

World Sturgeon Conservation Society

General Assembly Meeting

January 17, 2004)
City Hall, Neu Wulmstorf, Germany

Minutes

Agenda (see attachment 1)

Attendance – Twenty Five members, Four Guests (see attachment 2)

Several Journalists representing four Newspapers and the Mayor of Neu Wulmstorf attended the last half hour of the Assembly as invited guests.

1) Opening of Meeting

President Rosenthal called the meeting to order at 14:08.

2a) President's Report

The President introduced his report by providing information on the history of the Society. Since 1989, sturgeon specialists started to organize international Symposia to address all aspects related to sturgeon biology and species conservation. The first International Sturgeon Symposium (ISS I) was held in Bordeaux, France in October 1989 (organized by Dr. Patrick Williot and CEMAGREF scientists; around 100 participants), followed four years later by the second Symposium held in Moscow, Russia, in September 1993 (organized by VNIRO scientists; 130 participants). The Third ISS was convened in Piacenza, Italy, in July 1997 (organized by Paolo Bronzi, Giovanni Arlati, Remigio Rossi and David McKenzie), bringing together 164 experts from 24 countries. The fourth and latest one was organized in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, USA (organizers Ron Bruch, Fred Binkowski, Serge Doroshov) and held in July 2001 with more than 400 persons in attendance.

Initially it was uncertain whether these Symposia will become regular events as their organisation depended entirely on the initiative of one (or a very few) individual(s). While interest and participation was growing substantially each time, it became clear that in the long run there will have to be a well-structured organisation which provides the required infrastructure and organisational tools to guarantee continued support and planning far beyond what an individual organizer can handle. Therefore, the discussions to form such an International Society shaped clearly at the Piacenza Conference and preliminary preparations on the structural needs of such an organisation started during the intersessional period. The ISS IV Scientific Committee invited additional expertise from the attendees and prepared a resolution to establish a WORLD SOCIETY which would become the home for future ISS events. The proposal was endorsed at the final session of the Oshkosh Symposium and a Foundation Committee was formed which started to work immediately.

It was also clear from the beginning that such an organisation will have to be more than just an organisational platform for upcoming ISSs. Therefore, it took about 1.5 years before the final aims and objectives were formulated, the organisational and structural needs identified, the selection of a home office undertaken and the draft statutes completed. The Society was finally established on March 11, 2003, here in the City Hall of Neu Wulmstorf. The compositions of the Foundation Committee and the first Board of Directors can be found on the WSCS webpage by clicking on the „about WSCS“ button.

The overall objectives are clear and include the following key points:

- (a) to foster the conservation of sturgeon species, restoration of sturgeon stocks and their sustainable use world-wide
- (b) to develop information exchange among all interested in sturgeons (subject areas include: general biology, species and habitat protection; stock enhancement, biological resource management, fisheries and fisheries-related issues, aquaculture, and cultural and regulatory issues)
- (c) to promote information exchange with regional, national, international, inter-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs);
- (d) to enhance the cooperation between and among anglers, fishermen, scientists, governmental agencies, local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organisations.
- (e) To inform the public on all aspects of the status and biology of sturgeons, their requirements for effective species protection, and needs for appropriate management. The tools to achieve this objective include the use of adequate modern publication and communication means and the organization of International Conferences.

In order to fulfil these objectives, which are long-term, the home office and the Board of Directors have (with tremendous support by the Foundation Committee Members) initiated the following activities:

