

Minutes of the Fourth General Meeting of the Society of Australian Systematic Biologists

Seminar Room, Australian Museum
6 College St, Sydney
5.05 pm Thursday 23 November 2000

Attendance: 18 members.

1. Apologies

Andy Austin, Steve Donnellan, Muhammad Iqbal, Chris Lambkin, Greg Rouse, Judy West.

2. Business arising from Minutes of Third Annual General Meeting

All to be dealt with under other items.

3. President's Report

The year 2000 has been a quiet one for the Society, being in between meetings and the seemingly total preoccupation with the Olympics. The next biennial SASB conference will be held in Melbourne in 2001 jointly with the Australasian Evolution Society. It will be organised by Robin Wilson (incoming SASB President) and Mark Elgar of the Evolution Society. Robin will give us a more detailed overview of what is planned for this meeting.

As with last year in November, "Science Meets Parliament Day", was held at Parliament House, Canberra, organised by the Federation of Australian Science and Technology Societies (FASTS). Because the SASB is not a member of FASTS, SASB was not officially represented. However, some SABS members were there and were able to speak for systematics and lobby on behalf of ABRS. The issue of SASB becoming a member of FASTS was discussed at last year's AGM and was decided against, mainly because of the cost and the necessity of levying fees. However, although it was not done this year, some more formal arrangement with SASB members attending might be considered. Alternatively, we could possibly consider an affiliation with like-minded societies and joint representation.

The Fourth International Legume Conference is being held in Canberra in July next year. Because it will have a primary emphasis on systematics and biogeography, and following a request from Mike Crisp, one of the organisers, the Society has provided \$1500 towards their expenses and is billed as a partner.

In August Winston sent a submission as President of the Society commenting on the Biological Diversity Advisory Council's paper on "Biodiversity Research: Australia's Priorities". David Morrison sent a submission on behalf of the Society in early October (while Winston was overseas) commenting on the report from the Chief Scientist Dr Robin Batterham, "The Chance to Change". Both documents are available on the Society's web page.

SASB joined the International Federation of Systematic Societies ("a society of societies" as Mike Crisp put it) last year. Our main involvement has been having Dan Faith as an Associate Editor of the journal *Systematic Biology*. Dan has agreed to continue in this role at least for a further three years (the term of the incoming Editor of the journal, Chris Simon).

Winston welcomed the two new Council members: Dr Muhammad Iqbal, a postdoctoral fellow working on parasitic wasps with Andy Austin, and Dr Dan Faith, a Principal Research Scientist at the Australian Museum; they replace Chris Lambkin and Mike Crisp. Winston thanked both Chris

and Mike for their contributions over the last year. Mike Crisp has served as Vice-President, President and Councillor.

Winston congratulated and thanked the "real workers" of the Society:- David Morrison and Steve Donnellan. They have agreed to continue as Secretary and Treasurer respectively, with David also responsible for the essential task of maintaining the web page. Winston also congratulated Robin Wilson who has been elected as President. Robin has already served on Council for two years, firstly as a Councillor and then as Vice-President.

At last year's AGM it was suggested that the one-year limit for Council members, or even the positions of President or Vice President, be relaxed to two years or possibly longer. This would require a referendum under our Constitution -- something that was to be considered in the last 12 months but was not. A referendum should be held early in 2001.

Some significant events occurred this year. The probable disbanding of the CSIRO DELTA team is of great concern. Winston had discussions with relevant people regarding this early in the year, and it seems little can be done unless independent funding can be obtained. ABRS has been going through some major administrative changes -- and a new director has now been appointed. The grants program received a cut of around \$80,000 this year with only about 23% (28) of the new grant applications being funded. It is very important that ABRS grants funding be quarantined from the rest of ABRS's budget, as has been strongly suggested in the past in meetings with the Minister. Winston met with the Acting Director (Bill Phillips) of ABRS early in the year, and emphasised the necessity to maintain a strong grants program. Bill outlined the new initiatives that ABRS is taking, and these are also described in a document on the Society's web page. Amongst these is a strong move into electronic delivery and a marked reduction in paper-based products. The Australian Biological Information Facility (ABIF) is now online and showing great potential. In the meantime Ian Cresswell has been appointed director and will be taking up the position soon.

ARC continues to fund systematic programs at a very low level, partly a reflection of the poor funding that it receives. The Prime Minister is now saying that additional funds for science are a priority -- we shall see.

This was the first year that the Biosystematics undergraduate degree programme ran at the University of New England. This degree course is run in partnership with the Australian Museum and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney.

Winston attended a workshop on the possible development of an Australian "Virtual Museum" organised by the Council of Heads of Australian Fauna Collections (CHAFC), in Canberra in mid June. This meeting looked at the development of an integrated database system for Australian faunal collections -- along the lines of the Australian Virtual Herbarium. The workshop was very positive, but so far there has been little sign of any post-meeting activity. It is this sort of project that will add value to research collections over and above the taxonomic values that were mainly envisaged when they were assembled. It is important that the Society push in all available forums the necessity for Commonwealth commitment to meaningful funding to database the huge amount of biological information residing in our herbaria and museums.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Society currently has a balance of \$4,345.29, as a result of its role in the Dampier 300 Conference in Perth.

