

Canadian Members of the AFS: Do We Really Belong?

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Introduction

In recent years, overall membership in the American Fisheries Society has grown steadily in response to a variety of program initiatives that have increased the profile and importance of the Society. However, increases in Canadian membership have not kept pace with recent gains in American membership and, overall, Canadian fisheries professionals are under-represented in AFS. This information suggests that the Society may not be adequately responding to the needs of fisheries professionals in Canada. In 1988, President Robert G. White established the Canadian Concerns Committee to provide information and advice to the AFS Executive Committee on the activities of the American Fisheries Society in Canada. Specifically, the Committee was charged with the task of determining how AFS could become more relevant to existing and potential members of the Society in Canada, and suggesting means of stimulating interest and membership.

Methods

After initial consultations with President White, the Committee co-chairs drafted a study plan to assess the attitudes and concerns of Canadian members of the AFS. It was felt that membership concerns could be efficiently identified by polling Canadian members of the Society on relevant issues. The questionnaire developed by the Membership Concerns Committee (Moffitt 1988) was used as a model for the present study. Questions were designed to reveal members' views on the structure and organization of AFS; on the goals, objectives, and effectiveness of the AFS in Canada; and to obtain general information on the respondents. The results of this study may be compared to those obtained by the Membership Concerns Committee (Moffitt 1988).

In March 1989 the final questionnaire was distributed to 522 active members of AFS in Canada. The questionnaire was followed by telephone calls, notes of reminder, and requests for cooperation published in Chapter newsletters. A total of 217 responses were received, representing 42% of the Canadian membership.

Results and Discussion

Organization and Structure of AFS

The Parent Society and the Chapter are identified as the most important organizational units within AFS to Canadian members, with 43% and 35% of respondents ranking them as very important respectively (Fig. 1). The Sections and Divisions are considered to be much less important, ranked as very important by only 16% and 5% of the membership respectively. These rankings by Canadians, al-

though lower overall, mirrored the results of an earlier, general study of AFS members (Moffitt 1988). The relative importance of the Chapter is underlined by attendance at Society meetings. More than 25% of respondents usually attend Chapter meetings, while less than 5% of Canadian members usually attend Parent Society, Division, and Section meetings.

Canadian members were asked to rate the effectiveness of the executive director, the headquarters support staff, the editors and publications staff, elected officers, and committees in serving the needs of Canadian members of the AFS (Fig. 2). Of these, the editors and publications staff are given the highest rating, with 28% of respondents indicating that they are very effective. Committees are ranked next highest with 10% of respondents feeling that AFS committees are very effective in responding to their needs. On the whole, Canadians question the performance of the executive director, headquarters support staff, and elected officers. Five percent or fewer of Canadian members rate these groups as being very effective at serving their needs. These results can be contrasted with the general membership survey (Moffitt 1988), in which more than 30% of respondents felt that the executive director and the headquarters staff were "very effective." Elected officers were rated only slightly less effective in that earlier study. Canadians clearly perceive a deficiency in the existing organizational structure with respect to having their needs addressed. Many respondents indicate that this concern might be rectified by

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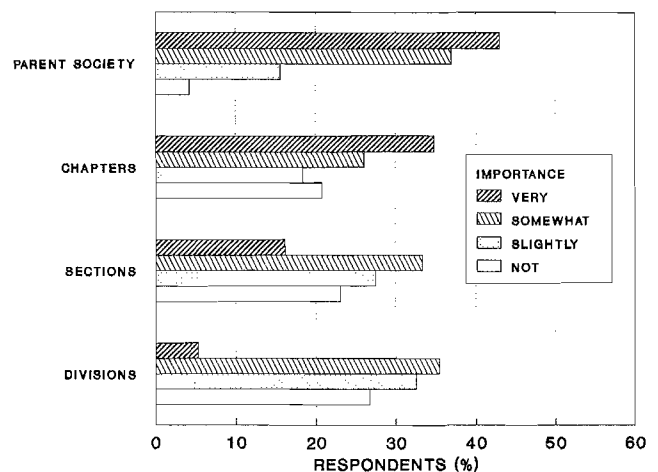


Figure 1. Relative importance of the organizational entities within AFS to Canadian members.

establishing an AFS office in Canada, complete with an associate executive director and support staff.

