

Exploring the Future of the Canadian Conference for Fisheries Research – A Discussion Paper

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The Objective: Identify a mechanism to ensure the long-term stability of the Canadian Conference for Fisheries Research (or its spirit) in service of trainees and fisheries and aquatic science professionals in Canada.

The Issue: In ~2010 DFO withdrew from serving as the permanent “secretariat and treasurer” of the conference. Moreover, in ~2012 there were changes in tax law that required more regular and stringent reporting by non-for-profit entities such as the CCFFR. Since 2010 a small Board of Directors has guided the activities of CCFFR. John Lark has served as secretary/treasurer/whip and without his support CCFFR would have floundered. Yet, there is currently no long-term plan for CCFFR and it is unreasonable to have a major conference depend solely on a single individual. For years CCFFR prided itself on its informality but those times are behind us given changing expectations for what has become the flagship conference for the fisheries and aquatic science communities in Canada. For example, issues such as liability, financial reporting, inclusivity (and other aspects of equity and diversity), social media presence, web site maintenance, and sponsorship, among others, require stability and established institutional structures. This is something that can’t be managed during just a few weeks leading up to the conference. Over time the conference has grown from 20 participants to routinely topping 200 with ~ half of the participants being trainees. There is also increasing need to ensure that the voices of Canadian fisheries and aquatic science professionals are heard when it comes to key topics such as revisions to various pieces of environmental legislation. Being that the name of the organization is in fact a conference makes it difficult to be taken seriously when attempting to engage with decision makers. Without a secretariat or succession plan, the future of CCFFR is at risk. A committee was struck to explore the future of CCFFR during 2019 in an effort to identify and recommend a plan for realizing the necessary stability for CCFFR.

Options for Moving Forward

Option 1: Identify an organization willing to take on the role of the secretariat (for at least a 10 year period) that would involve handling all financial aspects (filing tax forms, maintaining bank accounts, working with accountants) and providing support for conference planning (e.g., assisting with negotiating hotel contracts, ensuring insurance is maintained, dealing with website and social media).

Risks: No such organization has been identified.

Benefits: The status quo could continue (although that also has risk as described above!).

Option 2: Explore the idea of a formal merger with a stable entity – the logical one being the Canadian Society for Limnologists. If SCL were to consider a name change (e.g., the Canadian Society of Aquatic Sciences – or – to jive with CJFAS – the Canadian Society of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences) and increase their scope, CCFFR (its members and the conference) could easily be absorbed by that organization (and henceforth be known at the Canadian Conference for... “SOCIETY NAME”. An ongoing conference committee could deal with aspects of conference organization. There could be “working groups” within the “new” society so that those with interests in say, fisheries or limnology, could tackle issues of topical importance in smaller groups. In fact, it is possible that the Canadian Aquatic Resources Section of the American Fisheries Society could also be linked to the “Fisheries Working Group” not unlike how SCL has a relationship with ASLO. With careful thought re governance structures, bylaws, and procedures, this has the potential to be a win-win-win for the fisheries and aquatic science communities in Canada.

Benefits: Such a merger should promote a much closer relationship (integration) of individuals working in different spheres of aquatic science. Moreover, there is strength in numbers (of members). It is fair to say that despite great efforts of groups like CARS, only a small fraction of Canadian fisheries professional are members and an even smaller group are actively involved in CARS. As such, this could bring a “voice” to fisheries professionals in Canada. This would also bring the necessary stability to the CCFFR and rebrand it to be a more genuine gathering of aquatic science professionals.

Risks: Change always has an inherent level of risk. In this case, the largest suite of risks are to the individual entities in that a “merger” would reduce autonomy.

*Note – SCL would need to do its own risk evaluation.

Further Considerations...

Committee members provided responses to a series of questions. At the end is a summary of some emergent themes.

Question 1. What OTHER options are there for trying to create long-term stability for CCFFR?

- Perhaps expanding the Board of Directors that would include a conference committee that has a 2-3 year commitment. During the last year of their tenure a new committee would form and be trained or shadow the old conference committee so that there is a transfer of knowledge and continuity.

- Create a secretary/treasurer group so that it's not just one person.

- I understand that the question is about the long term stability of the conference. CCFFR and SCL have long term relationship but I would not exclude considering other societies that could be a good fit for merging forces. The SCL membership has expressed an interest in co-participation with CSEE to get exposure to other fields of ecology.

