TOWARD A MORE EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE OF AIBS

Since the mid 1960's, at least three committees appointed by the Governing Board have explored the structure of the American Institute of Biological Sciences with a goal to provide a more effective organization for the biological sciences. Of particular concern to all committees have been the twin problems of adequate communication and responsive interaction between the Institute and the diverse community with which and for which it works.

The committees have explored a variety of organizational models embracing disciplinary divisions and even regional and state structures with consequent changes in the nature of the Governing Board. In order to function effectively, while providing new or augmented programs in the service of the biological sciences, each of the several models required an additional measure of staff support that was not likely to be met given the resources available to the Institute at the time.

Thus, the most recent committee to study reorganization sought a type of change which would enhance existing mechanisms without entailing new budgetary commitments. In particular the group embraced the concept that it is better to do a few things well—things that are desired by, and service the needs of, individuals and adherent societies—rather than a wide array, all less well done due to limited resources. Important to this concept are clear channels of communication among the adherent societies, the individual members, and the Governing Board of the AIBS.

Hence, at the March 1974 meeting of the Governing Board, the AIBS Constitution was amended to provide for direct representation on the Governing Board of an elected officer of each adherent society. This amendment seeks to expedite communication between the governing body of the adherent society and that of the Institute and to insure an effective and responsible input from the biological societies to AIBS programs. Individual members are represented on the AIBS Governing Board by Members-at-Large.

A first draft of the proposed Amendment was given a pre-Governing Board hearing at the December 1973 special meeting of society presidents and AIBS officers. Although there was some disagreement on details (thus initiating a re-draft), the general principles behind the proposed action were recognized as sound. And there was a strong expression that each biologist, regardless of his or her specific discipline, should participate in the activities of both the discipline and the profession. As a member of the adherent society appropriate to your specialty and of the American Institute of Biological Sciences you can enjoy the fullest possible representation and participation as a biological scientist.

All of us as biologists seek a more effective input to society-at-large and to the governing bodies delegated to resolve problems confronting the total society. AIBS interactions with comparable professional societies from our sister sciences—the American Chemical Society, the American Institute of Physics, the American Mathematical Society, for example—provide one important pathway to facilitate the needed communication. Similarly, direct AIBS input to various action-oriented, non-scientific elements of society insure that our views as biologists are at least communicated.

But no mechanism of this type can be effective unless the individual biologist supports and makes known her or his perception of high priority needs via the officers of the Adherent Societies or the Members-at-Large of the Governing Board.

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