

## Aquarium-Museum Panel 2006-2007 Annual Report

From: Russell Moll, Panel Chair  
To: Chair, Committee on Committees

I am pleased to present this report summarizing the activities of the Aquarium-Museum Panel for the 2006-2007 academic year. In brief, this Panel serves as a source of faculty advice to the Birch Aquarium at Scripps (BAS). This Panel addresses issues pertaining to the operation, intellectual direction and interactions with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO). The Panel met four times in the 2006-2007 academic year with each meeting lasting one and a half hours.

The topics considered by the Panel in 2005-2006 covered four broad categories – BAS operations, advice on future displays at the BAS, presenting sound science versus science advocacy, and providing better access to the BAS by SIO faculty, staff and students.

Under the category of BAS operations, each Panel meeting began with a discussion of the current status of the BAS by Director Nigella Hillgarth. Her presentations touched on issues such as the financial status of the BAS, near-term and long-term exhibit plans, trends in BAS attendance, and the status of the physical plant of the BAS. Once again the most salient message from these discussions was reassurance to the Panel that the BAS is on a good trajectory with stable financial footing and exciting, high-quality exhibits planned for the future.

A substantial amount of discussion at each meeting addressed the issue of future displays at the BAS. Topics ranged from an overview of the about-to-be-opened climate change exhibit to blue sky ideas about future exhibits. There was strong support by the Panel for the climate change exhibit, a deep ocean exhibit and a biodiversity exhibit. The latter would be achieved via a transformation to the Hall of Fishes with a biodiversity theme. Other topics mentioned for future exhibits included: nearshore processes, rip currents, ocean waves and marine geology.

The discussions surrounding sound science versus science advocacy by the Panel was couched in how to present good science and science solutions to contemporary problems without moving into advocacy. The Panel offered several ideas and examples of what they viewed as unbiased science solutions to problems and highly recommended avoiding advocacy or a specific point of view. A case in point is that it is good to inform the public about sources and sinks of climate change gases yet avoid presenting an opinion such as “this industry is good or bad” for the environment. Overall the Panel supported the current approach of the BAS

The issue of providing better access to the BAS was the source of continued dialogue by the Panel and several issues were raised under this general category. At each meeting we reviewed the implementation of providing free access to the BAS for SIO graduate students. This popular program has been up and running for more than a year with the

net result an increase in graduate student visits to the BAS. The Panel also discussed the newly formed program to provide better access by faculty and staff to the BAS. This program, which provides up to four free visits per year for SIO faculty and staff, has been slow to gain recognition yet is well received by those who become aware of the new BAS access. Improved access by students and faculty/staff has worked toward the desired result of more engagement between the SIO faculty, staff and students and the BAS.

The last Panel meeting of the year concluded with a brief discussion of topics and issues for consideration during the 2007-2008 academic year.