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Dr. Andy Austin  
President,  
Society of Australian Systematic Biologists

20 October 1998

Dear Andy

At our annual meeting in June, the Council of the Society of Systematic Biologists (SSB) discussed ways in which we could interact more effectively with other systematic societies. One result of that discussion is a renewed interest in helping to organize some type of International Federation that might serve as an umbrella organization for systematic societies. In addition to talking about this with you I have also mentioned it to the new South African Society for Systematic Biology, and they too are interested. I have also made some suggestions to the systematics group in New Zealand, and I need to continue that conversation. However, I wanted to get something down in writing that I could send you for your meeting coming up on the 26th of November, so I thought I would put a few things down that I have discussed with our council and most importantly with our new journal editor, Dick Olmstead. It would be great if your council could discuss this at your meeting, and perhaps come up with some constructive comments and maybe even vote to proceed with the discussion. So with all that in mind please take a look at these ideas that I have been tossing around and let me know what you think.

The purpose of the Federation would be to encourage more international interaction in the systematic community, and to use that interaction to call attention to the importance of systematics as well as to foster joint research projects. When I travel I am constantly amazed at the number of people who are working toward the same goals and are not aware of other similar efforts. For instance, scientists in South Africa and Australia are way ahead of scientists in the U.S.A. in using systematic information for conservation purposes. Hopefully, a Federation would encourage the dissemination of information, electronically at least, and result in more interaction. From that starting point we could branch out into helping societies work for maintaining, or even increasing, positions and funding in systematics.

As you know, SSB publishes the journal *Systematic Biology*. About one quarter of our issues (c. 750; data from issue #4, 1997) are mailed to foreign addresses. Of the c. 750 foreign mailings c. 420 were personal memberships and the remainder went to libraries. In South Africa there are 10 personal memberships / 12 library subscriptions, in Australia there are 35 / 39, and in New Zealand there are 14 / 10. You may not know that our annual meetings (held in conjunction with Society for the Study of Evolution) are large, usually around 1200 people with about 40% of the attendees being students. We sponsor symposia and sometimes the resulting papers are published in the journal. However, the meetings are very "North American", attracting mostly scientists from the U.S.A. and Canada. So, in addition to the other goals of the Federation, as a society SSB is interested in increasing its international interactions at the annual meeting and in the articles published in *Systematic Biology*. Specifically, it would be good to include more speakers in the symposia and papers in the journal from non-North Americans.

Below is a draft proposal to facilitate discussion, so please feel free to copy it to anyone you think may be interested. All suggestions are welcome. I will send a similar letter to South Africa and New Zealand and see what they have to say as well. I will also send a copy to the council of SSB. I hope we can come to some type of agreement, as I think we could put together a great group of individuals. The directory alone would be a great benefit.

Sincerely,

*Vicki Funk*

*President,  
Society of Systematic Biologists  
National Museum of Natural History  
Smithsonian Institution*

## **International Federation of Systematic Societies**

**Purpose:** To encourage more international interaction in the systematic community, and to use that interaction to call attention to the importance of systematics as well as to foster joint research projects.

**Membership:** Open to all Systematic Societies; also open to individual members who are not members of any Systematic Society. In the beginning we would start with a few societies but once all the details are worked out we would welcome any society.

**Dues:** None.

**Communication:** Information would be shared via email and website, and later perhaps a newsletter. At the very least we could start by cross-linking our systematic web pages for increased communication. Also, we could have a joint website membership directory where members of all societies are listed, and we could include a category of what people work on and their areas of interest. Just think what it would be like to know who all the spider taxonomists are!

**Journal:** Of course we would hope that many of your members who are not already members of SSB would join and receive *Systematic Biology*. To try and broaden our perspectives and increase interest in South Africa, Australia and other areas we would propose appointing an Associate Editor from each country. The job of that individual would be to encourage their colleagues to submit articles to *Systematic Biology* and to provide an incountry contact person for the journal. Individuals could submit their article through either the Associate Editor from that country or through the main editorial office. Membership in SSB is only \$35 per year for regular members and \$15 for students, and all non-USA journals are sent via air mail at no additional cost to members.

**Annual Meeting:** Each society would have its own regular meeting(s), but hopefully the increased communication would lead to increased international participation in symposia.

**Organization:** Each society would continue to function as it sees fit. There would be no interference in any of the member societies' business by the Federation. The Federation would be governed by a board consisting of the President of each society and one additional member-at-large from each society (the election or appointment of this second individual would be determined by each society). The Society Presidents would serve on the board for 1-2 years depending on the term of office prescribed by the constitution of the individual societies; however, the member-at-large would serve a longer term, perhaps 4 years, and the terms would be staggered to provide consistency. The board would "meet" via email, and at any of the societies annual meetings if several of the members are present at that meeting.

**Other things to consider:** We might be able to arrange for a small rebate per member (c. \$5) to the societies for their Members who are also members of SSB. For instance, if there are 20 South Africans who are members of SSB, then at the end of the year we would send a check for \$100 to the South African Society.