Goals and Objectives of AFS

The mission of AFS is to promote the scientific management of aquatic resources for the optimum use and enjoyment by the people of North America. Canadian members were asked to indicate how adequate AFS is in expressing its mission to groups involved in resource management in Canada. Overall, respondents feel that AFS is failing in this role (Fig. 3). Ninety-nine percent of respondents feel that AFS is inadequate or only slightly adequate in expressing its mission to the Canadian public. The Society is only slightly better in communicating its message to federal, provincial, and territorial government agencies, and academic institutions; more than 80% of respondents think that AFS is only marginally adequate in expressing its mission to these groups. Only 0.5% of respondents think that AFS conveys this message very adequately to Canadian industries and the resource conservation community. These data suggest that in the opinion of Canadian members, AFS has

failed to communicate its mission to Canadians in general and more importantly, to decision-makers in Canada.

The Society has identified a number of specific goals and objectives that are designed to contribute to the fulfillment of its mission in North America. Canadian members were asked to rate how adequate they felt AFS is in carrying out these goals and objectives in Canada. AFS is highly rated for its activities related to the collation and dissemination of scientific, technical, and other information to members of the Society and the general public (Fig. 4). However, AFS is rated much lower on its activities relating to the promotion of continuing professional development, teaching, and advancement of fisheries sciences and practices. Only 8% of respondents feel that AFS is performing a very adequate job of promoting the conservation and wise use of fisheries resources in Canada. When asked which of these objectives should receive the most emphasis in Canada, almost half of all respondents indicate that the promotion of conservation and wise use of fisheries resources is the most important goal (Fig. 5). When this information is considered in light of the Society's mission, it is clear that there are major shortcomings in the expedition of program activ-

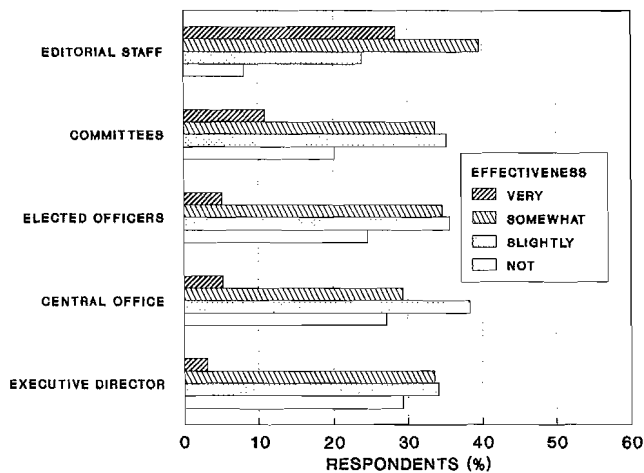


Figure 2. Perceived effectiveness of different AFS personnel in serving the needs of Canadian members.

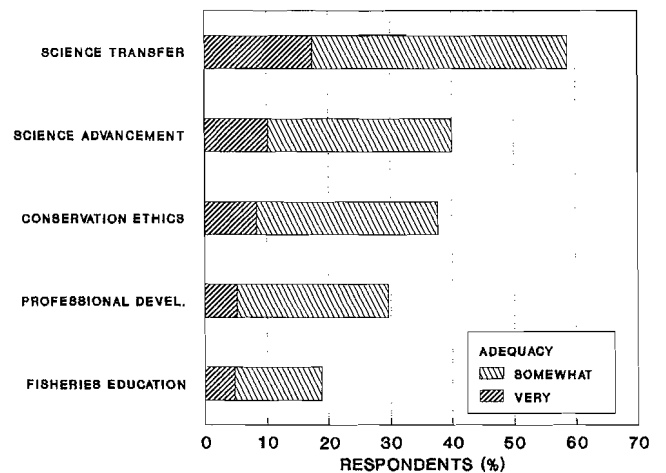


Figure 4. Adequacy of AFS in carrying out its goals and objectives in Canada.

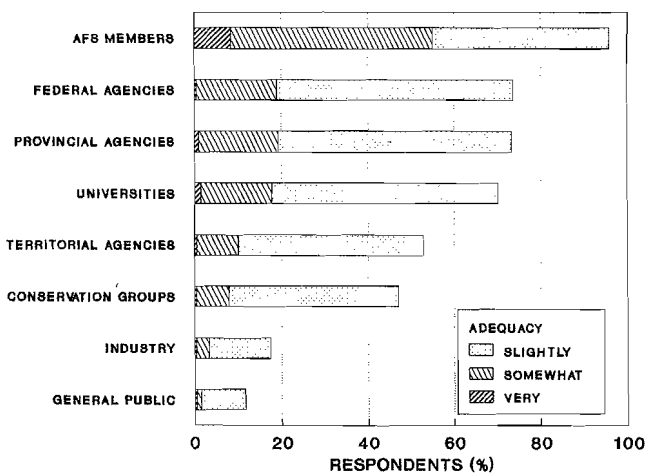


Figure 3. Adequacy of AFS in expressing its mission to various Canadian groups and agencies.

