

Minutes of the WSCS General Assembly 2006

Piacenza, June 8th, 2006

16:10h – 18:10h

1. Opening of the General Assembly and Welcome by the President

The Board meeting was opened at 10:00h at the Town Hall of the Provincia di Piacenza, Av. Garibaldi 50.

The President welcomed the members and guests (see attached list). In his welcome address the President specifically thanked the Provincia di Piacenza and the attending representative (Mr. Celeste Poggioli) for being the host of the Board meeting as well as of the General Assembly while also making their infrastructure available to effectively run the meetings. He thanked also Dr. Paolo Bronzi for taking up the responsibility in planning and organizing the event.

The President emphasized that the change of meeting places from year to year is intended and will allow members of different regions and countries to participate in the General Assembly.

He noted the high interest of the Province in supporting the jointly planned and organized workshop on “Fishlifts: overcoming obstructions to spawning migration routes. (particularly in the Po River). This workshop is intended to build the basis for the subsequent work on opening the upper reaches of the River for migratory fish species and is considered a good example for the involvement of the WSCS in facilitating sturgeon conservation.

2. Adoption of the Agenda, logistics and other issues

The Agenda was presented and the changes were agreed upon by the GA. Dr. Bronzi explained the local arrangements and services for logistic needs.

In Memoriam

The President reported on the sad loss of four members who passed away in 2005. He referred to the obituary notice for **Evgenii Artyukin** published in the Journal of Applied Ichthyology and recalled his merits and achievements. Special reference was made to Evgenii’s input to sturgeon research. His interest in sturgeon evolution and taxonomy was well recognized as well as his leadership in work on the restoration and controlled reproduction of rare and endangered sturgeon species in Russia,

Don Robson, former administrative director of the Canadian NRC in Halifax and a close friend to the President, passed away at the age of 82. As a retired science administrator and engineer he joined the Society from the beginning as one of our first Canadian members and supported our work vividly as sponsor member.

Phil Black of Vancouver (age 81) was an active and enthusiastic supporter of nature conversationists and especially concerned about endangered species. He joined the society early on and assisted our colleagues on the west coast. By a tragic accident we lost a good friend and supporter.

. Our Russian member and active scientist in sturgeon research **Dimitry Andrianov** died unexpectedly at the end of last year. He was one of the active Russian members with a high reputation in sturgeon research. We will miss his advice.

We lost valuable friends and important contributors to our aims and objectives. They will be remembered as vivid supporters of the Society. A one minute of silence was held in honor and memory of those dear colleagues who passed away so unexpectedly.

3. History of the Society

The President presented a short overview on the history of the WSCS and its foundation as well as on the aims and objectives while also focussing on the initial intent to provide a home for the International Sturgeon Symposia and ensuring their future. He also briefly introduced the services for members and the early activities.

4. Treasurer's Report

a. Membership

With the new members joining the Society during the ISS 5 in Ramsar, and with the additional registration early this year the Society reached a total of about 450 members. For the next two years a moderate increase to somewhat over 500 members is projected, reflecting an asymptotic growth of the membership. It is concluded that the ISS events are major occasions to gain membership.

The issue on unacceptably high bank charges for transfers of the membership dues was discussed as always. In order to improve the logistics and to reduce costs for handling the affairs for the regional membership, it was suggested by Dr. Pourkazemi and others to have local bank accounts in the name of the Society and to provide the regional representatives with the power to cash the fees and to perform the follow up affairs. For this purpose the WSCS home office will supply the forms (serial letters) for the receipts. The currency exchange rates will have to be fixed at the beginning of each year to assure a uniform handling, to simplify accounting. The membership dues for the respective year will be collected according to the exchange rate set at that time. A bank transfer of the dues will take place once a year. The balance of the account as well as the transfer to the home office account will be provided no later than mid December to allow the home office to prepare the balance before the end of the fiscal year. Also to reduce the workload of the home office, it is suggested that the regional representatives do print and handle the membership cards for local distribution.

b. Annual Balance 2005

The balance was presented in detail by the treasurer and discussed in planery. In accordance with the suggestions of the three evaluators it was agreed that the form would be slightly restructured to have the carry over from the previous year separated from the income and to have the carry over into the subsequent year also separated from the expenditures of the given year to make the activities during the fiscal year more apparent.