- Membership campaigns by each board and foundation committee member
- Initial services to the general public (press releases, short articles in journals and magazines; e.g. Newsletter of the European Aquaculture Society, Aquaculture Magazine of the World Aquaculture Society, Press release via the Wisconsin Sea Grant office, etc)
- Design and installation of a website (see report by our webmaster below).
- Going online with the website in late July 2003
- Expanding the website on an almost weekly basis
- Establishing direct linkages to the world-wide databank „FishBase“
- Opening a NEWS page on the website
- Installing a news archive
- Building links to other sturgeon relevant websites
- Initiating (negotiating) cooperation and MOUs with local/regional sturgeon societies
- Improving communication efficiency between all interested parties, especially by gradually expanding parts of the website to several languages
- Formulating advice to international organisations and regulatory authorities on specific sturgeon issues
- Participating and co-organising regional and international conferences (e.g Sturgeon Session of the AAC (Aquaculture Association Canada) 2003 Annual meeting (see our website on the respective page); planning of a sturgeon Session in conjunction with the 19th International Zoology Congress in Beijing, China, August 2004 (see below)
- Developing an MOU with the European Aquaculture Association and others to enhance communication on sturgeon issues.

The future plan for 2004 is highly ambitious and perhaps many of the activities will be initiated but are designed to be addressed over several years. This holds particularly for the planned services to the membership. We will soon open a „Membership Directory and Profile“ as a webpage accessible to members only. To be able to do so we need members to submit their Curriculum vitae or any information on their sturgeon expertise they wish to have

included. Further we will shortly open an internet information and discussion forum for members while also creating a searchable „NEWS ARCHIVE“ accessible to members only. We also wish to expand the section on „Contributions from Members“ and invite all of you to submit your contribution on research results or sturgeon observations that may be of general interest to the membership.

After long negotiations we have managed to derive an agreement with the Publisher of the Journal of Applied Ichthyology (JAI) (which has already become the journal for the ISS III and ISS IV Proceedings) as the official Journal of the WSCS, thereby offering a home to the scientific sturgeon literature which is otherwise wide-spread in non-specific journals. In order to serve the scientific community best and guarantee the highest standards of peer review, the Editorial Board has been extended by 7 additional Sturgeon experts (now totalling 11 = about 40% of the total editorial Board). We invite all sturgeon scientists to submit manuscripts to JAI.

Further services we intend to establish include

- reduced registration fees for members intending to participate in sturgeon conferences (negotiations for ISS V and for the Beijing Workshop have started)
- an online bibliography on sturgeons , including abstracts, species index, geographic index and a subject index. So far, over 5000 references have been entered of which 10% have been abstracted. Many references have never been translated into English before. The bibliography will be made accessible for members by the end of February/early March 2004. It will be updated monthly.
- A reprint archive will be established (primarily for historical papers and those in languages other than English). Members are entitled to order photocopies at copying and handling (mailing) costs.
- Members are entitled to subscribe to the Journal of Applied Ichthyology (which is the official journal of the society) at a specially reduced rate (close to 80% of the regular subscription rate).

As President of the Society I urge all members to continue to support the development of the organisation by spreading the news on our activities and invite people interested in sturgeons to become members. Further, we need your direct input as volunteers either by offering in kind contributions or soliciting financial support. The society is still a young child that needs to be nourished to continue to grow fast.

Other activities underway or planned are reported by Board Members and/or invited guests under the agenda items listed below.

2b) Vice President's Report

Vice President Serge Doroshov was unable to attend the meeting but sent his regards and encouragement in an e-mail to the President who read the message to the audience (see attachment 3).

3) Treasurer's Report

Ron Bruch presented the Treasurer's Report for the fiscal year January 1, 2003 – December 31, 2004 which will be filed at the home office. In summary: Total Income from membership fees 3994,77 Euros; Total income from donations 2296,00 €; Total Income summed = 6290,77 €; Expenditures 6207,63 €; Assets 952,4 €; Total Balance 83,14€. Treasurer's Report unanimously approved by the General Assembly after motion for approval made by Martin Bilio.

4) Introducing the WSCS Website

WSCS website developed by Bert Wecker and launched in July 2003. Site has numerous pages introducing the WSCS, stating the WSCS history and objectives, providing information and news on sturgeon, and WSCS memberships, and other features (such as book publications / monographies and their contents tables, categorized website links to pages with sturgeon content, etc). Growth in website use has more than doubled each month through December 2003. Plans for 2004 include adding members' services pages for access to the WSCS sturgeon bibliography (a relational databank currently containing over 5 000 entries) and member directory, discussion forums, the news archive and more translations of WSCS information into additional languages.