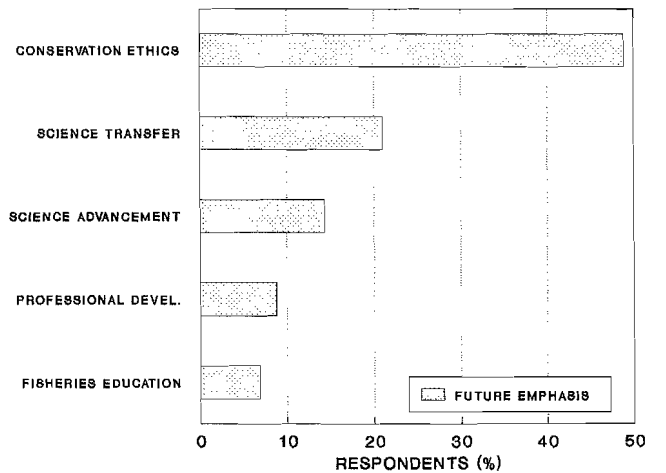


Figure 5. Relative emphasis to be placed on the various objectives of AFS in Canada over the next 5 years.

ities in Canada.

When asked which activities should be given priority for increasing AFS involvement in Canada, Canadian members provide clear and emphatic advice. The vast majority of respondents feel that increased public education and more participation and commentary on environmental policies (in each case, 94% rate these as high or medium priority) are required in Canada (Fig. 6). Fewer, but still a substantial majority of respondents feel that increased publication or a job information service are needed (72% and 61% respectively rate these as high or medium priority). In addition, most Canadian members feel that AFS should increase its involvement in Canadian aquatic environmental issues (82%), in influencing policy development and decision-making processes concerning the management of aquatic resources (76%), and in policy and decision-making activities related to sport (65%), commercial (57%), and native (50%) fisheries (Fig. 7). This finding is not surprising considering that over 90% of respondents feel that AFS resolutions have little or no effect on resource managers and public decision-makers in Canada.

Our membership was asked to provide further guidance

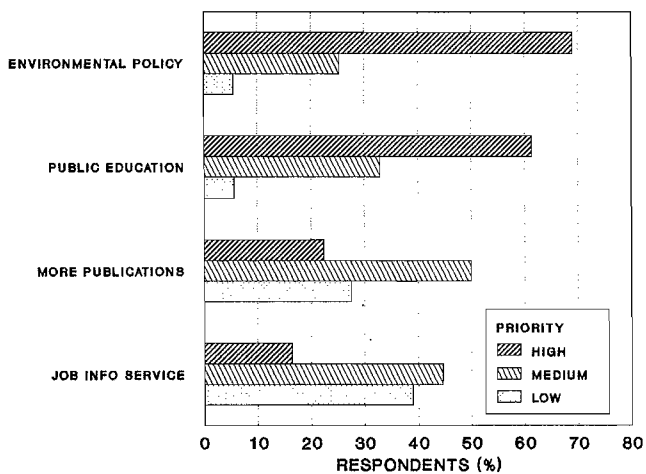


Figure 6. Relative priority to be given new activities and services in Canada.

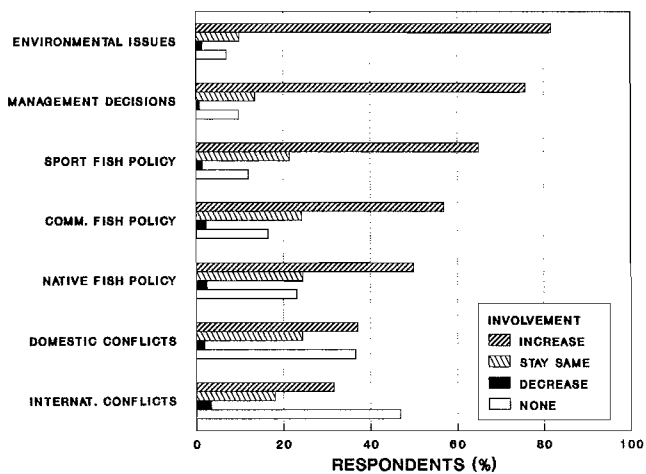


Figure 7. Level of AFS involvement required in areas of policy development and conflict mediation in Canada.

on the level of emphasis that ought to be placed on various activities in Canada. Conservation education, public relations, and resource management head the list of activities that require more emphasis (Fig. 8). Respondents also note the importance of research, lobbying, and professionalism in Canada and indicate that more emphasis should be placed on these activities. The majority of members feel that AFS should increase or maintain its current level of emphasis on employment opportunities, affirmative action, litigation, academic standards, and professional publications. Analysis of the responses indicate that in no area should the level of emphasis be decreased.

