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

18th December 1996

Dear Senator Hill

## **Funding for the Australian Biological Resources Study (ABRS)**

I write to you as a member of the Executive Committee of the new Society of Australian Systematic Biologists. This Society represents the interests of 150 systematic and evolutionary biologists throughout Australia, including botanists, zoologists, parasitologists and mycologists. These professional scientists are responsible for all of the studies on the taxonomy and biodiversity of Australia's biota.

The Society has recently become aware of the drastic financial cuts imposed on the Australian Biological Resources Study (ABRS). Funding for ABRS in 1996-1997 is \$2.685 million, as opposed to \$3.38 million in 1995-1996; and there is the expectation of further cuts in future financial years. The immediate consequences for ABRS are a reduction of 21% in Participatory Program grant funding (\$1.51 million as opposed to \$1.9 million) and 60% in operational funds across ABRS. The cut in operational funds will have a most serious effect on the ABRS Publication Program, especially in the long term, through reduction in editing resources (including the potential discontinuation of the *Algae of Australia* series) and the funds for printing costs.

As you will be aware, ABRS is central to the continuation of research into the diversity of Australia's living resources, and it has an enviable record developed over the last 20 years that is a model for many other developed countries. ABRS is essential to the funding of basic taxonomic research on Australia's plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms, the production of catalogues of animal and plant species, and the publication of the *Flora of Australia*, *Fungi of Australia*, *Algae of Australia* and *Fauna of Australia* series of books.

The Society of Australian Systematic Biologists strongly urges, given the pivotal role that ABRS plays in research and the documentation of Australia's biodiversity, that its funding be returned to pre-1996 levels and be increased in future years. The Society of Australian Systematic Biologists is also concerned that ABRS is not listed to be funded under the National Heritage Trust, and yet this funding fits ideally with the present Government's statements regarding the objectives of this Trust.

I look forward to your reply to this matter, which is fundamental to all Australian systematic and evolutionary biologists.

yours sincerely

Dr David A. Morrison  
Executive Committee  
Society of Australian Systematic Biologists