

**Address to FASAS on the occasion of the transfer of Presidency to AAS.
FASAS Council Meeting, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 9 October 2009
Professor Kurt Lambeck
President, AAS**

It will be with pleasure, anticipation and some trepidation that the Australian Academy of Science (AAS) takes on the Presidency of the Federation of Asian Scientific Academies and Societies (FASAS) in January 2010.

Pleasure because we have enjoyed our relationship with our regional colleagues over the years that FASAS has existed and out of which have grown friendships and understandings that would not otherwise have been achieved.

Anticipation, because there is much that regional groupings of scientific Academies can do for the benefit of the people in the region. FASAS has identified issues that go beyond our individual boundaries and we anticipate that our FASAS community will be able to address some of these effectively through regional collaboration.

Trepidation, because the challenges faced are substantial and the resources available are limited.

Not only the Asian region, and I include my part of the world in that, is faced with major challenges that can not even begin to be addressed by individual nations or by specialist groupings. I need not provide the list because we are all aware of them. But what many have in common is that their solution rests on being able to effectively apply science and technology.

This is something that Academies should be able to do if they do indeed represent the country's elite scientists and technologists. But it does require that these bodies are able to effectively contribute to or lead the national debate.

This has been clearly enunciated by FASAS which was established
“...primarily to promote greater awareness of the roles of S&T in nation building among the general public, business, policy and decision makers..”
and
“...to enhance the contribution and impact of academies in national and regional development.”

We recognize that this is something that we probably have not been able to achieve in our own countries and that there remains much that we can learn from each other's experience.

This, I believe, must remain an important part of FASAS' objectives: to facilitate the building of strong and independent academies across the region that can advise governments on the use of science to resolve national and regional issues.

FASAS has also recognized that to achieve its goals, science literacy of society is important. This is as much so for Australia as any other country in the region. Thus education, of not only the future scientific elite but of all members of society, must remain on our agenda and we must find the resources to advance this.

It may seem odd to some that Academies have a role in something as basic and obvious as education but experience elsewhere has shown the potential value of independent, respected and cross-cutting bodies leading the debate in improving education systems. Our challenge is to find the collective resources for this.

One of the realities that we have to face is that we are not the only frogs in the pond. Besides, the issues are too big and too important to leave to a single group.

Within our own sphere we have our sister organizations with parallel objectives. Most obviously there is AASA, but there is also the Science Council of Asia and the regional ICSU network. And then there are the groupings of technological Academies and Engineering Societies.

AAS is of the view that there are too many groupings with both overlapping and orthogonal interests and that, as a result, our efforts are dispersed and available funding is diluted.

Some of this multiplicity grew out of history and some of it as a result of the diversity of the issues that need to be addressed, and the latter cause is still such that a single association to cover all needs is unlikely to be effective.

But we do need to think hard about rationalization. Personally, I am tempted towards an IAP model in which (i) FASAS and AASA in the first instance would effectively become a sub-group of IAP with membership rules, statutes and bye laws similar to those of IAP, and (ii) the other bodies would be invited to observer status to ensure effective cooperation and a removal of overlaps.

But there may be other models and I will be interested in hearing views on these as well as on advice on how we may proceed, in the coming months, so that a more coherent proposal can be developed as 2010 progresses.

As I said, AAS looks forward to the challenges with pleasure, anticipation and trepidation. We look forward to working with FASAS members to achieve not just the goals of our Federation, but to leave lasting benefits for the peoples of our region.