

From The Chair

A few words from chairman Tom Franks



About a year ago, one of our committee members said to me, "The trouble with ICID, we've got an image problem". This was said at one of our regular technical meetings, which gives our members the chance to update themselves on key professional issues (in this case, the use of poor quality water), as well as renew friendships and strengthen working networks. The meeting was well conducted with three excellent speakers, and it was well attended, by around 45 members. Nevertheless the idea persists that there is an "image problem". This is a matter of regret to me, and one that your committee and indeed the whole membership needs to address.

It is a matter of regret because I believe that we in the British Section work hard to provide real benefits from membership. Currently members in the UK have the opportunity to attend three technical meetings in a year (and these are of a consistently high standard), as well as the research day in March. In addition they receive the quarterly journal Irrigation and Drainage, and the biennial News and Views. All of these represent, I believe, excellent value for the current individual subscription on £28. This is not to sound a note of complacency. We are constantly looking at ways in which we can improve the benefits, and we would welcome any suggestions.

At the same time we would welcome ideas for improving our "image". Image isn't everything. In the final analysis, ICID is about water for agriculture. It is important that there is a strong professional body, in the UK and internationally, that speaks with authority on water for agriculture. If that is unfashionable, so be it. Nevertheless, we should do what we can to improve our image, so please let us have substantive ideas for doing this.

Most of our members are predominantly concerned with the activities of ICID in the UK. This is as it should be, and I hope that this focus of the British Section will continue and increase in the future. Nevertheless, the international activities of ICID are also of great importance. Here again, there are problems of "image" and substance. There are currently lively ongoing debates about the way ICID conducts its business. In our case this achieved prominence after the last Gerald Lacey lecture, given by Alan Hall, and it will continue with the next Gerald Lacey lecture. This will be given by Bart Schultz, the current president, who will be able to give us a first-hand account from the perspective of the leadership of ICID.

There are undoubtedly problems and issues to be faced by the international body. On the public front, these include the way ICID responds to such matters as the Vision for Water and the World Commission on Dams. Internally there are continuing discussions on such matters as the cost of attending international meetings, and the future of the Young Professionals' Forum (a debate which is currently raging on the web amongst British section members, and which is reported elsewhere in this edition). Obviously there are many ways in which individual members can see these being improved. My request is that members enter actively into the debate, but that they also take trouble to fully acquaint themselves with the facts of the situation. ICID is a large and complex undertaking, and one must be sure of the facts before voicing criticisms and suggestions.

From my own perspective I see the problems, but I also see a good deal of excellent work being undertaken by ICID. At the last IEC in Cape Town we welcomed Finland and Tanzania as members. ICID is an unusual body, bringing together a wide range of countries, with a wide range of issues facing them. Water for agriculture is itself a complex sector, comprising not only technical but also economic, social and political dimensions. ICID is the best organisation we have for facing these issues on the global scale, and I would like to see us in the UK doing all we can to strengthen it.

This is my last message as Chairman. In May I hand over to Graham Wilson, and I am sure that we will all support him as he takes over. Undoubtedly the most important task facing the British Section is to maintain and increase the number of individual members. Please do your bit by encouraging your friends and colleagues to join. Finally, the AGM in May is the time when we welcome new committee members. If you feel you would like to serve the British Section more actively by joining the committee, please put yourself forward for nomination.

Tom Franks
Chairman, BNC