Overall, Canadian members overwhelmingly indicate that there is a continuing need for a professional fisheries organization in Canada (almost 100%) and that the American Fisheries Society could respond to that need (93%). However, there is a great deal of concern among the membership about the lack of influence that AFS resolutions have on government resource managers and public decision-makers in Canada. This problem is compounded by a litany of government decisions on resource management that are perceived to respond to the needs of special interest groups instead of the resources and the public in general.

Nearly 45% of respondents feel that AFS dues should be lower for Canadian members given the current level of service and support. If, however, the Society were to expand its role in Canada, 83% of members indicate that they would support the current dues structure; a further 16% are prepared to pay even more than their U.S. counterparts.

A high proportion of Canadian members (74%) feel that AFS should change its name to more accurately reflect its goals and distribution of its constituents. The importance of the name change has been highlighted by recent involvement by AFS in Canadian resource management issues. On several occasions politicians and government resource managers have failed to see the relevance of comments made by AFS on these issues. Because "American" has become synonymous with "United States" in common usage, government agencies have dismissed AFS comments as meddling by a foreign country in Canadian affairs. This perception is unlikely to change unless AFS changes its

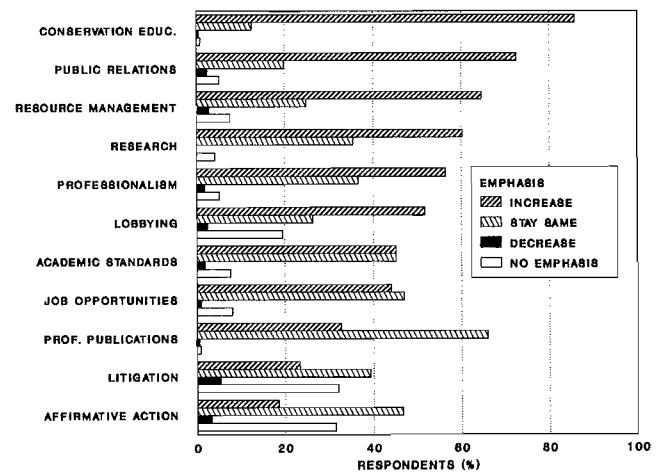


Figure 8. Relative emphasis that AFS should place on various fisheries and environmental activities in Canada.


name. And without AFS involvement in these types of issues, the relevance of AFS to Canadian members will remain minimal.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The American Fisheries Society currently has only a low level of involvement and an almost non-existent public profile in Canada. Canadian members of AFS are frustrated with government decision-making processes and further frustrated by the lack of influence of AFS on these processes. For AFS to continue to be a viable option for Canadian aquatic managers, technicians, and scientists the Society must respond to the needs of Canadian members. To do this, the Society must expand its services in Canada and actively participate in Canadian issues. The Canadian membership has offered a number of practical suggestions that will help expand the role of AFS in Canada as follows:

1. A Canadian office of AFS is acutely needed. This office must be staffed with, at minimum, an associate executive director. This office would be dedicated to raising the profile of AFS in Canada and responding to the unique needs of Canadian members.
2. The name of the American Fisheries Society should be changed to more accurately reflect the distribution of its constituents. Membership in AFS continues to expand throughout the world, and the Society's name should reflect its global influence. A more generic name, such as the "Fisheries Society" would achieve this goal and at the same time help convince government decision-makers in Canada to consider input from our organization.
3. It is imperative that AFS raise its profile in Canada. AFS is currently relatively unknown to most government agencies, resource conservation groups, and the public in general. A Canadian office, name change, and an aggressive and protracted public relations campaign would greatly

contribute to the achievement of this goal.

4. Consideration should be given to the creation of a Canadian Division of AFS. This would encourage involvement of Canadian members by holding meetings at various locations across Canada and by focusing on issues related to fisheries and aquatic resources in Canada. Creation of the Canadian Division would promote the formation of more Canadian Chapters and ultimately would be expected to attract additional members. 

References

Moffitt, C. M. 1988. A profile of AFS members and their opinions about Society organization and policies. *Fisheries* (Bethesda) 13(2):24-30.


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