-I think there are enough aquatic members to justify an aquatic society. The current structure and size of the existing group are barriers to the continuation of the conference (CCFFR) and for the long term existence of the SCL, facing a number of members too small to maintain its status in an effective way. SCL members benefit from a platform to share information, receive newsletters. A combined entity would allow for example to get reduced rates for members at the annual conference. This would create a real incentive to become a member.

-What organization would take that on? What is the benefit to the organization? Would this be something a well established not-for-profit could do? This option would likely require the conference to support at least ½ a person's salary on an ongoing basis? Is this feasible? Sorry, more questions than answers here, but having a dedicated organization that is tasked with the secretariat role and is financially supported to do so would provide stability and longevity to the conference. Both pluses as it seems finding volunteers to take on these very time consuming roles is becoming more and more difficult.

-The way IAGLR works for the annual conference is by hiring a conference coordinator during the period of the conference. A manager position for the new entity could also be considered (depending on resources).

-Since SCL and CCFFR were created, there are now a number of other water research associations (e.g., the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution, Canadian Ecotoxicity Workshop, Canadian Water Network, Canadian Water Resources Association, Canadian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society). Some of these groups have work that overlaps with SCL and CCFFR. For the future, is there any opportunity to have joint meetings? The pro is the opportunity to cross-pollinate ideas and research results. The con is the meeting moves around, making it harder for people to commit to coming. It is also nice to just have a small meeting where you're speaking your own jargon with people who understand you. Having an annual general meeting becomes harder.

- Given its relationship with AFS, I don't think CARS assuming a broader role is an option, but I would not rule out CARS playing a role in the new organization.

- ICAIS is an example of a conference similar to CCFFR. It depends on a volunteer to host, but uses a contractor to organize everything. It does run into challenges of finding a host, but has the globe to choose from and only meets every 18 months. Also, hosts are usually financially supported by a government agency.

Question 2. Even if we were to find an organization willing to take on the role of serving as the "secretariat" of the CCFFR (the first option in the document), is that even a worthy direction?

-DFO used to play the role of the secretariat and I do not think they will go back on this decision.

-I do think this could be a good direction as it would allow for some long-term stability and core group of people to plan the conference. It would allow for CCFFR to (hopefully) continue as is without fundamental shifts in its goals.

-There are organizations that just hire a third party to run the business. As an example, CAHS did this - recently: it used to be hosted at CCA but now it ran by a CEO that is part of a company that offers the service- and takes care of logistic. This may work for larger organizations, with a more substantial budget.

-An other example is PAGSE that used to be hosted by the RSC and did find a new roof with the Canadian Museum of Nature. I don't think we can compare CCFFR business to that of PAGSE- PAGSE does not have a conference, and carries much less liability for the host compared to CCFFR.

-Although examples of host secretariat exist, I do not think it is worthy solution.

-Heading in the direction of option 1 will mean the slow demise of CCFFR. The meeting might continue for ~10 years; but with time, people will wonder why the arrangement was made and it'll be absorbed once the last old scientist is gone. In many ways, CCFFR only still exists because of John Lark's determination.

Question 3. What do you see as the benefits and disbenefits/risks of bringing CCFFR into SCL and thinking about broadening out the scope of SCL to umbrella all aquatic science professionals in Canada?

Benefits

- increased membership= more resources allowing for more initiatives. The 2 groups may have chapters if needed. Cost saving in maintaining 1 corporation- Increased visibility and more appeal for students to become members. Opportunity to create a stronger link with a journal (CJFAS).
- One voice for aquatic sciences in Canada.
- Both CCFFR and SCL would benefit from having SCL exec more involved in conference organization, which is currently a heavy burden put on too few people.
- Established society would allow for long-term stability as structure is already in place, potentially increase collaborations across disciplines,
- I think there are only benefits to broadening the scope of CCFFR to merge with SCL to create a Society of Fisheries and Aquatic Science and adopt CJFAS as the journal. SCL floated this idea to CCFFR back in the early 1990s (?). The idea dropped like a lead balloon in CCFFR. I'm happy to see it back on the table. I don't understand why the artificial split between fisheries and limnology continue to exist. It's not like fish don't live in water.
- Join with SCL, broaden the scope of the meeting, and have smaller groups of more individuals share the 'burden' of organization/tasks.
- I don't see an issue broadening the scope of the organization to CCFAS for example – The broader scope has been part of the meeting ever since I started going in grad school with SCL involvement, and joining the 2 entities I think would only strengthen both. No dilution – fish can't survive without food, and ecosystem based management is the only realistic way to manage anyway – so the reflection of this reality in our governance only makes sense.

