

## **Income Based Dues Structure for Society of Wetland Scientist Members**

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Many of you are aware of the new membership dues structure based on income, which was approved by the membership at the annual meeting in Cairns, Australia in 2006. Within this structure, members pay various amounts of dues depending on their incomes, giving a break to members with incomes of less than \$40,000 per year. Also, at this meeting, we established a reduced rate for students and members from developing countries. The members voted for this structure in the spirit of fostering the membership of all wetland scientists and managers. With the dues increase of 2005, we didn't want to make it impossible for some members to maintain their membership.

Since starting the new income based dues structure, we have had a number of complaints from members. In my discussions, I detect that most members agree with the idea of giving a break to members with lower incomes. The objection to the income question stems from members not wanting to report their income without knowing what might be done with this information.

This year, the Membership Committee I Chair tried to come up with an alternate approach to income based dues. The Board decided not to change the current income-based dues structure because no one could think of a new way to ask the income question that wouldn't cause additional problems. In the end, the surest way to give a break to members with lower incomes is to ask the income question on the membership form. Many other organizations use income based dues structures, most notably the Ecological Society of America.

So, we are not making any changes to the dues income structure at the present time. Let me assure you that SWS has no interest in knowing what your income is! The income question is solely designed to identify members who need a small break on their dues because of lower income, for example, because these members are early in their professional careers or because they have recently started a new business. SWS puts the income information into a database by the category that you report, and the information is only accessed by the business office and the secretary-general. No one outside of SWS administrators has access to this coded information in the database.

For future planning of income structure, if anyone has a good idea about how dues could be structured to give members with lower income a break without specifically asking that question on the membership form, please let me know. I will take such suggestions to the Membership Committee, and we will try again.