

PRESIDENT OF HUNATIP LÁSZLÓ VARADI WAS HONOURED BY EAS WITH HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP



László Váradi with EAS President Bente Torstensen and EAS Executive Director Alistair Lane

At the opening ceremony of the Aquaculture Europe 2023 (AE2023) event in Vienna, Austria, the European Aquaculture Society (EAS) gave its highest award, the Honorary Life Membership, to László Varadi, who has dedicated his life and professional career to the recognition and development of freshwater aquaculture in central and eastern Europe.

Varadi has been involved in aquaculture development since 1974 when he started to work at the Research Institute of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Irrigation (HAKI) in Hungary. Besides R&D activities aiming at the development of sustainable freshwater aquaculture systems and technologies in Hungary, he was also involved in various aquaculture development projects in developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, mainly as an expert for the FAO. He retired as director of HAKI (now part of MATE) in 2012.

Before, and when the first EU Strategy for the Sustainable Development of European Aquaculture was released in 2000, László was a frequent flyer to Brussels presenting to the Commission, the Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions the attributes and development prospects of freshwater aquaculture in Europe. This was not only for the production and diversification of species but also on subjects such as cormorant predation, the preservation of wetland areas and the first articulate formulation of the ecosystem services that pond aquaculture provided.

In 2004, László was the driving force behind the creation and establishment of the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Central and Eastern Europe (NACEE). This was an important step towards the reduction of the gap between the Eastern and Western European regions in aquaculture cooperation after the economic and political changes in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s.

Technology and innovation are key words for László and the processes aimed at strengthening aquaculture innovation in Hungary have developed in parallel with the European ones. The Hungarian Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Platform (HUNATiP), of which László is president, can be considered a milestone. In close cooperation with the European Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Platform (EATiP), it contributes to the harmonization and coordination of Hungarian aquaculture innovation programs and independently carries out innovation activities. He was also president of the Hungarian Aquaculture Association.

Varadi received the FEAP Award for Excellence in 2015 for his contributions to freshwater aquaculture, by playing a key role in developing the Hungarian sector as well as for his strong involvement and cooperation with less developed countries.

Over recent years, László has split his time between Hungary and Laos. Cooperation in aquaculture development with Laos started in the 1980s and was supported by FAO at that time. One recent milestone was the establishment of a Hungarian-Lao joint venture company (ADC), which produces high-quality tilapia fingerlings. Fish culture was the “entry point” for other projects (e.g. feed manufacturing, livestock production, plant cultivation, irrigation) in the production of healthy and safe food in Laos.

Finally, László was the EAS president between 2006 and 2008, and a strong supporter of all of its aquaculture European events, being present at each since the mid-1990s. He chaired the AE2023 Steering Committee, making sure that its focus was not only on Austria, but also on Czechia, Germany and Hungary, and taking a lead on the development of the AE2023 Industry Forum.

Honorary Life Membership of EAS is an award given to those who have made a significant impact on the development of European aquaculture. Since 1981, EAS has given this award to very few persons, including Eric Edwards, Peter Hjul, Colin Nash, Courtney Hough, Pascal Divanach, Patrick Sorgeloos, Michael New, Sachi Kaushik and, Stefano Cataudella in 2022. EAS president 2022-2024, Bente Torstensen introduced and presented the award at the opening ceremony of AE2023 that was attended by 2,293 participants from 80 countries.