

Announcement

A Society for European Freshwater Scientists

This announcement reports on an exploration of the need for a forum to promote basic freshwater science in Europe. Specifically, it sets out the motives for the initiative and it describes progress made up to the convening of a discussion meeting, held at the Centrum voor Limnologie of the Nederlands Instituut voor Oecologisch Onderzoek (NIOO-CL) on 18 November, 1997. It also gives a summary of these discussions, in the belief that they will be of interest to all freshwater scientists in Europe. This means of communication is appropriate, for the group which met was not, in any sense, representative and it has no mandate from any authority or assembly.

The Background

The initiative was born from a perception, shared by many European freshwater ecologists, that the basic science is not in good health. The belief is that freshwater biology, physical limnology, some types of geochemistry and the link with hydrology, among others, are underinvested and that we are still not doing enough to understand whole catchments. The academic profile of freshwater biology is apparently falling. This is remarkable at a time of increasing public and political concern about the future of water resources, when trends of increasing consumption and pollution conflict with the objective of sustainability. This relevance is part of the problem, for the science is increasingly seen as applied and, thus, the responsibility of industry and commerce to fund. Yet industry and commerce do not sponsor the development of basic science. The funding to maintain and develop skills and to promote fundamental understanding has diminished substantially. With insufficient young, trained specialists in all branches of freshwater science, the disciplines will wither and the expert knowledge-base will decline. Ultimately, this will compromise the ability to pursue applied freshwater science. Much as the American Society for Limnology and Oceanography and the North American Benthological Society have been able to do in North America, some sort of professional body or learned society is needed to champion the science in Europe. Moreover, as so much of the freshwater science which is conducted in Europe is determined by the European Commission, a body capable of representing the discipline would not be out of place.