

The Australian Acoustical Society is a member of the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS) and represented within the Physical Sciences Board. FASTS is the science lobby group, and represents some 30,000 scientists through their membership of over 40 affiliated societies. The following item by **Ken Baldwin** and **Bob Crompton** has been extracted from a longer item prepared for the Australian and New Zealand Physicist (ANZP) and summarises the revitalisation of FASTS. Dr Baldwin is a Fellow at the Research School of Physical Sciences and Engineering, ANU, and Vice-President of FASTS. Professor Crompton holds a Visiting Fellowship in the School, and is the AIP past-President and representative on the FASTS Board.

### SYNOPSIS

The situation in 1993 could hardly have been worse:

- The Science Minister, Ross Free, was not talking to FASTS and had called for another body to supplant it.
- FASTS had no policies to put forward at the 1993 election which Paul Keating had won without once mentioning the word "science".
- The FASTS Executive Director, David Widdup, had found it increasingly difficult to interact with the government. A year later he left to pursue a new career, leaving FASTS with no permanent employees but with an opportunity for restructuring.
- The Institution of Engineers were publically (and perhaps justifiably) critical of FASTS' approach to lobbying.
- Organisations within FASTS such as the AIP, the Royal Australian Chemical Institute (RACI), the Australian Geosciences Council (AGC) and the Maths Sciences Council were giving notice of their intention to resign if FASTS did not lift its game.

Things were indeed grim. The organisation needed to change both internally and to become a pro-active rather than reactive body.

### DIAGNOSIS

A number of changes to FASTS' operation were suggested in the May '93 article in the ANZP to place FASTS on a firmer footing:

- 1 Society Presidents should form the FASTS Board to place them directly in touch with their constituents.
- 2 FASTS should adopt a President-elect/President/past-President continuity.
- 3 Previous FASTS officers should form a FASTS Advisory Committee.
- 4 The Executive Director's position should be restructured for greater effectiveness and accountability.
- 5 FASTS should adopt an ongoing policy formulation process to reflect the opinions of its constituent societies.

Since that time FASTS has been conspicuously silent - a silence which reflected sustained internal re-examination and re-building rather than inaction. Although FASTS may have been unable (because of personnel shortages) to keep the channels of information flowing to its constituents, a lot of work was going on behind scenes.

### METAMORPHOSIS

The result is that a new, mean and lean FASTS has emerged like a Phoenix from the ashes with the following milestones:

- November 1993: Prof. Graham Johnston, former President of the RACI, was appointed President, together with vice-Presidents Dr Gordon Burch (AGC) and Dr Ken Baldwin (then AIP representative on FASTS Board). These organisations represented some of the societies most critical of FASTS' operation. Prof. Bob Crompton, then AIP President, was elected to the FASTS Board.
- November 1993: A draft FASTS policy document was presented to the annual Council meeting
- June 1994: Resignation of the former Executive Director and advertisement of the vacant Executive Director's position which was restructured.
- June 1994: RACI rescinds their intention to withdraw from FASTS.
- November 1994: Election of a new FASTS executive, including treasurer Marion Burgess (from AAS), and Secretary, Dr Graham Heath (ANU, and RACI ACT President). The continuity of FASTS was assured with the appointment of a high profile new President-elect, Dr Joe Baker (OBE, MSc, PhD, FRACI, FTS) former Director of the Australian Institute of Marine Science and ACT Commissioner for the Environment.
- November 1994: Ratification of the redrafted FASTS Policy Document by the annual Council meeting of constituent societies.
- March, 1995: Appointment of Mr Toss Gascoigne, former CSIRO science communicator, as Executive Director.
- March, 1995: AIP rescinds their intention to withdraw.
- April, 1995: FASTS moves its premises to a centrally located office in Deakin, close to Parliament House, which offers better facilities for servicing members, and less all-round financial burden.

As can be seen, the changes have been major and substantive.

### PROGNOSIS

The picture for the immediate future looks bright. FASTS has major programs which will enhance its effectiveness and cement its place in the science policy arena:

- 1 *The policy document was presented to Senator Peter Cook, Minister for Industry, Science and Technology, at Parliament House on June 8th.*

This event was well attended by the media, the Science and Technology community, and politicians of all major parties. The policy is an evolutionary document, which will be revised and used to respond to the Government's much vaunted Innovations Statement in September, and which will form the platform for FASTS' pre-election lobbying campaign in the following period. All member societies will be able to feed back their views on policy to the FASTS Board and to the annual Council meeting.

The S & T policy document sets down agreed statements for:

- Educational Policy in Science and Maths Teaching
- Industry and Commercial Research
- Research in Government Institutions and National Facilities
- University Research and Post-Graduate Research Training.

The emergence of this document, and its widespread commendation, marks a new stage in FASTS development. The current Board believes that it can influence Government most effectively if FASTS is pro-active in having its own well-developed policies that can be seen to have the wide endorsement of thousands of rank-and-file scientists and technologists.

2 *FASTS will increase its consultation and involvement with its constituent societies.*

In the period without an Executive Director, FASTS was unfortunately forced to neglect much of its internal communication while concentrating on restructuring. However, with the arrival of the new Executive Director, this situation will improve dramatically. Mr Gascoigne's previous position was as Communications Manager with CSIRO's Centre for Environmental Mechanics. He is also a founding member and Secretary of the Australian Science Communicators (ASC) - a network of science journalists.

Toss has wide national experience in science policy articulation

and presentation, and in training scientists in media skills. His role will be to liaise vigorously with member societies, to implement and represent policies defined by the Board, and to deal with the day-to-day business of the Federation, as directed by the Executive. His impact in reducing the office bearers' workloads and increasing their national effectiveness has been immediate.

The new FASTS office is now on email and hopes soon to have its policies and other information documents available on World Wide Web. The Executive Director has also resumed publication of the national FASTS Newsletter which aims to publicise both the ongoing policy initiatives and the science lobbying efforts of the new Board and Executive.

3 *FASTS will form a set of strategic alliances, with the aim to make its lobbying efforts more effective by approaching Government on a unified front.*

At the FASTS National Council in November 1994 a vigorous policy forum was held with senior panellists from the Australian Academy of Science, the Academy of Technical Sciences, ANZAAS, ASTEC, NTEU, ASTA (the Australian Science Teachers Association) and the ASC. As one consequence, the Executive Directors of eleven different science and technology organisations (the two Academies, the Institute of Engineers, RACI/AIP, the Deans of Science, ANZAAS and others) have agreed to meet on a quarterly basis, coordinated by Toss Gascoigne, to discuss joint action and mutual support. Further strategic alliances in the broader community are being planned.

Two years ago, a new organisational structure, documented policies endorsed by the elected Board, fresh appointments to senior positions, and prudent financial operation was sought. We believe that FASTS has delivered on these obligations, and has built a strong foundation for an active future in the science policy arena.

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**Acoustics Applied**  
*putting the science and  
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15-17 November, 1995  
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