5) ISS V (5th International Sturgeon Symposium)

Dr. Mohammad Pourkazemi, Chair and organizer of the 5th International Symposium on Sturgeon presented information on the status of the planning for the conference. ISS V will be held May 9-13, 2005 in Ramsan, Iran in the Ramsan Azadi Hotel on the Caspian Sea. Hotel is on the sea in a beautiful setting of hills and orange groves with many natural hot springs in the area. Conference has received approval from the Iranian Minister of Jihad Agriculture and then the Board of Ministers. The Iranian government has committed support for the symposium of approximately \$100.000,00. National Committee for the symposium has been created including representatives from the Ministry of Science, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Jihad Agriculture, Environmental Department, Iranian Fisheries Organization.

The 1st announcement for the symposium will be sent out on 25 January 2004. Second announcement will be sent out on 15 February 2004. Abstract submission deadline will be 15 August 2004.

The Scientific Committee is currently being formed. Invitation letters to Sturgeon experts from around the world (including many of those who served on the ISS IV Committee) will send out soon with the aim to complete the committee membership in late January 2004. Private companies will be contracted to provide various services to symposium participants such as transport, tours, cultural events, e-mail and telephone services. The ISS V website will be launched soon, and will include all necessary information for participants including detailed visa information for foreign travelers. The ISS V website will be linked to the WSCS home page.

6) IUCN Sturgeon Specialist Group

Dr Pourkazemi presented information on the Sturgeon Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Dr. Pourkazemi is the chair of the Sturgeon Group, as well as a Foundation Member of the WSCS. The principal aim of the group, comprised of 44 members from North America, Europe and Asia, is to ensure the conservation of sturgeon. The group's accomplishments to date include completing the red list on sturgeon for North America and finishing the red list on sturgeon for Eurasia in 2004; collaborating with the TRAFFIC Network on trade review and recommending inclusion of species into category 1 or 2 for trade and management purposes, and encouraging the development of action plans for national and regional management of sturgeon stocks.

The WSCS will be developing an MOU with IUCN/SSG detailing potential collaborative programs and projects as there are many subject areas where cooperation will enhance effectiveness of work for both, IUCN/SSG and WSCS.

7) **EIFAC Group**

Dr. Mikhail Chebanov presented information on the recently established EIFAC Ad Hoc Working Group charged with examining the status of sturgeon stocks and population assessment procedures, stocking strategies as well as other methods required for management. The central focus is on the Azov and Black Seas and the Danube River system. WSCS will cooperate with the activities of this group to assist in them in their efforts (participation as observer during the first planning workshop in May 2004 in Poland).

8) **Symposiums and Conferences on Sturgeon in 2004**

Two upcoming events were discussed and briefly presented.

1) **A sturgeon session in Beijing, August 23-27 2004**, to be held in conjunction with the International Zoology Congress. The aim is to bring (a) sturgeon issues to the attention of a wider audience (zoologists in general), (b) foster the development of WSCS in the region and (c) encourage Chinese sturgeon experts to present their research work (mainly in Chinese) in preparation for ISS V. For further details contact either the Board Member Prof Jianbo Chang (Wuhan: see e-mail and address on the „contacts“-page) or the home office of WSCS..

2) **A sturgeon Workshop will be held in Madison, Wisconsin, USA, August 2004**, partly also in preparation of ISS V. For further information contact Ron Bruch (see „contact“ button on our website)

More information on each Workshop will be posted to the WSCS website as soon as details become available. Both Workshops will provide good opportunities for individuals and research groups to prepare and present papers that can in turn be presented (as a podium or poster and as a completed manuscript) at ISS V the following year in Iran.

9) **Fisheries and Aquatic Resources node of the National Biotic index – USA**

Doug Beard and Andy Loftus presented information on a project proposal to develop an information infrastructure in the US for North American fisheries and aquatic resources. They will be using sturgeon in North America as their pilot species to develop this information management system and if successful, will then develop an interface with FishBase. WSCS will be cooperating on this project and will have some members directly involved in project design, development and implementation.

