



My column this month is devoted to the Canadian Geoscience Council (CGC). It's a big topic, and I have found it hard to distill down to essential points; it's also by nature a somewhat boring topic, but I've done my best to make it readable.

In brief point form, here are the issues. The CGC was set up in 1972 to act as an umbrella organization for the earth sciences at the national level. All of the 17 or so societies that make up the CGC have come to the unanimous decision that the CGC has, over the past decade, failed to achieve its mandate. A concerted effort to overhaul and replace the CGC with an effective body is underway, spearheaded by CSPG past-President Jeff Packard, and Simon Hanmer of the Geological Survey of Canada.

The questions I'll address are: Do we need a CGC? How will the new CGC be different than the old? What will a renewed CGC give us? What will the new look CGC cost the CSEG in terms of money, time and resources? Where are we now in the process? Should the CSEG support the renewal process?

Do we need a CGC? One of the CSEG's mandates is to promote the science of geophysics. This means not only downwards to schools, universities, and the general public, but also upwards to the provincial and federal seats of power. We need a voice for the earth sciences in Ottawa. The Canadian economy is to a large extent based on metals and oil & gas. Who finds those commodities? The earth sciences. I believe it is our moral duty, both to our smaller earth science community and to the general Canadian public, to support an organization that will work to ensure adequate funding for earth sciences, and adequate earth science content in school curricula.

How will the new CGC be different than the old? Jeff and Simon have very carefully analysed the past weaknesses of the CGC, and crafted a totally new structure. Rather than go into detail on this, please contact me if you're interested. But the main change is that the structure is far more industry focused than the disciplinary / academic flavour of the old CGC. Our federal government is mainly concerned with the performance of the economy, so it is critical that the relevance of the earth sciences to the economy is reflected in the structure of the new CGC. Another major change is the introduction of votes weighted by society membership numbers, giving the energy sector societies far more of a voice.

What will a renewed CGC give us? To be honest, I don't feel that a renewed CGC will give us that much more, at least not in the short term. There may be some minor member benefits at a personal level. But in the long term an effective CGC will better ensure the future health of the earth sciences, both in academia and industry. Canadian universities are largely government funded, so effective lobbying will allow

Canadian universities to continue offering world class geology and geophysics programs. This will result in a healthy supply of well-trained geoscientists for our industries in the future. My perception is that government funding of industry, which is rampant in most developed countries, in Canada is biased in favour of Ontario and Quebec manufacturing (have you heard the sucking sound of the Bombardier federal tax money vacuum?) Shouldn't the innovators in our earth science based industries have more access to those kinds of competitive advantages? That's what effective lobbying should or could achieve.

What will the new look CGC cost the CSEG in terms of money, time and resources? The dollar cost to the CSEG is fairly insignificant, \$2000 for 2006. This would easily be eclipsed by the bar tab on one evening of the Doodlespiel. In terms of resources, I picture the CGC acting as a bridge between societies to promote the better use of existing resources. For example, if a geophysical society in Halifax is putting together some outreach material with seismic content for schools, the CGC could get them in touch with us and we could provide them with existing tools we've put together.

The bigger cost I see is that to make a renewed CGC work, we as a society and as individuals have to buy into the concept that we're part of a bigger Canadian earth science community. We will need to reach out more to the rest of Canada, something that incidentally is already happening with a successful first year of our Distinguished Lecturer program, and the establishment of student ambassadors across Canadian universities. We will need our CSEG superstars and heroes to step forward to serve and be recognized on a bigger national stage. And we will need to change our thinking from seeing the CGC as some external body that isn't doing anything for us, to seeing it as an organization that we are part of, and are committed to.

Where are we now in the process? The CSEG executive has voted to support the CGC renewal for 2006. We will revisit things in the fall, and gauge how the process is going, with the criteria being whether the CGC achieves self-defined milestones. So we're keeping an eye on progress, and if it looks like the effort is stalling and resembling past attempts, then we're prepared to pull the plug.

Should the CSEG support the renewal process? My opinion is absolutely, it's our moral duty. I will qualify that by saying that if the executive decides in the fall or a year from now that we should pull out due to lack of progress, then I will support that. I ask for members to express their opinions on this issue via the RECORDER magazine. If any of you are interested in seeing more detailed background information on this topic, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Have a great summer everyone!

Oliver Kuhn

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JULY			
2-6	ASEG Australian Earth Sciences Convention	Melbourne	www.earth2006.org.au
10-13	SEG Summer Research Workshop	Snowbird, Utah	www.seg.org/meetings/srw2006