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04) President's report

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Topic:

Topic author: aoren

Subject: 04) President's report

Posted on: 30 Jan 2012 20:58:32

Message:

Pessimist --> Optimist --> Pessimist

Some issues for thought

When I was elected President of the ISSLR following the 2008 meeting in Salt Lake City, my views about the ISSRL were moderately optimistic. The thoughts I expressed at the time can still be viewed in the President's message found on the web site of our society (<http://isslr.org/isslr/presmsg.htm>). The society was small, with an extremely small core of enthusiastic members who came to all our triennial symposia, but the question was always, do we have a viable society, does it have the necessary critical mass to succeed in the future.

At the Salt Lake City symposium in 2008, also thanks also to the participation of the FRIENDS of Great Salt Lake we had a huge audience, not only from Utah but from all over the USA and many participants from overseas. Somehow, by some kind of magic that only Wayne Wurtsbaugh understands, there also was a huge financial surplus, and suddenly the society was (and still is) very rich on a per capita basis. Wayne and his friends also found a publisher for the proceedings, and within a short time and with a hard-working and committed team of editors we produced a beautiful, 269-page volume within less than a year. These proceedings can be downloaded freely from the internet, and paper copies can be ordered at a very attractive price. The result of all this was, that your President was less pessimistic about the society than he had been before that symposium. I left Salt Lake City with the feeling that we are doing really well.

Now, after the Mar Chiquita symposium is over, it is time to re-evaluate the achievements of the society. The meeting was extremely nice, the organizers did an excellent job; we had a great venue, some good science, and a nice mid-conference excursion. Yet, I was left with some mixed feelings on a number of different issues:

- Nearly all the participants came from Argentina, a few from other South American countries, the small hard-core of salt lake limnologists who have been active in the society for many years was of course present, most of them as board members, we had a nice number of Chinese delegates (as in many other branches of science, China has the future!), but very few others.

- Travel grants. We had announced that the ISSLR had 5 travel grants of US \$ 500 each to support travel by students from outside Argentina. In the end we actively tried to find eligible candidates, but finally there were only 2 eligible applicants. Thus, a sum of \$ 1500 earmarked for these travel grants was returned to the coffers of the society.

- The Bill Williams prize for young scientists presenting the best student talk and student poster, to encourage salt lake research by young scientists: both in Perth and in Salt Lake City we had truly excellent student presentations. In Perth there even were two students who presented such beautiful lectures that the prize committee (of which I was a member) decided to give two student lecture prizes. In Mar Chiquita we also awarded these prizes for the best student lecture and poster, but I had the strong feeling that the level of these presentations was far below what

we had seen in the two previous symposia. And another important issue: if the awards are given to students to encourage a career in salt lake research, why didn't we see any of the awardees from Perth and Salt Lake City at the Argentina meeting?

- For the first time since the first salt lakes meeting in Australia (proceedings published in 1981 in Hydrobiologia) we have failed to publish the proceedings. We have an editor on the board, but as yet there is nothing to edit! And by now too much time has probably passed already to try to solicit manuscripts from the presenters.

And what happened during the past board election was depressing as well. No more than 29 members have voted to elect the members of the present board. This is much less than the actual number of members of the society eligible to vote (63, which is also a small number). Conclusion: most members do not appear to be particularly interested in the fate of the ISSLR.

Those present in Mar Chiquita have (automatically, as part of their registration fee) paid their membership dues for the coming three years. But I understand that only very few others have paid their dues and are therefore members in good standing of the ISSLR. Obviously most of the participants in the Salt Lake City symposium did chose not to remain ISSLR members.

Conclusion: your President, first a pessimist, then more optimistic, is now once more in a pessimist mood.

It is now the task of this board, and also the task of the organizers of the ISSLR symposium in 2014, soon to be appointed, to prove me wrong. I hope to finish my last term as ISSLR President in an optimistic mood.

Comments are welcome!

A few additional updates:

- I have been invited to participate in a conference on "Solar Salt, Sustainability and Biodiversity" - Sevilla, Spain, - 22-23 May 2012 (see <http://www.eusalt.com/pages/press-corner/file.handler?f=EuSaltConfWebEdition.pdf>) As I will be teaching a field course in this period I will not be able to attend. Our board member Carol Litchfield will present a lecture there, and will represent ISSLR.

- Another congress this summer, of interest to those working on halophilic microorganisms, is Extremophiles 2012 also in Sevilla see <http://congreso.us.es/extremophiles/> I hope to attend that meeting.

Aharon

Replies:

Reply author: aoren

Replied on: 30 Jan 2012 21:00:57

Message:

Within 1-2 days I will send to all board members by e-mail a summary of the members' meeting held in Mar Chiquita (as a pdf file of the annotated Powerpoint file used during that meeting).

Reply author: aoren

Replied on: 30 Jan 2012 21:18:25

Message:

I have just sent the summary of the members' meeting (Mar Chiquita, 14.5.2011) by e-mail to all board members. If you did not receive it, please let me know. Comments can be posted on this board forum.

Reply author: rjellison
Replied on: 31 Jan 2012 05:52:03
Message:

You can view Aharon's notes on the membership meeting
["www.isslr.org/db/2011%20Member%20Mtg.pdf"](http://www.isslr.org/db/2011%20Member%20Mtg.pdf)

Reply author: clitchfield
Replied on: 31 Jan 2012 12:27:36
Message:

I think one reason the US attendance was so poor was the high cost of the airfare and the long flight to Buenos Aires. May is also not a good month for US academics as that is usually the final exam/graduation time. I know I moved up my exam, with the students' permission, so I could attend. Not everyone had that option.

