



GRASSLAND SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

SACNASP Voluntary Associations Workshop

3 August 2012

Four delegates from the Grassland Society of Southern Africa attended a SACNASP Voluntary Associations Workshop in Pretoria on 3 August 2012. The new CEO of SACNASP and the Chair of the Board stated that the purpose of the workshop was to present the “new” SACNASP to the Voluntary Associations recognized by SACNASP. The GSSA delegates were Wayne Truter, Loraine van den Berg, Dave Grossman and Brian Dawson. At the conclusion of the workshop the delegates agreed upon the fact that SACNASP is making some positive progress in terms of being accommodating and attempting to make the registration process easier, less onerous, and seeking ways to accommodate the groups and prospective members who are “falling between the cracks”. Various issues were raised during the workshop and will be discussed in some more detail.

SACNASP legal framework

SACNASP is a function of the Natural Scientific Professions Act (Act 27 of 2003). Any individual not registered with SACNASP and practising science in any of the fields of practice listed in Schedule I of this Act is doing so illegally and can be prosecuted. Therefore it is compulsory for anyone practising Natural Sciences to register with SACNASP. The fact that many have not yet done so is indicative that something was “not right” and hence the “new” approach.

The 'new' SACNASP

This change in legislation in 2003 has led to reorganization within SACNASP resulting in a move towards a ‘new’ SACNASP, which was introduced during the workshop. To date a total number of 4938 individuals is registered with SACNASP, with an increase of 583 new registrations from 2006 to 2012. SACNASP is also becoming younger and more beautiful with 38% of the members being younger than 40 years of age and 27% being female. The demography of SACNASP is also more representative with 23% black, coloured and Asian members. The distribution of fields of practices in which members are registered are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of fields of practice

Field of Practice	%
Geological sciences	28%
Earth sciences	11%
Environmental sciences	10%
Agricultural sciences	8%
Animal sciences	8%
Chemical sciences	6%
Ecological sciences	4%

It was announced that SACNASP is improving on the old registration process by moving towards an online registration process. This system will be in place in the second half of 2012. In addition they will be introducing a regular newsletter as part of their active media campaign. They also expressed a willingness to be involved in Voluntary Associations' Congresses and Conferences, including advertisements in abstract books or presentations. SACNASP Council members have organised regional breakfast sessions in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng Provinces. A similar event will be organised in the Eastern Cape Province in November. They are also in the process of forming links with industry improving their visibility in this sector as well.

SACNASP introduced a Facebook page as well as a website to increase visibility, but more importantly to improve communication with members. It was indicated the SACNASP will approach

the GSSA to add a link to SACNASP on our website. It might be a good idea to possibly drive that process from the GSSA's side.

It was stressed that the management of the 'new' SACNASP intends to align their focus with the needs of the Voluntary Associations.

Education and Training

During the workshop SACNASP requested inputs from delegates on the matter of the extent to which SACNASP should be involved in education and training. They indicated that SAQA and CHE requested inputs on curricula development and that SACNASP could provide some sort of function in this area e.g. leading a process of guiding tertiary education to align their curricula to comply with SACNASP registration requirements.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

SACNASP instituted a system of CPD in 2011, which is linked to the renewal of registration from 1 January 2011 for all registered persons according to the CPD policy. The CPD document has been circulated to all Voluntary Associations and more information is available from SACNASP.

Voluntary Associations and SACNASP

The role of Voluntary Associations within the SACNASP structure was discussed. According to SACNASP, Voluntary Associations, such as the GSSA, have the following influence on SACNASP:

- The composition of the SACNASP Council
- Professional Affairs Committees (PAC's)
- Qualifications Assessment Committee (QAC)
- Registration Committee
- Continuing Professional Development Committee (CPD)
- Finance and Personnel Committee
- Educational matters (Curriculum development, Training Facility evaluation)

Voluntary Association Representation on SACNASP Council

SACNASP indicated that the term of the current Council is coming to an end in April 2013 and that Voluntary Associations could play a major role in determining the next composition of the Council. The following requirements are set for Council:

- Council must consist of >20 and <30 members
- >12 and <18 members must be Professional Members that must be nominated by Voluntary Associations (Calls for nominations will come from the Department of Science and Technology (DST))
- >4 and <6 members must be nominated and appointed by State
- >4 and <6 members must be nominated through an open process of public participation

Inputs and questions from delegates

- Not all SACNASP registered members are members of professional organizations such as the GSSA. Would it be possible to decrease the SACNASP registration fee for those individuals who are members of Voluntary associations? SACNASP indicated that there is no way to decrease registration fees as their fees are in line with, and even cheaper than other professional boards. It could be a possibility if the membership numbers increase drastically.
- What happens in the situation where individuals work accross sciences (fields of practices) – as is the case with a number of GSSA members. It was indicated that such an individual should be registered in at least one of the listed fields of practice (the primary degree will determine in which field this should be).
- It was indicated that there could also be an addition to the listed fields of practice in Schedule I of the Act. This should happen in the following way:
 - The Voluntary Association should identify a new field of practice

- The Voluntary Association should compile a set of criteria required for the new field of practice including required qualifications and competencies in a specific field
- The Voluntary Association should compile a document on the type of work individuals should be able to do for the new field of practice
- All these documents should then be submitted to the SACNASP Council for perusal and approval.

(The GSSA can contact SACNASP for an example as Toxicological Science was recently added as a new field of practice)

- A big concern, especially from the GSSA's side was how to handle situations where members do not have pure science degrees e.g. B.Sc. Tourism or Diploma's etc. SACNASP indicated that the GSSA (PAC) should compile guidelines on the qualifications that could be acceptable and submit it to the Council. SACNASP and the Agricultural Extension Association are also currently in a process to look into how Extension Officers can be accommodated within the SACNASP registration structure.
- A common concern from all attendees was that registration and re-registration for more than one field of practice is expensive. A suggestion was made that individuals, when first applying for SACNASP registration, pay the required registration fee for each field of practice they wish to register in, but in subsequent re-registration years only pay for "one" registration. SACNASP indicated that they will look into this suggestion.

Conclusion

It appears that the 'new' SACNASP is well-intended and superior to the lacklustre and top-down approach experienced by many in the past. It seems that most of the concerns that we as a Society had are being addressed by SACNASP to some extent. The success will depend on how this new approach is implemented in the future.