

## Science to Influence Outcomes: Is it Advocacy?

Questions about advocacy often arise with the issues I get involved in as president of the Society. When I discussed the theme for my presidential year, "Science to Influence Outcomes," some members were concerned that it suggested advocacy—that we would somehow use science in a negative way to affect change. My intent was to emphasize the message that science can help us to advance the conservation of aquatic resources and that AFS is a primary source of sound scientific information. I have also heard concerns that the Fisheries Conservation Foundation will push AFS to be an environmental advocacy organization. Some of that concern may be historical (our membership mix has changed many times over 130 years); some is semantic (substitute "education" for "advocacy" and you probably would not elicit even a comment); and some is based on perception (whether AFS should take positions on anything beyond the scientifically factual).

It is hard to see how AFS can fulfill its mission without being involved in some kind of advocacy. Two of the four AFS objectives listed in our constitution are to:

- **promote the conservation, development, and wise use of the fisheries;**
- **promote and evaluate the development and advancement of all branches of fisheries science and practice.**


on "Marine Stocks at Risk." Due to this lengthy procedure, policy statements may take several years to develop.

Another form of AFS advocacy is through resolutions. These arise mostly in the AFS units. They are approved by the Resolutions Committee and the Governing Board and then by members at the Annual Meeting. Resolutions tend to be more timely in development than policy statements and are typically much narrower in scope.

Less formal approaches to advocacy include the development of white papers, testimony at public hearings, letters from the executive director or president, and Capitol Hill briefings and visits. Usually an issue comes to the attention of the AFS leadership, who then ask the appropriate expert people or units of AFS to develop a statement on the issue. After review and approval by the relevant group or unit, the statement is used for letters, public hearings, or sometimes publication in *Fisheries* under the authors' names. An example of the latter is the Guest Director's Line "On the Development of a National Ocean Policy" in the May issue, which benefited from input from the Marine Fisheries Section and the Estuaries Section. Of course visits with government officials are more free-wheeling with topics dependent on their interests. In my experience with those sessions, AFS representatives typically stick with topics that have been thoroughly vetted within the Society or we refer them to other AFS experts.

Could such advocacy categorize us as an environmental organization as opposed to a professional society? I think that the appropriate distinction between the professional society and the environmental organization is the degree to which value judgments influence the positions we take. AFS prides itself on bringing the best science available to management and policy decisions, but our science is frequently imperfect. We can rarely predict the outcome of an action with absolute certainty. As individuals, we do not shy away from using our best scientific judgment to make our professional decisions. If AFS is to achieve the two objectives mentioned above, as an organization we must do the same, i.e., use our best collective judgment based on available scientific information.

The Fisheries Conservation Foundation may be the best vehicle available to accomplish AFS objectives in the area of public outreach. Yet I have heard concerns from some members that the FCF will be an environmental advocacy organization, allowing AFS to engage in advocacy outside of the controls of the Society's constitution and approved procedures. This cannot occur. The Foundation cannot fund any project that is not approved by the AFS Governing Board. This is similar to many of the other advocacy activities described above.

If AFS must, as I believe, engage in advocacy to achieve its objectives, why is it so controversial? I think that concerns about AFS taking official positions on a few "hot button" issues are really what drive discussions about environmental advocacy. A successful professional society must be open to differences of opinion and must find ways to welcome those differences. I believe AFS has through its procedures and the sensitivity of its leaders found ways to accommodate differences among members very successfully, and fears about AFS or the FCF becoming simply "another environmental advocacy organization" are unfounded. 



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According to the American Heritage Dictionary, "promote" is a synonym for "advocate," defined as "to speak in favor of; recommend." Advocacy is the noun form meaning, "active support, as of a cause." If our constitution indicates that we should be involved in advocacy, then why is advocacy such a sensitive issue? The AFS has extensive policies and procedures that govern advocacy by the Society, its subunits, and individual AFS members. For the details of these procedures see [www.fisheries.org/html/Public\\_Affairs/Policy\\_Statements/pol\\_advocacy.shtml](http://www.fisheries.org/html/Public_Affairs/Policy_Statements/pol_advocacy.shtml).

AFS engages in advocacy in four ways, ranging from very formal to quite informal. Our most formal approach to advocacy is through policy statements, typically developed by a committee. A draft is published in *Fisheries*, comments from members are solicited, and further drafts are written, approved by the Governing Board, and finally voted on by the members. The policy statement is then made widely available. The last policy statement adopted by the AFS was