



From The EAS President



In my previous column I alluded to the new path EAS is embarking on, and addressed the specific case of the way we organize conferences. I just returned from a Board meeting in Brussels where some additional decisions have been taken in our strategy to re-orient and reshape the Society.

First, we decided to turn our Aquaculture Europe Conference into a real event that should cover not only the scientific conference but also a trade show, a one or half day for the industry and, similarly, a one or half day for participatory governance or stakeholder involvement and policy development. These add-ins should be sufficiently integrated in the conference so as to maintain interaction between science, industry and policy makers. Therefore, our policy will be to search each time for a compact venue that rotates throughout Europe and its prime aquaculture areas. In this way, we believe we will have a product that safeguards the current scientific quality and also attracts more delegates and promotes interaction with the industry.

We felt that a real expert should help us in this endeavour. Therefore, we decided to outsource our conference support to the company MF Cooksey, which has more than 10 years experience in organizing aquaculture events. The company has European collaborators who developed a strong network within the European industry. We know the company as it has been contracted earlier to organize the joint EAS/WAS events in Nice and next year in Firenze and could experience its efficacy and professionalism. We believe it will strengthen our position.

Next, the Board also decided to outsource our member and financial administration to a company (de Beek) that specialises in administering non-profit organisations, member based (including European) societies, etcetera. Both outsourcing decisions will be budget neutral at the worst and potentially could mean considerable cost savings. These decisions will free staff time from those routine procedures that do not add to real member services. This is important because this Board has set ambitious targets for itself. Besides the re-orientation of our conferences, we also aim to modernize the web site, the magazine Aquaculture Europe and other services to our members. I hope to give more detailed information on the latter issues in one of my future columns.

However, the most important challenge to the Society is stabilizing membership and, more specifically, our failure to

attract new young (student) members. More than two years ago, a special category of “young members” with reduced membership dues was established in an attempt to change the trend. In addition, last summer at Aquaculture Europe 2005, we launched a Student Forum. The session was attended by more than 50 students from all over Europe, and elected a small core group of three to five persons to take the lead and develop a real EAS Student Forum that could present itself at our Firenze meeting in 2006. Lena Trenovszki from Hungary leads this Forum and informed me a few days ago that she succeeded in attracting 20 national coordinators from 14 countries. And they are very active already! It seems to pay off, since the total group of young members has increased from about five to more than 60 at this moment. In short, the policy to rejuvenate the membership of EAS seems to work; what is left is to really increase our membership again!

Obviously all this has an effect on the profile of required competences at the Home Office in Ostend. Redundancy of permanently contracted employees became unavoidable but we hope to restore part of the employment by short term contract jobs paid through our Project portfolio, which has become quite successful this year.

I firmly believe that all these measures will turn EAS into a younger, dynamic and vital society again, as it was nearly 30 years ago. Next year, in 2006 we celebrate our 30th anniversary indeed. We won't let it pass by without a proper birthday party, which has been scheduled during the opening session of the next Aquaculture Europe (together with World Aquaculture) organized from 9-13 May in Florence, Italy. I hereby invite all members to come and join us in that event. The birthday celebration will be held at Palazzo Vecchio, the medieval masterpiece of the Medici.

But you should join us in Firenze for many other good reasons: the conference promises to be one of the most staggering events ever held in the aquaculture scenery in Europe! A special producer's day will cater to the needs of the industry. An “Italian Farmer's day” with English/Italian translation will focus on different aspects of importance to Italian aquaculture; the sales of the 200 booths at the trade show are running faster than foreseen and promise to bring Europe's best of the industry together. The EAS student forum is preparing a nice student-oriented program session together with their American and WAS colleagues, and the scientific program of the conference is solid as a rock. Without doubt, a must in all agendas of 2006. If you haven't included it yet in your own calendar, do it now!

—Johan Verreth