

20 March 2004

Dear Foundation Group Members,

The AwF meeting in Hawaii

WAS kindly allowed me to place a pledging leaflet for AwF in every conference bag during its recent conference in Honolulu. In addition, WAS enabled me to organise a short evening meeting to discuss AwF. With M.C. Nandeesh, I also organised a WAS session (one of the sixteen concurrent sessions!) on the aquaculture work of existing NGOs during the conference itself¹, during which I presented an update about AwF.

Although very few of the pledging documents have been returned so far (probably partly because there were many 'advertisements' in each bag, which tend to get lost in the hurly burly of a big conference), the evening meeting was a success. Despite some attractive competition (an auction of aquaculture equipment and a 'happy hour' which included free beer!), about 100 people turned up to the AwF meeting. I gave a 15 minute PowerPoint presentation about our progress so far (I can supply a copy of this to anyone who would like to use it to further publicise AwF; just let me know), following which I opened the meeting up for comments.

I was very pleased with the result. There were several impassioned messages of wholehearted support. One man wanted to elect a president, secretary and treasurer on the spot and offered help to draw up articles of incorporation. I pointed out that we intended to register in the UK first and would need a Board of Trustees to do that. However, he insisted on taking a vote (to establish legitimacy) and the result was unanimous agreement to establish AwF.

John Halver generously offered 300 copies of one of his books which AwF could sell to raise funds. Another man took the initiative to hold an impromptu collection during the meeting. This raised US\$ 1,215, including several individual donations between US\$ 50 and US\$ 200. Together with earlier donations from two of the Foundation Group members, over £1,500 (approx US\$ 2,770) has been raised to date. Though this falls far short of the US\$ 34,000 that we estimated in our strategy document was necessary for start up, it is an encouraging beginning. Two people have offered to approach the Gates Foundation for support; I have put them in touch with each other and await results.

Two of our group (NACA staff through Pedro Bueno, together with Mauro Doimi) are already working to improve the AwF website. In the days following the meeting I had several interesting individual discussions with other individuals who wish to help AwF. If our discussions mature into concrete proposals I will inform you about these later. In addition, volunteers offering their services for field work continue to come in almost daily through our website and other publicity.

Two people (Dave Conley and Mauro Doimi) captured the meeting on video and interviewed me later. The results of one should become available on the website of the Aquaculture Communications Group (www.aquacomgroup), with a link to our own website; the other is to be used for a programme on Italian television. I have been asked to write an article on AwF for the *Global Aquaculture Advocate*.

The support of you all, and the strong encouragement voiced by those that were present at the meeting in Hawaii, gives me the confidence to move on to the next step, namely the registration of AwF with the Charities Commission in the UK. This I will do as soon as I can clear my desk of some unfinished work for FAO.

The results of the meeting and subsequent discussions in Hawaii leave me with a number of thoughts:

1. Registration of AwF in various countries may be necessary in order to enhance/encourage donations through tax rebates. John Cooksey and Mauro Doimi are investigating the procedures in the USA and Italy respectively.
2. Many people have already offered to work in the field, on a voluntary basis, for AwF and I believe that we have only 'scratched the surface' of availability so far. Several ex-members of the Peace Corps were present in the meeting. Several students approached me later and spoke of the difficulty of obtaining field experience. One said that she would have jumped at the chance when she graduated

¹ Under Dr. Nandeesh's chairmanship, a similar session will be organised during World Aquaculture '05 (9-13 May, Bali, Indonesia)

three years ago if AwF had existed then. She even said that she would have been willing to pay to work with AwF in order to gain experience that could be placed in her CV, to help her get employment later. These offers of support confirm my original concept that there were people in our aquaculture community, from students to retirees, that would be willing to give time to support the goals of AwF. However, first we need money and projects to utilise this resource!

3. AwF is in a bit of a 'chicken and egg' stage, in that it needs money to start operations but it would be easier to obtain financial support if we had some on-going projects.....
4. It may therefore be useful to explore the possibility of starting by working with some of the existing NGOs (by providing volunteers with the skills that several of them stated were lacking during their presentations during the NGO session I mentioned above). This would enable us to say that we were already doing something useful in the field and might enable us to 'snowball' support from philanthropic organisations and the general public. Could I therefore please ask the members of the foundation group members to explore this possibility. **In particular, could I please ask Nandeesha to talk to Caritas Bangladesh and his friends in Cambodia, and Geoff Allan to talk to WorldVision in Thailand about this²?** I am myself talking to two groups in Brazil along these lines too.
5. Meanwhile, I think we should proceed with the next stages of our development strategy. Besides registering AwF as a not-for-profit organisation, **I think we should pursue the possibilities of gaining honorary Royal patronage and some celebrities to support us. Therefore, could those of you who offered to do so (as noted in our strategy document) please start exploring these ideas now?** One of those present during the AwF meeting in Hawaii knows the President of East Timor, Xanana Gusmao and the Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Ramos Horta (at the moment Minister for Foreign Affairs for East Timor) and has offered to ask them to give their support for AwF. I replied that I thought that we should try for support from a European Royal Family first (but perhaps I am wrong – what do you think?). Dan Fegan has kindly agreed to try to approach the Thai Royal Family through contacts at the British Embassy in Bangkok.

I would appreciate any comments you may have on the above. I will write to you again as soon as I have anything to report or I need your advice. Meanwhile I will be approaching individual members with specific requests.

Kindest regards,

Michael

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² These groups all presented papers during the NGO session in Hawaii.