

## Report to the Governing Board

To: AFS Governing Board

From: Mary C. Fabrizio, President

Date: 21 July 2008

The theme of my Presidential year has been *Fisheries in Flux: How Do We Ensure Our Sustainable Future?*, and although this is an excellent invitation to challenge our thinking about research, management, and aquatic stewardship, the theme also provokes thinking about the future of AFS as a professional association. How do we ensure that AFS will remain relevant in 10, 20, or more years?

### ***Looking back:***

During the past year, I had the privilege of serving as President of the American Fisheries Society, and of leading the Society in the development of a more deliberate and knowledge-driven approach towards maintaining our relevancy as a professional association. A leadership workshop sponsored by the Council of Engineering and Scientific Society Executives in November 2007 provided the Executive Director and me with tools to effectively lead AFS through this change. Attendance at the workshop was a pivotal moment for AFS (and many other societies represented at the workshop) as we learned about challenges arising from changing demographics and evolving technologies that could negatively affect the viability of professional organizations. Such challenges shape the environment in which we work, affecting how we work and how we interact with one another. This past year was devoted to ensuring an understanding of these external drivers and to developing strategies to position ourselves as a relevant and viable society for the future.

A key characteristic of associations with a reputation for relevance is the ability to adapt to changing environments by sustaining and using knowledge to ensure that members receive products and services of high value. Such an organization is known as an intelligent association. Actions of intelligent associations are strategically guided towards achieving desired outcomes – in our case, desired outcomes are those that benefit AFS members, and those that benefit fisheries and aquatic resources. The following activities summarize the progress to date.

- Recognizing that the AFS Strategic Plan will expire in 2009, I initiated four activities to better prepare for a revision of the Plan.
  - The annual retreat of the AFS Governing Board will be focused on defining who we are (core purpose and values), and where we are going (goal for the future). These ‘big picture’ questions help to set the stage for the next step, which is to define what we are doing (through our revised Strategic Plan).
  - I appointed a special committee, the Strategic Planning Committee (chaired by Eric Knudsen) to prepare a draft revised plan. The Committee will obtain input from AFS leaders at the annual Governing Board retreat, and this input will help the Committee understand the long-term direction and goals desired by the Board. Such understanding will provide meaningful context within which short-term (1- to 5-year) strategies can be identified.
  - I developed a membership survey in coordination with the Membership Concerns Committee, the Publications Overview Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee, and the AFS Officers to help gauge opinions on electronic media, AFS meetings, mentoring and education, AFS governance, recruitment and retention, outreach, advocacy, and future priorities for AFS. A report on the results of the spring 2008 survey will be used to guide discussions at the AFS retreat on strategic planning. This is the first time that the AFS strategic planning process will be informed by contemporary feedback from members.

- I pursued the use of a Bulletin Board Focus Group to help AFS leaders obtain input from the membership about what members want or need from AFS now and in the future. Focus Group members were selected to represent key membership sectors and invited to participate in the online (moderated) discussions held in mid-July 2008. Opinions about how members perceive their profession changing and how AFS might respond were shared among respondents. A report detailing the outcome of the discussion will be provided to Board members at the annual retreat.
- To better prepare our future leaders and to ensure that current leaders understand AFS governance, the AFS Leadership Workshop at the annual meeting was restructured under the leadership of Dirk Miller to focus on delivering vital information to new AFS leaders. The workshop now emphasizes the characteristics of intelligent associations and introduces attendees to these concepts. Materials from the workshop will be available via the AFS web.
- In 2007, the sale of the AFS headquarters property in Bethesda, MD, became a tangible likelihood. In response to a request from the AFS Executive Director for leadership input to the decision-making process associated with relocation of AFS headquarters, I appointed a special committee, the Transition Committee (chaired by Past President Christine Moffitt). The Transition Committee identified the human-resources and society principles used to guide our move. A retreat was held at the mid-year meeting of the Governing Board to discuss opportunities and challenges associated with the move. The outcome of the retreat was a clear directive and guidance for the Executive Director; such guidance will facilitate future Governing Board approval of the sale and subsequent relocation process.
- The AFS budget continues to provide opportunities for AFS to invest in new initiatives. During 2007-2008, three new initiatives were pursued: development of a new AFS journal, enhancement of public outreach, and development of Governing Board leaders.
  - Early in my tenure as President, I guided the development of the new open-access journal, including the hiring of the Development Editor (Don Noakes) and the crafting of an implementation strategy for the journal. To this end, I convened a meeting of leaders from the Publications Overview Committee, the journal editor, and AFS journal production staff (Donna Davis, Aaron Lerner) in Bethesda, MD, in October 2007 to develop the scope and editorial policy of the new journal. Together with POC Chair Steve Cooke, and the AFS Executive Director, I drafted a Guide to the Decision-Making Process for the New AFS Journal which describes the roles and responsibilities of the Editor and the POC. Such a guide was necessary because we are using a novel approach for oversight. Appointments to the journal editorial board have been completed and online publication is expected before the close of 2008. The journal is called *Marine and Coastal Fisheries: Dynamics, Management and Ecosystem-based Science*.
  - A Policy and Outreach Coordinator was hired at AFS. A noteworthy effort to enhance public outreach is the ‘translation’ of scientific findings as articles for the public. This effort is jointly pursued by the External Affairs Committee under the leadership of Kevin Pope, and AFS staff Elden Hawkes and Aaron Lerner.
  - Recognizing the limited travel support for some Governing Board members, and desiring to support continued involvement of Board members at the mid-year meeting, I appointed a special committee under the leadership of Stu Shipman to administer a leadership development award (i.e., small grants to support Governing Board members’ travel to the mid-year meeting).
- Annual meetings continue to provide members with an effective forum to exchange ideas, develop professional networks, exercise leadership, and participate in continuing education programs. I provided oversight to the committees that develop the technical program and host the annual meeting of the Society. Three dynamic leaders were invited to address the meeting theme, *Fisheries in Flux: How Do We Ensure Our Sustainable Future?* at the Plenary Session. I also encouraged the use of speed presentations and several other innovations to provide for additional interaction opportunities among attendees.