10) **FishBase**

Rainer Froese presented information on FishBase and the gap analysis (see attachment 4) showing the need for sturgeon data, papers and photos. WSCS has paid to sponsor 22 sturgeon species pages in FishBase (which places the WSCS logo on each of these pages), and has budgeted in 2004 funds to help enter sturgeon data directly into FishBase sturgeon pages.

11) **Open Session for General Assembly**

Comments by Dr. Martin Bilio (written comments by Dr. Martin Bilio see attachment 4)

- a) It is important that WSCS, in its involvement in world sturgeon issues, can be more critical than CITES
- b) WSCS needs to become involved with government organizations with responsibilities for managing and addressing sturgeon issues
- c) WSCS should organize English courses for Scientists to facilitate greater flow of information and communication on sturgeon projects, issues
- d) WSCS should encourage Institutions to support the production and distribution of sturgeon journal papers and books
- e) It is important to open access to sturgeon literature in Russia, Iran, and other countries
- f) There is much information in Russia that is very valuable but needs to be analyzed and published – WSCS should promote this effort.
- g) There is a critical need to intercalibrate sturgeon sampling strategies on international systems
- h) There is a critical need to assess long term stocking success for sturgeon stocking programs

Comments by Dr. H.J. Schlotfeldt (the representative of the Association of European Fish Pathologists) – AEFPP would like to establish a close working relationship with WSCS. WSCS welcomes this and will develop an MOU outlining joint interests and cooperation opportunities.

A press conference was held in the presence of the Mayor of the city Neu Wulmstorf. The Mayor welcomed the group. He assured the participants that the Community is fully supporting the activity of WSCS and is glad to be able to provide the infrastructure for the meeting. The President expressed on behalf of the Board and the General Assembly his appreciation for the generous support received by the Mayor and the staff of the City Hall.

Adjourn at 16:50

Ronald Bruch (Treasurer and Rapporteur)

Harald Rosenthal (President)

Attachements

1) Agenda of the General Assembly

1. **Opening of the Meeting**
introducing the board of Directors to the Membership
2. **President's Report**
briefing on history of the society, briefing on statutes, explaining membership development, reporting on activities during the start-up phase
3. **Treasurer's Report**
2003 financial report, 2004 budget, Membership matrix and dues
4. **Introducing the Website to the membership** (online)
5. **Information on Membership services**
6. **Report by the Vice President on the status of WSCS past and future involvement in Conferences**
e.g. Sturgeon Session at AAC Victoria, Canada 2003; Sturgeon session in China 2004 (Intern. Zoological Congress), EAS interest in joint sessions 2004 at their regular meetings, status of planning of 5th ISS in Iran 2005, etc
7. **Open session**
for questions and inviting suggestions from the membership to the Board of Directors on further activities and services
8. **Miscellaneous items**
9. **Session in public**
Access of the general Public and media
10. **Closing of the meeting**

2) List of Participants

Members

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| 1. Arndt, Gerd-Michael, | Germany |
| 2. Battenfeld, Carol, | Germany |
| 3. Beard, Douglas, | USA |
| 4. Bilio, Martin, | Germany |
| 5. Bronzi, Paolo | Italy |
| 6. Bruch, Ronald | USA |
| 7. Chang, Jianbo | China |
| 8. Chebanov, Mikhael | Russia |
| 9. Debus, Lutz | Germany |

10. Firzlaff, Dietmar	Germany
11. Gessner, Jörn	Germany
12. Hilge, Volker	Germany
13. Kirschbaum, Frank	Germany
14. Korroch, Uwe	Germany
15. Lofthus, Andy	USA
16. Münchow, Oliver	Germany
17. Pourkazemi, Mohammad	Iran
18. Rosenthal, Harald	Germany
19. Ruban, Georgii	Russia
20. Schlotfeldt, Hans-Jürgen	Germany
21. Trzebiatowski, Rajmund	Poland
22. Wecker, Bert	Germany
23. Williot, Patrick	France
24. Kouchki, Ramin	Iran
25. Rideq, Apad	Hungaria

