

## **Fish Health Section: the first five years (1973 to 1977) and a little before that.**

### **A little before that:**

Jim Warren, a USFWS Hatchery Biologist from Genoa, Wisconsin, was the driving force behind the formation of the Fish Health Section. On April 30, 1971 (Warren letter), Jim wrote to Robert Hutton, the Executive Secretary of the American Fisheries Society (AFS), and asked that consideration be given for the formation of an AFS national chapter of fish pathologists. He also wrote several letters to the AFS Fish Disease Committee proposing the need for this chapter and succeeded in getting a consensus from the committee to establish the new chapter. The Fish Disease Committee was established in 1964 as a temporary AFS committee serving at the pleasure of the AFS president (Warren letter, February 16, 1973). Warren attended the AFS Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, UT (September 17, 1971) where approval was given to form the new section called the Fish Health Section (Warren letter, September 22, 1971). Jim was very active in promoting the fledgling section by letter and by attending (or appointing a designate to attend) annual fish disease meetings (Midwestern Fish Disease Conference – established in 1970 and Western Fish Disease Conference – established in 1960; letters in file). Jim chaired the first steering committee that activated the section (first newsletter, Fish Health Section, 1972). The Fish Health Section was the first section established in the AFS.

The title “Fish Health Section” apparently was derived from a modification of the name “National Section of Fish Health Specialists,” which in turn was modified from “National Chapter of Fish Health Specialists” (Statement for the Executive Committee

AFS, September 14, 1971, Salt Lake City, Utah and a signed petition to establish the section on September 17, 1971). There is no information on the origin of “National Chapter of Fish Health Specialists”.

The starting date for the Fish Health Section (FHS) is a matter of some confusion. As previously mentioned, formation approval was given on September 17, 1971. The Fish Health Section was approved on September 14, 1973 at the Annual Business Meeting of the AFS, Lake Buena Vista, Florida, and made retroactive to September of 1972. In the 1972 Report of the Fish Health Section Steering Committee, it was stated that the section would be officially inaugurated on January 1, 1973. So go ahead and pick your own start date.

Although Warren was the major mover and shaker behind the Section, he certainly did not work alone. Ron Goede (UT), Chuck Hicks (MO), Bob Summerfelt (OK), Don Amend (WA), Dave McDaniel (UT), Pete Bullock (WV), Roger Herman (OH), Bill Klontz (TX), Bill Wingfield (CA), and John Plumb (AL) worked with Jim on the steering committee and its three subcommittees, Professional Standards, Technical Procedures, and Membership and Balloting, to bring the dream of the Section to reality (first Newsletter, Fish Health Section 1972). Others who were part of the process included Stanislas F. Snieszko (WV), Ken Wolf (WV), Harold Wolf (CA), George Post (CO), Howard Larson (MN), Larry McDermott (Ontario), J. David Erickson (ID), Gary Camenisch MO, James Wood (WA), Dave McLean (Ontario), John Fryer (OR) and Fred Meyers (WI) (Warren letter September 1, 1971). Doc Snieszko, although never in a position of leadership over the section, was always a very strong supporter. Ken Wolf was never a member of the section but was part of the founding group. Fred Meyer gave

the only recorded dissenting vote against the establishment of the Fish Health Section, yet was important in its formation and direction. Fred was later elected to a leadership position in the section in December of 1973. The content of Fred's letter of dissent will be briefly discussed in a later article of historic interest and perspective on the issue of certifying fish pathologists.

The AFS Fish Health Section was established with three written goals (Warren letter, September 22, 1971). The first was to “assure timely communications among members through the publication and dissemination of proceedings or abstracts of fish disease conferences and technical sessions.” The second was to “advise the officers of the American Fisheries Society on the current status of fish disease problems, and prepare recommendations for society action.” The last was to “establish and disseminate approved procedures for the detection or diagnosis of certain fish diseases.” It is interesting to note that one of the initial needs, expressed as a purpose for founding the new organization, the classification or certification of fish pathologists (Warren letter, April 30, 1971), was not one of these three goals.

By the end of 1972, there were 104 members in the new section, each paying \$2.00 for dues in addition to the \$20.00 AFS membership fee. The new section sent out two newsletters in 1972 (in FHS archives - not considered an official FHS newsletter as Volume 1 starts with the first 1973 publication) in which several emerging fish disease issues were reported. These included 1) the certification of disease inspectors/fish pathologists, 2) the listing of bacterial kidney disease as a serious problem, 3) the detection of infectious pancreatic necrosis virus (IPNV) in Coho salmon returning to the Columbia River, 4) the chlorination of the Tobacco River, Michigan to depopulate fish

infected with whirling disease, 5) incubation temperatures for best viral growth in cell cultures, 6) oral vaccination of salmonids against *Vibrio*, and 7) legislation authorizing the establishment of a cooperative National fish health program (Bills S. 2764 and H. R. 14730 – both bills failed for lack of congressional support).