- Understanding that members desire to know more about AFS activities, I used my monthly columns in *Fisheries* as an opportunity to provide the membership with information about strategic changes and new activities that are being implemented at AFS. I covered topics such as the new electronic journal, planning for the transition of our headquarters office, defining our core purpose and values, and the role of AFS in the international arena. I also used the opportunity to inform the membership about critical, yet misunderstood, governance issues such as the difference between AFS policy statements and resolutions, proper parliamentary procedures used to conduct AFS meetings, the role of AFS certification, and procedures for identifying new initiatives.
- AFS continues to serve as a leader of national and international concerns in fisheries and the fisheries profession. As such, AFS officers function as ambassadors for the Society. During this past year, I represented AFS at the North Central Division meeting (Madison, WI, December 2007), Northeastern Division meeting (Galloway, NJ, April 2008), and the Western Division meeting (Portland, OR, May 2008). In February 2008, I represented AFS at the international symposium on Advances in Fish Tagging and Marking Technology in Auckland, New Zealand. This meeting was jointly sponsored by AFS, the Australian Society for Fish Biology, and the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society. In March 2008, I attended the annual meeting of the Japanese Society of Fisheries Science (Shimizu, Japan), and in July 2008, I participated in the annual conference of the Fisheries Society of the British Isles (Cardiff, Wales). I also participated as a member of the Board of the Fisheries Conservation Foundation, attending the annual Board of Directors meeting in September 2007.

***Looking towards the future:***

The continued relevancy of AFS will depend on how well AFS adapts to membership changes and to external factors affecting the way our members interact with one another. AFS should continue to use a knowledge-based governance strategy by focusing on key strategic challenges and opportunities; monitoring performance and achievement of desired outcomes; adjusting strategies and policy as changes or challenges occur; and maintaining policy and planning tools for intelligent governance. The following critical leadership activities will require attention by the AFS leadership team in the coming year:

- Plan for leadership succession of the Executive Director position.
- Plan for leadership succession of AFS Units and Officers.
- Ensure completion of Strategic Plan for 2010-2014.
- Facilitate implementation of Strategic Plan by Units, Officers, Executive Director, and Staff.
- Develop user-friendly electronic reporting of AFS accomplishments to enable formative evaluation (monitoring) of progress towards strategic goals.

Over the course of the next few years (2010-2014), the AFS leadership team should periodically examine and reach consensus on what constitutes value and success. Similarly, our strategic direction should be periodically affirmed. In some cases, strategies may need to be adjusted to ensure that the outcomes being achieved are consistent with our strategic intent and core values. Strategies may also be adjusted to ensure that members are receiving products and services that are of value to the membership.

***In appreciation:***

Thank you for allowing me this brief opportunity to serve as your President – AFS is a well-respected association of fisheries professionals who care deeply about aquatic resources and about each other. You have given me a great honor which I will never forget. Thank you for supporting and challenging me during this past year; it has been a remarkable experience!