Guests

1. Münchow, Jolanta,	Germany
2. Rosenthal, Karin	Germany
3. Rosenthal, Ingrid	Germany
4. Schadwinkel, G..	(Mayor of Neu Wulmstorf)

3) Message from the Vice-President

Dear Board Members and friends of WSCS,

Regrettably I cannot attend this important meeting of **WSCS**, but I share with you the enthusiasm for success of World Sturgeon Conservation Society. Our Society is on its way to become useful and highly recognized, thanks to your participation and willingness to share your knowledge and expertise with others. The year of 2003 was a critical year for the launching of the new society, which successfully started to function due to enormous efforts of the President, Professor Harald Rosenthal. Please join me in congratulating Harald with this achievement, and wishing him happy and productive New Year.

The new society faces new challenges. Our main challenge is to attract best people to support the society mission and projects. The society needs to obtain additional funds to support the operations of the President Office. We have to establish and to further enhance the

international recognition and high reputation of WSCS. This can be achieved by helping our colleagues in developing an excellent program for the 5th ISS in Iran, and by our participation in other international conferences. We also should enhance outreach and communications with the worldwide audience of "sturgeonites" (people who love sturgeon), via internet, publications, workshops, and special projects. With your help, the WSCS will be strong, attractive, and popular society in 2004.

Thank you for your great contribution to the World Sturgeon Conservation Society!

Best wishes and happy New Year,
Serge Doroshov, Vice-President

4) Written Comments by Dr. Martin Bilio regarding his contributions to the open discussion of the General Assembly

- 1. Expression of appreciation for the heavy work load shouldered by the founders of the WSCS, in particular Harald Rosenthal, Sergej Doroshov, Ron Bruch, Paolo Bronzi, Jörn Gessner, etc., and congratulations on their successful efforts.*
- 2. Is the Russian sturgeon database of which Vera Krilova of VNIRO told me in 1999 in Astrakhan now connected with FISHBASE? – Michail Chebanov said that it is restricted to a few aspects only, e.g. morphological characters.*
- 3. Would the WSCS be ready to collaborate in Phase II of the TACIS component of the Caspian Environment Programme funded by the European Commission?*
- 4. Is it correct that the WSCS is in a position to express opinions more freely than a government-determined organisation such as CITES (in a way similar to that of the EAS with respect to FAO)?*
- 5. How can the WSCS deal with Governments, i.e. how much influence could WSCS exert when critical issues are concerned?*
- 6. One should strive after having training courses in scientific English language funded by international organisations, especially for native speakers of Russian and Chinese! – Information obtained from the EC after the meeting: No possibilities for extra funding, must be incorporated in cooperation projects. (Will be considered in the current project implementation offer to the EC in which I myself am involved.)*
- 7. The approach to controlled reproduction should be different according to the purpose – when stocking of natural waters is the objective, domestication effects must be avoided; when production for human consumption is aimed at, such effects are desirable. – According to Harald Rosenthal, this is already being considered by the WSCS.*
- 8. How could sturgeons be influenced by the ctenophore Mnemiopsis leidyi? Detailed research on food relations in the Caspian Sea is needed!*

9. *There is considerable unpublished material available in Russian fishery institutions (in contrast to Academy institutions) the publication of which should be promoted.*
10. *Libraries of fishery institutions of NIS (Newly Independent States = ex-components of the Soviet Union) are in great need of western literature (journals as well as books).*
11. *Iran is in possession of important scientific information in Persian, thus not accessible to western scientists (example: first appearance of the invasive ctenophore Mnemiopsis leidyi in the Caspian Sea recorded **four** years earlier **according to** Persian reports than **to other sources**). Efforts should be made to achieve more information exchange at the scientific level.*

5) FishBase gap analysis **

** filed at the home office (copies available on request)