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*Senator the Hon. Robert Hill
Minister for the Environment
Parliament House
Canberra. ACT. 2600.*

14th October 1997

Dear Senator Hill

Funding for the Australian Biological Resources Study (ABRS)

We write to you as the Presidents of three scientific societies representing the interests of approximately 700 Australian scientists. Together we are responsible for the discovery, naming and classifying of the country's plants, animals and microorganisms. Such studies are essential for the responsible management of Australia's biodiversity.

It is with some concern that we note in your speech on 3rd October at the Systematics Conference in Adelaide, delivered on your behalf by Chris Gallus, that the level of funding for the Australian Biological Resources Study will remain at a drastically low level, after it was cut by 40% for the current financial year (i.e. from \$3.38 million in 1995-96 to \$2.685 million in 1996-97).

Of immediate and direct concern to the scientific community and, importantly, to those who are major users of biosystematic and bioresource information in Australia, is that the ABRS Participatory Program will receive only \$1.046 million for research grants and contracts in 1998.

ABRS is the only agency in Australia that specifically funds the discovery and documentation of our incredibly rich flora and fauna. Most of our biodiversity is very poorly known, and the importance of these studies cannot be underestimated. Information on the diversity and distribution of our fauna and flora directly underpins the management of our natural resources for tourism, conservation, forestry, agriculture and fisheries.

ABRS is central to the continuation of research on the diversity of Australia's living resources, and its record developed over the last 20 years is the envy of and a model for many other countries. ABRS is essential to the funding of taxonomic research on Australia's plants, animals and microorganisms, and making this information available to ecologists and environmental managers through its publications program.

We strongly urge that, given the central role ABRS has played in the understanding and management of Australia's biodiversity, its level of funding be returned to pre-1996 levels and be increased further in following years. One way of achieving this would be to direct a small proportion of funds from the National Heritage Trust to ABRS, so that the task of documenting Australia's living resources can be undertaken at a level commensurate with its size and importance.

We look forward to your reply to this urgent and important matter, and we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely,

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