

THE FUTURE FOR IAHR - A PERSONAL VISION

BY ROGER FALCONER

I have been a member of IAHR for about 35 years and over that period I have witnessed considerable change in our discipline. When I first joined IAHR we were studying traditional hydraulics and fluid mechanics per se. Consulting companies were proud of their hydraulics divisions and clients expected the work to be done by 'hydraulic engineers'. At that time we had good links with specialist consulting companies and, in particular, strong ties with the international research laboratories etc. Departments of civil engineering taught hydraulics, hydrology and public health engineering, with the subject topics being taught as almost mutually exclusive. Today things are very different.

Today we are driven by legislation and the challenges associated with climate change, population growth, environmental change etc. The stakeholders - who we now need to en-gage with - are driven by multidisciplinary challenges, such as ecosystems services, the EU Water Framework Directive etc. Take, for example, diffuse source pollution and bathing water quality. The animals on the land deposit FIOs (faecal indicator organisms), the storm comes and the FIOs are transported from the catchment, through the river and estuarine basins, into the coastal bathing waters, often leading to non-compliance with legislation and, ultimately, beach closure. On the other hand the beach could be failing due to point source pollution from an effluent works or CSO etc. Traditional hydraulics forms a crucial part in addressing this beach failure scenario and the expertise within our association has a major role to play in improving: the stream hydraulics, the river hydraulics, the estuarine fluid mechanics and the coastal processes - to mention but a few. Equally hydrology and meteorology are crucial in addressing this problem and so too are aspects of epidemiology, biochemistry, wastewater treatment processes etc. However, whilst we might have expertise to contribute to such problems, we - as an association - are not engaged at the political and key stakeholder levels. No Government comes to IAHR for advice; no international funding agency comes to IAHR for technical support and, in particular, no water industry stakeholders or farming associations come to IAHR for advice for the above example. The same is true - at least in the UK - for research. Our research councils do not come to IAHR for grand challenge initiatives or research proposal reviewers, and our governments (national and regional) do not come to IAHR for the names of prospective members of research panels etc. In my opinion the same is probably true for similar associations, such as: IWA, IAHS, IWRA and PIANC (with whom we have just signed a collaborative agreement). In contrast the Energy research agenda speaks with one voice - at least across Europe. There are much closer links between governments, NGOs, industry, other stakeholders and the research community. As a result key stakeholders are also more involved and engaged in congresses, such as ours being held this year in The Hague - which I hope you will attend. In contrast to many other disciplines, I would argue that we are a disparate community: including, IWA, IAHS, IWRA and PIANC etc.

My vision for the future of IAHR is that it is paramount that we should work more closely with other water related associations to develop a much stronger collective voice and influence. If IAHR, together with partner associations, can be at the decision making table, whether it be national governments, the EU, UN or the World Bank etc., then we shall have much less difficulty in attracting a wider range of stakeholders to our congresses etc. Furthermore, in this world of growing focus on research impact assessment then we, primarily as researchers, must also welcome closer links with industry and end-users of our research. We have already accomplished much over the past two years on this front by acquiring major sponsorship from Spain Water and IWHR China, both of whom are engaged



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in a wider range of activities than those historically associated with IAHR; both of these sponsors are driven by a stakeholder agenda. IAHR has also recently become a UN Water partner, which also has the intention of bringing water associations together and we are involved in a new UN initiative on hydrology with UNESCO and WMO.

In the shorter term (i.e. over the next few years or so), my vision is that we should strive to create a Global Water Society (or similar), wherein the key water associations are affiliated. The Society could have its own president and council, with representatives distributed from the councils of the member associations. I believe that such a Society, which would cover all aspects of water science and engineering, would be attractive to governments, funding agencies and industry, as they would only have one port of call for their issues or challenges relating to water. I believe that if our associations worked more closely together, and spoke and operated with one voice on water, then we would all win and could all contribute significantly to cleaning up our catchments, rivers, estuaries and coastal basins, in the example cited above. In trying to work towards this vision, Vice President Arthur Mynett and I have already had very positive meetings with the Chief Executive of IWA (namely Dr Ger Berkham) and the President of IAHS (namely Prof Hubert Savenije). We discussed with them the opportunities of working more closely together and the benefits of speaking globally on all issues of water through a single voice - a Global Water Society (or similar). VP Mynett and I were encouraged by their enthusiasm to explore this further and our Executive Director and the new Council now have the opportunity to build on these discussions for the future. In the longer term I would suggest that we might even wish to explore the potential opportunities and benefits of mergers with some other associations.

We have seen in the UK the establishment of the Society for the Environment, which includes a number of learned societies all working together. This organisation has, in a very short time, achieved considerable influence in the UK and governments and stakeholders in the field are keen to seek advice etc. from this Society; I believe this Society acts as a template for the future opportunities for IAHR. My overriding personal vision therefore is that over the next decade IAHR will become a key player in a Global Water Society and international water associations, such as IAHR, can speak with one voice on water issues and together we can develop stronger dialogue with governments, research and international funding agencies, the water industry, consulting companies, NGOs etc. In conclusion, I believe IAHR has a great future, but if we build closer partnerships with similar water associations then I believe we will have an even brighter and more sustainable long term future.