Reply author: NikolayAladin
Replied on: 01 Feb 2012 23:16:08
Message:

Dear All,
I read your info and I like your ideas.
I would like to speak about making more expeditions to our very special lakes and to make more education and more salt lake propaganda WORLD WIDE via INTERNET, with video and with photos.
I would like to publish info about our Aral Sea Expedition in our ISSLR website in English, Russian, Japanese, German, Chinese, Swedish and Spanish. Later today I shall send text in English, Russian, Japanese to Prof. Dr. Robert JELLISON.
Aral Sea is the most suffering lake and we must use some more languages for education and propaganda.
Also today I shall send some photos about Aral Sea Expedition 2011.
Video will be sent some later.
Yours,
Nick Aladin

Reply author: Egor Zadereev
Replied on: 01 Feb 2012 23:57:22
Message:

I think that we should be neither pessimistic nor optimistic but realistic.

It is clear that our society is small as well as salt lake limnology is almost marginal area. We are not "commercial society" as for example ASLO which have well known journals and attracts people as something big and powerful. But we still need something to attract people. As soon as there is no benefits to be in the society it is difficult to expect that people will feel that they are members of the society. What we can offer to scientists in different countries? Of course tri-annual conferences are a good and minimal requirement to stay viable. I think that the only thing we can offer in addition to conferences is the atmosphere of collaborators and friendly people focused on all aspects of salt lakes research. But to keep (or create) this atmosphere what we have to do is to think a bit broader on what we can do as a society/group. We may think about joint research projects and share information about funding opportunities. We may consider joint expeditions (or at least clearly demonstrate which expeditions or research visits are possible). It will be great to disseminate information about PhD and post-doc opportunities (if any) in the field we are interested.
It seems to me that traditionally we have little contacts with European colleagues. I realize that salt lake research is more developed in other countries but still it will be nice to establish contacts with salt aquatic ecology scientist from Europe. And also we should focus on young scientists.

Finally, it looks that crisis of the society somehow connected with the crisis of the ideas what is the difference between lake limnology and salt lake limnology. Why should we consider salt lakes as something unique? I think it will be great to find an opportunity to raise money to organize some kind of workshop or working seminar or conference on the urgent and strategic research aims for salt lake research. We need some kind of broad and strategic agenda. Most probably such agenda will be just declaration which will never be realized but it might be usefull....

Reply author: aoren

Replied on: 02 Feb 2012 00:00:07

Message:

Egor, your comments are greatly appreciated!

Reply author: rjellison

Replied on: 02 Feb 2012 07:20:30

Message:

I think the Facebook page has worked well and should result in increased visibility. We are also financially better off than ever before due to Lynn DeFrietas and work by the Friends of Great Salt Lake for the 2008 conference. A more active website would also be useful. However, I feel my previous arguments on how our interests in salt lakes would be better met by working actively with the rest of the limnological community still hold. It would be a win-win for us to collaborate more with SIL (infrastructural support, larger meetings, dues structure, new highly appropriate journal, wider exposure, ability to continue triennial meetings, etc.) but I won't detail these arguments here. We've had extended discussions about the future of ISSLR during previous meetings and not much has changed.

Previous discussions can be viewed at:

2008: http://isslr.org/forums/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=199

2009: http://isslr.org/forums/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=217

Reply author: Egor Zadereev

Replied on: 02 Feb 2012 07:33:32

Message:

Yes, indeed a lot was already discussed years before...

Reply author: ehbucher

Replied on: 06 Feb 2012 21:23:52

Message:

Regarding Aharon considerations, it is clear to me that any scientific meeting organized at the end of the Southern Hemisphere will attract less scientists in comparison with Europe and North America. However, the main (valuable) reason for organizing events in rather remote places is to promote development of local science, as well as to provide scientists with a unique opportunity to expand their "on the ground" experience. However financial and time costs are becoming higher and higher, and most of us are usually in short supply of both.

One possible alternative for a more optimistic approach would be to consider involvement of all ISSLR members in some kind of common project, such as comparative studies with unifying key questions translated in projects to be implemented in as many lakes as possible (nitrogen dynamics? extremophiles? social issues?). Then, each symposium could provide a more compelling reason for coming given the interest in furthering our common interests and the possibility of (hopefully) producing an interesting contribution of global value.

Along the same vein, ISSLR could look for exchange programs, for example, that would facilitate integration. Funding for interdisciplinary, interinstitutional programs have expanded significantly in the past years.

In summary, perhaps we should think of a new paradigm for scientific societies. From the Mar Chiquita experience, I feel that in order to be optimistic we need to consider a new mission and

vision, as well as a common "operational" goal. It is likely that innovative changes could will be easier to install in small organizations like ours.

Reply author: NikolayAladin

Replied on: 06 Feb 2012 23:34:05

Message:

Dear All,

as I said already to Prof.Dr. Robert JELLISON,
facebook is good, but we should be in touch and in cooperation with:

- 1)ILEC website in Japan
- 2)World Water Week website in Sweden
- 3)World Water Forum website.....

This year March 12-19 in France it will be a next meeting of WWF

Few years ago when WWF was in Turkey I did a special side event for Aral and Caspian Seas and it was very important event for those who are studding both GREAT SALT LAKES not in USA but in Central Asia.

Caspian Sea is still to be NUMBER ONE and Aral was as large as Lake Victoria in Africa.....in 1960..... half a century ago!!!

I advise all of us to have connection with

ILEC, WWW, WWF

Sincerely yours,

Nick Aladin

Reply author: Egor Zadereev

Replied on: 09 Feb 2012 08:31:39

Message:

I agree that we should at least try to use the resources of these organisations to advertise our conferences and activities (in case we will initiate activity other than conference).

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