

From: Bob Mesibov <mesibov@southcom.com.au>  
To: Margaret.Sheil@arc.gov.au  
Cc: era@arc.gov.au  
Subject: Journal rankings - comment from Society of Australian Systematic Biologists  
Date: Tue, 16 Feb 2010 18:13:36 +1100

Dear Prof Sheil,

I write on behalf of the Society of Australian Systematic Biologists (<http://www.sasb.org.au>) to express disappointment with the recently announced ERA journal rankings.

Among the 20000+ journals on the list are many that are regularly used as outlets for publication of high-quality Australian research in systematics. Unfortunately the ERA rankings do not reflect the standing of those outlets in the global systematics community.

It is especially alarming that museum journals generally have a 'C' ranking, including the principal Australian ones:

Memoirs of Museum Victoria  
Memoirs of the Queensland Museum  
Records of the Australian Museum  
(Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia + Records of the South Australian Museum)  
Records of the Western Australian Museum

The most serious distortion in the ranking, however, is clearly the result for *Zootaxa*, the world's leading journal for publication in zoological systematics. *Zootaxa* not only publishes far more high-quality, peer-reviewed animal taxonomy than any other journal, it has also become one of the most highly cited in the world of systematics, despite having been published for only ca 10 years.

Ranking *Zootaxa* at 'C' demonstrates that the one-ranking-fits-all approach taken by the ERA program has ignored the special nature of publication in systematics. High-quality systematics publications:

- are of global value

...because specialists working on particular groups of plants and animals need to be familiar with the world literature on the group

- are of lasting value

...because a monograph on a particular group may be the 'last word' on that group for many decades; today's systematists make regular use of 19th and early 20th century taxonomic works, citing them in the bibliographies of their latest papers

- are of great value for standing in the systematics community

...because the sole author of a major, high-quality taxonomic work on a particular group is established as an expert on that group simply by virtue of having published that evidence of long and hard effort in solving difficult taxonomic problems. This way of achieving scientific standing is very different from that in fast-moving scientific research programs where number of publications per year, number of collaborators and 'piecemeal' publication are all indicators of quality activity and high standing.

We would appreciate hearing from the ARC on how it proposes to recognise the special nature of systematics research and publication in future. We are aware that ARC does not often fund systematics research and that systematists in Australian museums, herbaria and botanical gardens are often reluctant to submit proposals to ARC for that reason. Against this background, ARC's deprecating the principal outlets used by systematists is very disappointing.

Regards,  
Dr Robert Mesibov  
President, Society of Australian Systematic Biologists