The accounting balance for 2005 was unanimously approved at 16:56h.

c. Planned budget 2006

The budget 2006 was presented by the treasurer, explained in all details and subsequently discussed. The effects of budget relevant decisions on the budget were also discussed and the expenditures were negotiated on the basis of the planned activities for which the verification was presented.

i. Expenditures for Fish Base

The current price of the FishBase pages are in principle higher than what the society had paid in the past because of the special arrangement during the first year. It was noted that there has been a substantial increase in usage of this unique databank. The President is presently

negotiating the new terms, however it was decided that the contributions should not exceed the target 1800 € for each of the 2006/07 fiscal years.

ii. Web Master

The webmaster was unable to attend the board meeting. There has been some increase in the usage of the website while the archive for the news section is rapidly increasing. Also, after a long start-up phase, the discussion forum is beginning to become more attractive. Board members are requested to visit regularly the discussion forum and seek to answer questions raised or alarm colleagues who would be able to do so.

iii. Bibliography on sturgeons

The bibliography continues to expand. Unfortunately, the databank does have some access problems mainly at the user end because of the software requirements. The webmaster presently is looking into the problem and it is hoped to have a solution soon.

iv. Secretarial support for the home office

It was suggested to approve secretarial support for the President to run the home office at a cost level of 4000€ These comprise 3000€ for general program support and 1000€ for the news section of the website. With the increase in membership there is a growing workload for services that can only be satisfied with secretarial assistance.

v. Reimbursement of the President for 2005 expenses along with the organization of the 5th ISS.

The President had to spend a total of 950€ in 2005 to cover urgent costs for WSCS representation during the 5th ISS for various organizational purposes. The Board agreed already unanimously at the board meeting to reimburse the President for the costs incurred and the General Assembly endorsed this decision unanimously at 18:41h.

vi. Membership dues

The General Assembly was informed that the Board decided to maintain the membership dues at the present level as the present rates seem to be acceptable to the membership. The General Assembly was informed that the operational needs of the Society are certainly not covered by the membership dues and that additional funding has to be generated through other sources (e.g. sponsors) to fulfil the tasks.

The proposed Budget 2006 was adopted by the GA at 17:05h unanimously.

d. Proposed Budget 2007

The proposal for the budget 2007 (see attachment for details) was presented by the treasurer and subsequently discussed. Although it seems early to prepare the budget, the reason for providing the plan at this time to the GA is simple. The next General Assembly will take place at the earliest in March next year, however, a budget would be needed for the effective work at the onset of the year. The budget was outlined as a provisional one taking care of the income as projected based on the membership and the expenditures for the activities that the Board approved on June 7th. Expenditures for linking to sturgeon pages in Fish Base in 2007 may be saved, provided that the Society (e.g. their members) take over the responsibility to support the data files on that web pages. In this case there is a fair chance that the service can be obtained at no cost. The President will re-negotiate the offer already made by FishBase in 2004.

The layout of the budget 2007 is similarly structured as the one prepared for 2006. Final adjustments can be made at the next General Assembly. The budget plan was adopted unanimously by the GA at 17:11h.

e. Proposal of the candidate list for the Board elections 2007

The list of suggested candidates for the upcoming 2007 Board elections - has been discussed and prepared in light of the need. to have this list available four months in advance of the General Assembly at which the voting will take place. Since the present Board meeting is the last prior to the voting event and since the proposed list of candidates will have to be adopted by the General Assembly tomorrow, the Board must come up with a tentative list of candidates today.

After some discussion it was clear that the Society as a still very young organisation needs continuity to grow to full maturity and that it would be advisable to opt for a second term for most of the Board members. One exception is the Vice-President, Prof. Serge Doroshov, who feels at the present highly overloaded with work and – while in support of the activities – feels it would be best when he can be partially relieved. The Board therefore suggested the following list for approval:

President	Harald Rosenthal (Germany)
Vice President	Mohammad Pourkazemi (Iran)
Treasurer	Ron Bruch (USA)
Secretary General	Joern Geßner (Germany)
Board member at large	Paolo Bronzi (Italy)
Board member at large	Jianbo Chang (China)
Board member at large	Georgii Ruban (Russia)

In order to facilitate the change in the Board and to honour Dr. Doroshov's merits in founding the Society, it was suggested to award him - currently the Vice President of the Society - with a honorary Board Membership for 2007.

