loyalty for the Society, and to a large extend, constituted the face of the Society to the outside world.

In my first column, I wrote: "The European Aquaculture Society will only become attractive to its members when it succeeds in involving them more in its activities. .. The board will have to deploy initiatives to improve membership involvement in its European stewardship, in its activities and in its internal discussions". I must admit that this is the very weak element in our performance. Yet, decisions are underway to create EAS Working Groups, and search structural ties with national organisations. And, to my personal satisfaction, I already announced earlier the successful start of our EAS Student Forum, under leadership of Lena Trenovszki from Hungary. New student members, who are eager to support the Forum, are entering weekly! It has changed our members profile already, since we have now more than 60 (active) young (student) members compared to less than 10 about one year ago.

So, although the present Board has not been highly visible, I firmly believe that stiff decisions have been taken which will enable the Society to become again the spider in Europe's aquaculture web. I am confident that the first hurdle to come, AQUACULTURE 2006, will be taken with extraordinary success. Please do not forget this. It will be really a unique event that has never been shown before in the European Aquaculture Scenery! Top politicians, governmental officers, policy makers, Captain's of the Aquaculture Industry, small entrepreneurs, scientists from all over the world and students will mingle and meet each other in Firenze from 9-13 May! And, last but not least, on May 9, EAS will celebrate its 30th anniversary in the glorious surroundings of Palazzo Vecchio, and on May 12, all members can meet the Board and each other on the EAS General Assembly!

Johan Verreth
EAS President (2004-2006)