

The World Aquaculture Society: A Growing Organization in a Growing Industry

The World Aquaculture Society (WAS) is a professional association devoted to the exchange of information on all aspects of aquatic husbandry. Through publications, workshops, symposia and annual meetings, WAS promotes educational, scientific and technological advancement of aquaculture throughout the world. Operating out of its home office on the campus of Louisiana State University, the Society serves a membership of some 2,500 aquaculturists from more than 100 countries.

The truly international organization had a rather modest beginning less than two decades ago. An informal meeting on mariculture resulted in a four-member steering committee which met at Grand Terre Island, Louisiana, USA, in 1969 to draft a preliminary charter and bylaws. These were presented the next day to a gathering of 44 aquaculturists from the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast. "In what has frequently been described as a burst of megalomania these first members had the pluck to christen the group the World Mariculture Society," reported Guido Persoone in his President's address at the society's 17th annual meeting in association with Aquaculture '86.

In the first years of the society, the membership was dominated by the United States, but a determined effort by the Board of Directors has resulted in rapid internationalization of both membership and administration. Two of the last three presidents and more than half of the current board of directors hail from outside the continental United States.

Much of the growth and internationalization of the society has resulted from affiliation with other national and multinational organizations. The European Aquaculture Society, the Aquaculture Association of Canada and the Caribbean Aquaculture Association are current affiliates of WAS. At present the society is pursuing affiliation with additional groups including the Latin American Association of Aquaculture, the Australian Aquaculture Association, the Japanese Aquaculture Research Group and aquaculturists in Africa. "Affiliation forges a communication link between widely separated groups of aquaculturists," says John Castell, chairman of



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the WAS Affiliation Committee, "and global exchange of aquaculture information is one of the society's most basic objectives."

Major aquaculture meetings also accomplish this goal. More than 1,300 aquaculturists participated in the 1987 annual meeting in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Then president Ken Johnson described the society in his welcoming address as "a

growing organization in a growing industry." The Ecuador meeting was the largest, most cosmopolitan and most successful international meeting yet hosted by the rapidly growing organization. The next WAS meeting will reach out toward Asia. Scheduled for Hawaii in January 1988, the meeting will be centered on the theme "West Meets East." A full day of meetings and symposia will be devoted to Asian aquaculture practices.

This is the first step in what the society hopes will be a long and mutually beneficial exchange between eastern and western aquaculture interests. "Asia is the dominant force in aquaculture," says John Manzi. "For the benefit of the industry as a whole, we've got to improve lines of communication between east and west." This effort to encourage exchange of information and technology with Asia will continue at the society's 1989 meeting in Los Angeles. Japanese aquaculture practices will be a significant component of this joint meeting with a half-dozen other aquaculture organizations. Manzi adds, "We're hoping to hold the 1990 meeting of WAS in Japan. The Japanese have made tremendous progress since the Kyoto meeting (1976), and we need to bring the world back to Japan for a first-hand look."

The rapid growth and success of WAS reflects the international growth of interest in aquaculture in both the private and public sectors. David Aiken, current president of WAS, summarized the new direction of the society in his inaugural address in Guayaquil: "The society has made a commitment to its membership to increase its international activities, to broaden its informational base, and to expand its distributional network and communication channels."

The WAS has begun to live up to its name. It has evolved from a small regional workshop with localized interests into a large international organization that addresses global aquaculture issues and provides access for developing aquaculture technology. Through its quarterly journal, newsletter, special publications, annual meetings and sponsored workshops, the WAS endeavors to provide the information necessary to assist aquaculture in its global growth and development. ●