The suggested list was adopted by the General Assembly unanimously at 17:15h.

5. ISS5 Report on the outcome of the 5th ISS (International Sturgeon Symposium)

Mohammad Pourkazemi, the Chair of the organizing committee for the 5th ISS reported on the outcome of the conference held May 9-13th in Ramsar, Iran. Dr. Pourkazemi expressed that he and his fellow organizers as well as the respective institutions considered it an honour to have had the opportunity to host the event that drew close to 600 participants submitting 300 papers for presentation. 100 presentations were selected by peer review for oral presentation, others were admitted for the poster sessions. Additionally, four workshops were held to target specific issues where hands-on experience was provided to participants. Subjects covered in these workshops included: (a) sturgeon sperm cryopreservation; (b) Sturgeon sexing and gonad staging; (c) caviar processing and (d) Diseases and parasites in sturgeons.

Dr Pourkazemi emphasized the importance of the event both nationally for the information and experience for University and researchers from other institutions, exchanging their views and experiences. Also for the Ministry, Fisheries administration and fishermen the Symposium was helpful to emphasize the importance of sturgeon species, their conservation needs as well as their potential for aquaculture. Likewise, the Symposium was of utmost importance internationally, bringing the world's expertise

together, exchanging their advancement in knowledge and discussing pertinent sturgeon issues within the science and management communities while also emphasizing the gaps in science and technology.

The response of the Iranian government on the conference was extremely positive. For the future it is envisaged to increase the efficiency of the hatcheries by further promoting scientific research in this field to overcome the main obstacles such as high mortalities during the rearing phase and to further increase the impact of the releases on the recovery of populations in the wild. In order to counteract on the continuous decline of the populations of sturgeons in the Caspian Sea, it is planned to build up a gene bank both of cryopreserved sperm as well as of live animals under captive rearing conditions. For this endeavour, criteria for the establishment of brood stocks are to be developed and the genetic basis of breeding plans have to be established.

Additionally, the participation of contributors from the Caspian range states made it possible to intensify contacts and provide orientation for the ongoing work. The Chairman acknowledged the support of the Scientific and Steering Committees, the Board of the Society and especially the input the President had in preparing and running the 5th ISS. Dr. Pourkazemi thanked the President for the repeated trips to Iran during the preparation phase and the follow up meetings.

As was planned from the beginning, the submitted manuscripts are presently in the final stage of world-wide peer review and the accepted and edited papers will be published soon in the Journal of Applied Ichthyology.

Additionally, one of the major outcome of the Symposium was the preparaton of the RAMSAR DECLARATION, the final version of which was published recently and is now distributed to governments of range states and agencies involved in conservation issues (see below)

Representation of WSCS at ISS 5

The president reported o the activities of WSCS at the 5th ISS in Ramsar. The President thanked all members that have contributed to the increased visibility by attending the booth and served as helping hands on other occasions. As a consequence, the membership increased by 70 persons during the meeting.

Logistics on distribution of the ISS 5 proceedings

Since every registered participant to the conference paying their fees receives a copy of the Proceedings, the question to save money for the WSCS bulk shipments or the various countries were strongly encouraged by the Editor. (Since the mailing of the Proceedings is an obligation of the conveyors, I wonder why we have to bother about that.)

Publication of the Ramsar Declaration

The recently published Ramsar Declaration drafted during the ISS 5 was presented by the Chair of ISS 5 and the President of the Society.

The Declaration is available in two flyers: the first part contains a preamble, the headlines of the key recommendations and an overall justification. The second part presents the detailed recommendations followed by the respective justifications. It was suggested to send the documents out centrally from the home office and distribute additional copies according to demand. For this purpose, the Board members are requested to send addresses of the main recipients (Agencies, Ministries, NGO's). In case of a direct distribution by board members in their country, it was agreed that members should provide the home office with the addresses already supplied.