Risks/Cons

- Loss of 2 historical names/ entities and loss of members wanting to be only associated with one group.
- Loss (dilution) of individuality (will require trade off). Increased responsibilities for new leadership- needs for a manager (to run the conference) that will increase cost.
- My main concern is that the new proposed committee may be dominated by fisheries scientists and I would worry that the voice of limnology contingent might become drowned out
- There wouldn't be a specific Canadian group solely focused on fishes, SCL may have different views that are in opposition with CCFFR, board of directors/committee would need to be balanced between the two groups to ensure decisions are in benefit of both groups.
- May need a dedicated (i.e., paid) person (maybe ½ time as I don't think this would be a full-time job – but then they would need another ½ job...), likely funded from the organization's budget to ensure the role is filled and tasks completed as needed.

-If the CCFFR (and fishy people) were to join with SCL then wouldn't CCFFR participants need to be members? Otherwise our costs would be a bleed on the SCL budget without any net benefit to them. We could ask for a nominal fee that is part of the registration to help with costs of organization? I know this isn't part of the past model, but the new reality of organizing and running the meeting seems to make this a necessity. For my part an extra \$50 in membership that was part of the registration fee (or separate but required to attend the meeting) wouldn't be a big deal. I have done it for many other conferences. For students it might, but hopefully their supervisors have the budget to send them and cover this extra nominal cost, or we could add some of the revenue to the Clements-Rigler fund to cover.

- Need to be careful of the terminology, not "bringing" CCFFR in to SCL but rather merging into a broader society.

Question 4. Any other thoughts?

-I think it would be important to maintain an exec that was balanced between these two groups. Our exec also has both anglophone and francophone representatives and I think it would be important to maintain this bilingualism.

-My take would be to draft a question to both membership to be answered at the next bus meeting (that is if SCL and CCFFR decide to get engaged) – and this will lead to the wedding...

-I still see the need for strong leadership to form/run the 'conference committee', and the smaller working groups needed to both keep the conference going, and to tackle emerging 'fisheries and aquatic sciences' issues relevant to Canada. Without a leader pushing the agenda and managing the business end, I think even this option could flounder.

-Bottom line is that whatever official option is adopted, dedicated leadership will be key, and I don't see that happening unless it is actually part of the person's job.

-I'm happy to see this initiative. The water research community in Canada isn't big enough to split itself the way it does. Combining efforts just make sense to me.

-Canada doesn't really have any other autonomous fisheries and aquatic sciences organization that isn't tied to a larger international body. I have always considered CCFFR to be the main conference I would like to attend annually – or more regularly than any other conference. Making it a larger and more formal entity I think would find support in the Canadian FAS world. If we make it CCFAS instead, then hitting up ECCC and maybe Parks could also be an option...

-I think we are waiting on SCL leadership on this, to see what their appetite is. Let's see what they think.

-I think we do need a fisheries society in Canada. Joining SCL makes a lot of sense, with SCL expanding their mandate as per your suggestions. Or maybe a node of AFS is another option. Even if CCFFR links up with SCL, keeping a formal relationship with AFS is important.

- It won't happen on its own – need to make it happen. Must happen to have an ongoing Canadian aquatics conference.

- Tradition has prevented this from happening in the past, no longer an option. Those who want the tradition to continue must step up to host – I suspect there is not enough will to do so.

- Closer association with AFS is not the answer – Canada has always been the poor cousin and AFS does not have the capacity to address Canadian policy needs.
- Partner with a journal that will contribute \$\$/organization to conference. Investigate IAGLR/JGLR model.

Emerging Themes...