**The first five years (1973 to 1977):**

The information that follows is taken from FHS Newsletters (1973-1977). In December of 1972, John Fryer, Associate Professor of Microbiology at Oregon State University was elected as the first President of the section, Graham L. (Pete) Bullock was elected Vice President and Jim Warren Secretary/Treasurer for 1973. President Fryer named the following chairmen for the section's six standing committees: Professional Standards, Don Amend; Finance, Jim Warren; Nominating, Jim Wood; Membership and Balloting, Chuck Hicks; Technical Procedures, Dave McDaniels; and Newsletter, Dennis Anderson. These same committees were continued through the next five years with only the Nominating Committee becoming an elected position starting in 1974. The Presidents elected over the next four years were Pete Bullock (1974), Courtney Gustafson (1975), Donald Amend (1976), and Jim Warren (1977). Elected positions for 1974 through 1976 included President, Vice president, Secretary/Treasurer, and Nominating Committee Chairman. In 1977, the Vice President position was replaced by President Elect. In 1976, there was a special election for five members that formed the Board of Certification and in the 1977 regular election for 1978 officers, two positions for the Board of Certification were on the ballot.

In 1973, there were 155 section members; in 1974, membership increased to 180. In 1975, there were 187 members, and by April of 1976, membership stood at 245

including 7 library members. Final membership counts for 1976 and 1977 were not found (see later comment for 1977). Membership dues were increased from \$2.00 to \$5.00 in 1977.

There were several major issues that the society considered from 1973 to 1977. Nine of these issues are mentioned here and include the pending crisis associated with the need for more FDA approved fishery therapeutants and the loss of chemicals in use at the time, the need to certify fish pathologists/pathobiologists/health biologists or inspectors for inspection and diagnostic work, the need for guidelines on disease classification and standards for the detection and isolation of disease organisms, the need to update the nomenclature of fish bacterial pathogens, the conflict over the use of depopulation [called “backhoe to glory” by one biologist – FHS Newsletter 4(3):4] with/without indemnification as a means for fish disease control, the need for uniform federal legislation controlling the movement of serious fish pathogens throughout the U.S. (all the early efforts failed; indemnification was also an issue here), the need to increase membership [comment was made on breaking away from the parent society (AFS) and that 140 previous members had not renewed as of April 1977], the need for a fish health glossary, and the allegation that Federal government services, such as diagnostic services, created unfair competition with members of the private sector offering the same services for pay.

The major accomplishments of the FHS in these five years were the completion and publication of the first Blue Book “Suggested procedures for the detection and identification of certain infectious disease of fishes” in 1975, the development of standards and protocols for certifying fish health inspectors in 1976, the near completion

of the Glossary of Fish Health Terms in 1977, and the establishment of a committee to look into the nomenclature of fish bacteria.

The first Fish Health Section meeting, a workshop on Standards and Procedure, was held in Denver, Colorado on August 12-15, 1974. The second, a workshop on several different fish disease topics, was also held in Denver on August 24-26, 1976. The early meetings were held biennially.

From 1973 to 1977, the section put out four newsletters per year. These newsletters not only reported FHS activities, business and bylaws, but announced fish health and related meetings; new publications that included books, proceeding and journals; fish disease courses; fish diagnostic services; job openings, retirements (e.g., Bob Rucker, 1973 and A. J. Ross, 1975); and lab openings (e.g., Fort Morgan Fish Disease Control Center, CO, 1974). Issues and opinions were discussed under the “Ye ole’ fish box” editorial comment section (some of the topics were reported above) and a number of short reports (two sentences to a few paragraphs) were written on disease research and diagnostic issues. The topics in these reports were wide ranging including: fish dying from fire ant ingestion, the nature of rodlet cells, fish coughing, shellfish diseases, goldfish ulcer disease, a large die-off of eels, fluorescent antibody technique for diagnosis of bacterial kidney disease, oxalinic acid treatments for fish bacteria, and *Branchiomyces* infections in fish. Diseases mentioned most in these reports were infectious hematopoietic necrosis, infectious pancreatic necrosis, channel catfish virus disease, whirling disease, enteric redmouth disease, furunculosis and vibriosis. There were also several reports on fish vaccines, notably the *Vibrio* vaccine. These short

reports kept FHS members current on a broad range of issues affecting the field of fish health.

As a final note, I did not comment on the editorial cartoons that were present in several of the early newsletters. Only the monkey that insulted the State of Alaska for poor hatchery design leading to fish diseases [Figure 1 from FHS Newsletter 3(2):3] really caught my attention, but it seems I could not compose any comment. Nevertheless, Don Amend sure did [Don's comment in FHS Newsletter 3(3):4 is available upon request]. Well, so long for now.

Respectfully submitted by Andrew J. Mitchell/Archive Committee  
Harry K. Dupree-Stuttgart National Aquaculture Research Center, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, P. O Box 1050, Stuttgart, Arkansas, 72160 USA, [dmitchell@spa.ars.usda.gov](mailto:dmitchell@spa.ars.usda.gov), 870-673-4483

Figure 1

