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# SIL news

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## In This Issue



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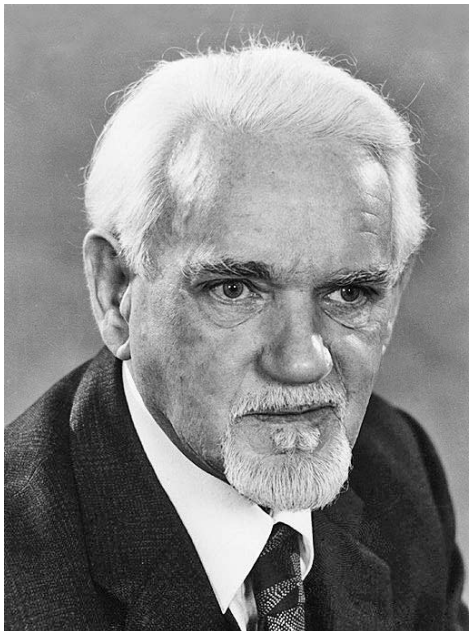
Dr. Ramesh D. Gulati
NIOO/Centre of Limnology
Post Box 1299
3600 BG Maarssen
The Netherlands
Fax: +31.294.232224
E-mail: r.gulati@nioo.knaw.nl

Contributions on a PC formatted disk, in any standard word processor or DOS (ASCII) text, or as e-mail attachments, will assist the Editor.

## Obituary: Richard A. Vollenweider (1922-2007)

Richard A. Vollenweider passed away peacefully on January 20, 2007, at the Hampton Terrace Care Centre in Burlington, Ontario, after a long illness resulting from a stroke more than two years ago. He is survived by his loving wife, Roberta, his brothers Karl and Kurt, and his nieces and nephews: Irene, Franz, Marcel, Ursula, Werner, Walter, Silvia and Roland. Thanks to the staff of Hampton Terrace for attending to Richard's daily needs. Born on 27 June 1922, in Zurich, Switzerland, Richard completed a graduate degree at the University of Zurich. He studied the dynamics of life in inland waters in Sweden, Egypt and Italy before undertaking his monumental analysis of nutrients and plant growth in lakes (eutrophication) for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In 1968, he completed his now classic study under the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) in Paris of Scientific fundamentals of the eutrophication of lakes and flowing waters, with particular reference to nitrogen and phosphorus as factors in eutrophication. It was then that he was lured by Wally Johnson of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada to head the Great Lakes biological detachment at the Canada Centre for Inland Waters (CCIW) in Burlington, Ontario. Later Richard became Senior Scientist at the CCIW in the federal Department of the Environment.



*A photo of Dr. Vollenweider taken in 1986 at the time he was awarded the Tyler Prize.*

Richard's analysis under the OECD provided the foundation for a multi-million dollar, seven-year study under the International Joint Commission of transboundary pollution in the lower Great Lakes (1963-1970). It latter also paved the way for a major OECD study of the causes and control of eutrophication in 18 countries, at 50 institutes, and of 200 water bodies over a period of 15 years. For this and earlier work with OECD, he received an Award of Excellence from the Rawson Academy of Aquatic Sciences. He shared the prestigious Tyler Environmental Prize with Werner Stumm in 1986. Many honours and awards for Richard's work included the coveted Naumann-Thienemann Medal of the International Association of Pure and Applied Limnology (SIL) in 1987, the Premio Internazionale Cervia for work on eutrophication of the Adriatic Sea, membership in UNEP's Global 500 Role of Honor, and an honorary degree from the University of McGill. Enormous knowledge and uncompromising thoroughness were the prime qualities that characterized his work. Richard paved the way for the study of inland waters and their drainage basins as open systems - rather than as microcosms. It is extraordinary that his 1966-68 OECD study was never properly reviewed or published in the scientific literature; nevertheless, it achieved the level required for recognition as a Citation Classic based on the number of citations in the scientific literature. Richard loved the mix of good conversation, food and wine. It was these characteristics, in fact, that brought him and Wally Johnson together. One of these occasions was at a Spanish restaurant in Paris after a

heavy, day-long OECD meeting. That evening later decided the matter: Richard, if offered the opportunity, would later move to Canada.

At the CCIW, Richard protected people and functions vital to good research when they were threatened with bureaucratic redirection or closure for trivial reasons. In every sense, he was well suited for the role as Senior Scientist at the CCIW. He was a leader. We are honored to have had him in our presence.

**J. R Vallentyne**
Senior Scientist (1977-1992),
Department of Fisheries and Oceans
Canada Centre for Inland Waters

*(Note: Editor SIL News: Some minor additions at the beginning of the article are based on information received by me from Richard Robarts).*

# Reports

## Limnology At Plön to Vanish. An Indication of a General Trend?

In December 2006, a large crane pulled up the "Plankton Towers" through the roof of the Max Planck Institute for Limnology at Plön, Germany. This was visibly the end of the Department of Physiological Ecology, and, as many people said, "the end of a long and influential period of limnological research at this institute". In fact, my department was already closed when I retired in September, 2006. The River Station at Schlitz, a part of the institute at Plön for more than 50 years, was closed also at the end of November 2006 with the retirement of Peter Zwick. The Tropical Working Group will close down as well when Wolfgang Junk retires in June 2007. On 1 July 2007, the institute will be renamed as Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Biology.

However, all these changes do not imply that the Max Planck Institute at Plön is under any distress. On the contrary, the Max Planck Society (MPG) has decided to expand the institute by investing more into new buildings, and establishing a third department. Those not familiar with the situation may find it difficult to understand this decision. Wherever I went in the past months, I was confronted with heads of the professional colleagues shaking and I even heard comments like: "How can you destroy one of the leading limnological institutes in Europe with such a long history?". Founded in 1892, and headed by August Thienemann from 1917 to 1957, this institute has had definitely an impressive history. It is gratifying to hear that colleagues still have such a high opinion of the work done at Plön until recently. Why end this era? The answer is rather complex because it is not only an internal decision of the MPG, but also reflects the general trend in the development of limnology in Europe.

In order to understand the changes, one first needs to have a good grasp of the mission of the Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science, which runs 80 institutes, mainly in Germany. It is a unique institution worldwide as it is not only explicitly devoted to fundamental research, but it also gives its scientific members (usually directors of a department in an institute) complete freedom to choose their research topics provided it is a cutting-edge research. There is no direct or indirect influence on research matters by politics or funding agencies. This is guaranteed by sufficient institutional funding (95 % from public sources) to run a department at high standards. Of course, institutes can acquire additional external funding, but this is not essential. These are dream conditions for a researcher. On the other hand, the MPG is expected to continuously work to keep at the fore-front of science. There is no room for routine or repetitious work. The consequence is a tight, biannual international evaluation of the work, and more importantly, a thorough review of the field of research when the director retires. The basic assumption is that within the 20 to 25 years of a director's stay at the MPG, his field should be an established science and should be continued elsewhere. Long traditions do not count. The resources must be exploited to start a new challenge.

During the past 90 years, there has been a continuous change in the research topics at the Max Planck Institute for Limnology. August Thienemann's holistic ecosystem concept was

*Removal of the Plankton Towers through the open roof of the Max Planck Institute for Limnology at Plön, 18 years after their installation in 1988. (Photos: G. Augustin)*