

SCRIPPS INSTITUTION OF OCEANOGRAPHY GUIDELINES ON ADVOCACY

DEFINITION OF TERMS:

*Throughout, when the terms: science, scientific, etc., are used, they are generally intended to refer to peer reviewed science.

*The term “activity” is used to refer to: pronouncements, exhibits, educational programs, media interactions, op-ed’s, etc.

*The term “Director” is generally used to refer to those higher level directors, such as the Director of Scripps, the Deputy Directors of the institution, and the Executive Director of the Birch Aquarium at Scripps (BAS).

PHILOSOPHY:

Over the nearly one hundred years of its existence SIO has developed an excellent reputation for its strong science. As we move into the next century, the science conducted by the institution is becoming more visible in the public eye. Issues of the environment are large, complex, and involve large numbers of stakeholders who often have widely differing opinions. The knowledge that is accumulated at SIO can be extremely important in informing and improving decisions relating to environmental issues.

Therefore, as an institution, Scripps has both a desire, and a responsibility, to communicate the best and most current knowledge and understanding in earth science to the public, policy makers, and decision makers. To be effective in so doing, the institution's credibility as an honest purveyor of knowledge must be preserved. It is inevitable that SIO will be called upon to provide information about environmental issues, and thereby be drawn into controversy. Only if the pronouncements of the institution are based on sound science, and limited to the extent of our scientific expertise, can SIO sustain its role and responsibility of providing the highest state of knowledge in support of responsible decision making.

Thus, as an institution, SIO must avoid taking a *political* position on controversial, contentious, or emotionally-charged issues or its credibility could be threatened, i.e., “the best politics is good science.” This does not mean that the institution should refrain from providing information *about* controversial issues – only that such information should be based on solid scientific research. In fact, it may be incumbent on the institution to provide such information to help inform a debate.

For these reasons, the following guidelines are provided as an aid to promote dialog for deciding how far the institution can go in its public activities. There is no intent to discourage individuals from involvement in, or comment on, controversial issues.

INDIVIDUAL POSITIONS VS. INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONS:

A distinction must be drawn between positions taken by SIO as an institution and positions taken by its employees.

It goes without saying that employees of the institution and its volunteers are free to believe whatever they wish. In addition, they are free to advocate whatever position they wish, if they do so as individuals, not representing an institutional view in any way. Staff employees, and volunteers are free to advocate any position they wish as long as they do not do so in the course of their regular duties. Staff employees have the added constraint that non-work (vacation, etc.) time must be used if they are involved in advocating political positions.

Academic employees, who are often called upon as experts in various matters, are endowed with "academic freedom" which reduces the constraints on them. However, it is requested that when an academic wishes to advocate a position, he or she must make it clear that they are not speaking for the institution as a whole.

When the institution speaks officially, there is a much higher standard that must be met. This is necessitated by the concerns outlined above, and by the added constraint that as a state supported institution, there are legal limits as to how far the institution can go in advocating one or the other side of a political issue. The "tests" outlined below can be used to assess how far institutional pronouncements can be safely taken. Also, certain individuals within the institution, such as those with "director" titles, must consider this higher standard in their activities since they are perceived as speaking for the institution in all that they say.

The Birch Aquarium at Scripps, as the principal institutional mechanism for communicating science to the public is seen as the same as the overall institution. Thus, in determining the content of exhibits, education courses, etc., the same rigorous standards that are applied to the institution as a whole must be observed. Since the "regular duty" of all BAS employees and volunteers is to communicate science, and therefore to represent the institution, BAS employees and volunteers must adhere to the institution's position (and these guidelines), on scientific issues and are not free to publicly advocate their own positions at the Birch Aquarium. If the institution has no scientific involvement on an issue, employees should refrain from public discussion of the issue.

TESTS:

What is the intention of the activity? Official institutional activities should have the purpose of furthering scientific understanding, education, and communication of scientific research. Activities undertaken for other purposes are highly likely to fall outside the scope of acceptable institutional undertakings.

Each situation will be unique, and thus, must be examined on a case-by-case basis. To assist in assessing when an activity meets the higher standard of institutional activities, the following tests may be used. If the answer to each test is "yes" then the activity has minimal risk. If "no" is

answered to one or more test, then the activity should be reconsidered to see if it should be modified to comply with our institutional constraints.

1. Does the activity involve an area where SIO has scientific expertise?
2. Is the activity focused on presentation of the results of scientific research, possibly including predictions?
3. Does the activity reflect general scientific consensus when such evidence exists?
4. If societal responses to a scientific problem (in which Scripps scientists are involved) are being addressed, are the major view points presented in a balanced way?
5. Are the addressed areas of scientific uncertainty presented in a balanced way?
6. Does the activity refrain from calling for political action beyond calls for continuation or increases in scientific study, for further scientific study in a different direction, or relying on sound science in decision making?
7. Does the activity avoid close and/or public collaboration with a group or non-governmental organization involved in political activism or advocacy?
8. Does the activity refrain from calling for support of groups, political parties, etc., on one side or the other of an issue?