6. IUCN Sturgeon Specialist Group

The Chair of the IUCN SSG presented the recent activities of the IUCN concerning sturgeon conservation.

a. IUCN Red List review

The SSG has proposed a revised Red List review, which was not decided upon by IUCN up to now.

b. Caspian sturgeon Action Plan

An Action Plan for Caspian sturgeons is currently being developed by the range states, being supported by the IUCN.

c. Bruxelles meeting on enforcement of protection

For the enforcement workshop, M. Pourkazemi asked for a guideline for the 1st workshop taking place. He requested the members to provide information about the management measures carried out historically as well as recently. It was also proposed that the President participates in this important meeting and presents the views of the Society.

d. Berlin workshop on genetic analysis of caviar

From September 29th to October 1st a CITES expert workshop on methodology of genetic species identification will be held in Berlin. The workshop aims at the standardization of methodology for species identification and the agreement upon certain reference methods. Additionally, the development of a collection of reference samples is to be decided upon. The board discussed the issue and recommended that the subject be expanded to include at the same time evolutionary and biogeographic aspects as there are urgent issues in Europe and elsewhere to deal with questions on original and subsequent changes in species ranges, having an impact on

e. CITES Animal Committee meeting Lima, Peru (regulation on AC 22)
(previous TOP 19)

Dr. Pourkazemi presented the plans for the meeting to be held in Lima, Peru. According to his information, the main focus on this meeting should be the formation of a Working Group by the range states of the Caspian to develop jointly a conservation programme. In addition, the evaluation of the programme by external experts was suggested to ensure that the document is in accordance with the required form and contents. Guidelines for the development of the plan would be considered highly necessary.

7. Action plan development

The president presented the recent status concerning the development of Action Plans under the Bern Convention and the involvement of WSCS herein. The Danube Action Plan was released and amended by the Bern Convention in November 2005. The Action Plan for the *A. sturio* which was presented at the occasion of the meeting of the Bern Convention in the Council of Europe in Strassbourg by the President together with the representative of WWF France is currently in the final phase of preparation. Patrick Williot made mention that thanks to the activities of different participants to the development of the Action Plan, the French Ministry for the Environment has largely changed its attitude towards sturgeon remediation and in the meantime has selected the programme as one of the main focal points of French environmental policy.

The GA discussed the options for future activities and agreed that future Action plans should be drafted for critical regions such as the Aral Sea and the Amur River/Heilongjiang stocks.

8. Date and Time of next WSCS General Assembly

The next GA meeting is to take place at the Institute for Hydrobiology of the Chinese Academy of Science. The meeting place was suggested by the Chinese members as a test run for ISS 6 in 2009. In addition, the meeting place allows a wider participation of the Chinese membership for the GA.

The suggested date is the March 7 -10, 2007.

The decision was adopted unanimously (18:02h).

9. Miscellaneous

a. CITES 2007 meeting in The Hague

2007 is the year during which the Conference of the Parties to CITES being held in The Hague, (The Netherlands). It was suggested that members of the Society should be registered by their national governments as delegates in order to have strong support for the sturgeon conservation efforts at this meeting. WSCS as NGO is granted observer status.

b. EAS/WSCS joint session on sturgeons

The President received an invitation by EAS following the MOU to carry out a joint session during the next EAS annual conference.

The discussion mainly focused on the feasibility to arrange for the preparation of the event in such a short time. The subjects to be dealt with were discussed and it was concluded that a joint workshop should focus on the development of broodstock rearing.

It was decided, that the President should further negotiate about the potential scope and the obligations of WSCS in the organisation.

For future commitments the question has to be addressed how these activities can be most beneficial for WSCS. If the number of cooperation offers increase, the general aims and the scope of the Society as well as the prioritization of the activities will have to be refined to make sure the effort results in the most effective measures that can be easily handled in the future. It was suggested that board members prepares and decides on a list of criteria for the participation in such activities and informs the General Assembly accordingly.

The General Assembly was closed at 18:10h.

Rapporteurs: Ron Bruch, Jörn Gessner, Harald Rosenthal