

A Visit Fit for an Emperor and Empress of Japan

Sunday, July 12 of 2009, marked the day that the Emperor and Empress of Japan graced the halls of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Institute of Ocean Sciences (IOS), site of the PICES Secretariat, in Sidney, British Columbia. Although Emperor Akihito had last visited Canada as a Crown Prince in 1953, this was his first visit to Canada as reigning Japanese Emperor. Apart from the more traditional meetings and events that marked his official 11-day visit to Canada, the visit to IOS was for personal interests, as the Emperor is a noted and passionate marine biologist, with 30 published papers.

The Emperor and Empress rarely make public appearances even in their home country, so it was considered quite a coup for IOS to have them visit the facilities. Befitting such an extraordinary honour, preparations for the visit went into high gear at the Institute many weeks before Their Majesties' arrival. Except for the Imperial visitors, Japanese and Canadian delegations of senior officials and invited scientists, the Institute visit was a closed event. After formal greetings by, among others, Dr. Timothy Parsons, 2001 Japan Prize recipient, the visitors were treated to a short film (in Japanese) about the Institute and its activities. The film included the role PICES, as an inter-governmental science organization, plays in encouraging scientific collaboration among its member countries in the study of the North Pacific Ocean.

During a scientific tour that followed, senior IOS scientists (several of them have been also playing an important role in PICES activities) gave presentations at stations along the display path. Dr. Kenneth Denman (2007 PICES Wooster Award recipient) reviewed research on the effects of climate change on North Pacific marine ecosystems. Dr. Eddy Carmack described the International Polar Year and the Canadian Three Oceans Program focused on the Arctic and climate change. Dr. Richard Thomson introduced the international Canadian-led NEPTUNE Cabled Ocean Observatory project. Dr. David Mackas greeted Their Majesties at the plankton lab and presented research linking plankton and climate change. Overall, the biggest problem encountered was to keep the event on schedule. What originally was supposed to be a 45-minute tour of the facilities turned into one almost two hours long! Their Majesties were both very engaged and interested. Their knowledge of ocean science was impressive, and they were "up close and personal" with the presenters, asking many astute questions. Discussions with scientists continued during a light lunch tastefully arranged at the IOS cafeteria overlooking the grounds and the waters of Saanich Inlet.

The event was a resounding success, and this success was the product of a lot of hard work by many people, spread across all of the organizational units at IOS and coordinated

by Mr. Robin Brown, Manager of Ocean Sciences Division. This visit not only gave scientists the opportunity to interact with Their Majesties, but it also provided His Majesty the opportunity to put his own scientific interests into a wider context of climate change and issues involving ocean processes. We are grateful to DFO/IOS for giving PICES the exposure and opportunity to be introduced to Their Majesties, and the accompanying media, during the visit.



Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko pass a polar bear image during a tour of IOS (Photo by Todd Korol, Reuters).



PICES Executive Secretary, Dr. Alexander Bychkov, and Dr. Sus Tabata (IOS Senior Scientist, retired) are introduced by Dr. Wendy Watson-Wright (Assistant Deputy Minister of Science, DFO) to the Emperor and Empress during their visit to IOS (Photo by Adrian Lam, Times Colonist).

PICES PRESS

Published and produced by PICES Secretariat
P.O. Box 6000,
9860 West Saanich Road,
Sidney, B.C., Canada. V8L 4B2
Tel: 1 (250) 363-6366
Fax: 1 (250) 363-6827
E-mail: secretariat@pices.int
<http://www.pices.int>
ISSN 1195-2512