- What we have is great (really important aspect of student training and creating a sense of community) but is also tenuous – with careful thought we could create something that benefits all – retaining the best of our past while inventing a new future
- Within the diverse committee constituted to explore this issue there is interest in more formal discussions re the merging of CCFFR and SCL to create something new – like the “Canadian Society of/for Aquatic Science”
- Canada lacks a common entity that represents aquatic science professionals so there is an opportunity to bring our community together and create something bigger/stronger/more effective – a voice for aquatic science professionals in Canada (e.g., more inclusive of practitioners)
- SCL and CARS have links to other entities (SLC to ASLO; CARS to AFS) – there is a need to explore how those relationships can be maintained moving forward if there were creation of a new entity* (*note – it would likely be easier to modify SCL’s governance documents rather than start from scratch)
- The annual conference is important but is an AWFUL LOT of work for a very few people. There is need for more continuity and supports for the organizers and a standing committee focused on “Meetings”
- It MAY be possible to consider supporting a part time staffer to assist with duties such as meeting organization if the new entity was financially stable
- There is recognition of the importance of maintaining “balance/diversity” in governance of any new entity so that it was not dominated by any one group – relatedly, there is opportunity to have various working groups within that pursue different issues that may represent various disciplines (e.g., fisheries, limnology, etc)

Next Steps

- Broader discussion of the ideas presented here (and alternatives) at the respective annual meeting of the CCFFR, SCL and CARS.
- Discussions within the executive committee’s of CCFFR, SCL and CARS.
- Based on outcome of the above – and if support for moving forward with the concept of a “Canadian Society of/for Aquatic Science” with a meetings committee that deals with the annual meeting then there would need to be formal joint discussions with leadership from the various committees (would also require legal consultations).

History of CCFFR (taken from CCFFR website – see

https://www.uwo.ca/sci/ccffr_scl2019/about/history_of_ccffr.html): The first meeting of the CCFFR, sponsored by NRC, was held in Ottawa on January 6, 1948, with W. A. Clemens in the chair and H. Williamson acting as secretary. The terms of reference suggested that the CCFFR "act as a clearing house for information and as a forum for discussion of common problems, to promote the coordination of research and technique, to consider what researches ought to be undertaken and to recommend accordingly, to give advice on the granting of funds for specific researches when such advice is requested and to advise on the dissemination of information". A good deal of the first meeting was given over to a discussion of sponsors, grants, publications, membership, time and place of meetings, and programme. It was agreed that the Fisheries Research Board of Canada be asked to sponsor the meetings and that such meetings would be held at the time and place of the board's annual meetings.

The CCFFR held annual one-day meetings at Ottawa, sponsored by the Fisheries Research Board (FRB) and held at the time of the FRB annual meetings, from its inception in 1948 until 1967. These annual gatherings met a need by bringing together fisheries scientists from government and universities. However, the excellent papers presented were frequently heard by rather small audiences. It was concluded from discussions at a business meeting in 1967 that the length of the meeting (one day) and the fixed location (Ottawa) were two factors that may have kept the attendance down. It was therefore agreed to consider introducing a number of changes to the original meeting procedures. The annual meetings were extended from one to two days and meetings were alternated between Ottawa and other centres. One session each year was given over to contributed papers. Those changes resulted in a dramatic and gratifying increase in attendance. This also resulted in an increase in the expense of convening the meetings so that a fee of \$1.00 was instituted in 1964 and increased to \$2.00 for registrants in 1972. At the 1973 meeting, the name of the organization was changed to the Canadian Conference on Freshwater Fisheries Research and the title of Chairman was changed to President. The conference continued to act as a forum for the discussion of problems related to freshwater fisheries research, as set forth in its original terms of reference. In 1973, in recognition of the content of programs and interest of attendees in all aspects of fisheries research, freshwater and marine, CCFFR was changed to represent Canadian Conference For Fisheries Research (Conférence canadienne pour la recherche sur les pêches, CCRP).

The Canadian Society for Environmental Biologists (CSEB) requested to meet with CCFFR and have its one-day meeting follow on from CCFFR's two days. This was operational from 1976 to 1989, when CSEB again decided to meet independently of CCFFR. The Canadian Society for Limnology also requested to meet with CCFFR and such an arrangement has been in effect since 1979. A joint CCFFR/SCL banquet was instituted in 1989.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which had long supported CCFFR through provision of administrative and secretarial support, committed in 1988 to providing a Secretary-Treasurer on a continuing basis. This was terminated in ~2010.

In 1990 changes were instituted to the venue of the CCFFR meeting. Ottawa no longer was required to be the absolute venue in alternate years; other central locations could be selected. CCFFR celebrated its 50th anniversary at the 1997 Conference in Ottawa with an excellent program and a record turnout of 230-odd. Since then, attendance has remained high as the conference has jumped around from coast to coast to coast and all parts in between.