Financial Statement 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2000

Assets at 30 June 1999	\$	\$
Westpac Cheque account	2,715.25	
TOTAL ASSETS		2,715.25
Income		

Interest	12.93	
Dampier 300 Conference refund	3,120.65	
TOTAL INCOME		3,133.58
Expenditure		
Bank Charges	3.53	
Fourth International Legume Conference float	1,500.00	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE		1,503.53
Assets at 30 June 2000		
Westpac Cheque account	4,345.29	
TOTAL ASSETS		4,345.29

Motion: That the Financial Statement as presented be accepted. Moved: Robin Wilson. Seconded: Pat Hutchings. Accepted nem. con.

Steve has taken the necessary steps to obtain an Australian Business Number (ABN) for the Society. Apparently, GST-exempt organisations that the SASB has financial dealings with require the SASB to have an ABN so that they can legitimately recover any GST component.

5. Secretary's Report

David Morrison reported that as at 22 November 2000 the Society had 298 members. This was a 7.5% increase over that reported at the last meeting (the previous numbers were:- 1999: 277; 1998: 264, 1997: 216). There is a constant trickle of new members throughout the year, usually from the on-line form on the web page. Chris Lambkin was also responsible for recruiting a number of members from the University of Queensland.

Unfortunately, this estimate of the size of the Society is a somewhat unreliable figure, due to members changing their email addresses without informing the Secretary. In fact, at least 10% of the members were uncontactable at the time of the meeting. Chasing such members is a continual (and unnecessary) drain on the Secretary's time -- most members are eventually traced in one way or another, but only after considerable effort. The two most common sources of change to email addresses are government agencies changing their network addresses, and postgraduate students graduating and thus moving. The latter group can be very difficult to trace.

Given this situation, the Society is actually losing members as fast as it is gaining them. SASB still does not represent more than a relatively small fraction of the systematists in Australia. Peter Weston raised the issue of being more pro-active about gaining new members. There is a list of members, arranged by institution, on the web page, and members were encouraged to use this list to identify people within their own institutions who are not yet members.

David also pointed out that Pete Cranston's Electronic Guide to the Chironomidae was added to the SASB web page at the beginning of the year, as agreed at the last Meeting. This Guide has been updated once since its inception, and in fact occupies most of the Society's web space (c. 20Mb). This is an example of what SASB can be doing to help disseminate taxonomic information.

David also pointed out that the problems associated with the current location of the SASB World Wide Web Home Page, as highlighted at previous meetings, would be ongoing. It will therefore be necessary to keep an eye on this situation, with a view to moving the Web pages elsewhere. Given the healthy financial situation, the possibility of using a commercial server was discussed, especially as this service can provide a unique domain name for the Society. No decision was made.

6. Society Meetings

Robin Wilson reported on the organisational arrangements for the next SASB meeting, to be held in July. He provided a printed handout, explaining that the information was soon to be added to a web page. (The web page has since been created, and there is a link to it from the SASB home page.)

There would be concurrent sessions running over four days, with some sessions free for other activities.

There was some discussion about the projected costs (eg. \$300 for registration, \$90 for the dinner). It was agreed that the proposals were in line with what has occurred at other conferences, assuming that c. 150 people attend.

Mike Crisp reported on the arrangements for the Fourth International Legume Conference, which SASB is sponsoring, also to be held in July. This is the fourth in a series of specialist meetings concerning the biology of legumes. It thus incorporates more than systematics, although this will be a primary focus. The organisation is well advanced, and there is a web page for those interested in attending (there is a link to it from the SASB home page).

7. Electronic Publication

Shortly before the Meeting, Robin Wilson had circulated electronically to all members a Discussion Paper concerning "On-line Publishing of Systematic Journals in Australia". The Paper has also been added to the SASB web page.

This Paper is intended to canvass opinion about the roles that SASB might play in making available, via the Internet, published taxonomic information. Robin is hoping for some feedback from members on these issues. This will result in a new version of the Paper in the new year, which will be used as the basis for a workshop to be held at the next SASB conference. The immediate activity is to speak to CSIRO Publishing about sponsorship of this workshop.

Robin also raised the issue of broadening the umbrella of what is considered as publication of taxonomic information. The mooted implementations of ideas such as the Virtual Australian Herbarium and Virtual Australian Museum are indicative of the way in which taxonomic information is likely to be disseminated in the future, and SASB should have a proactive role in the development of these concepts. An electronic presence should provide a greater public profile for systematics.

8. Other Business

Winston returned to the point that it was suggested that the one-year limit for some of the Council members be relaxed to two years. This would require a referendum under our Constitution, which had not yet happened. One of the consequences of this is that Winston had recently been elected as Vice-President but he is not intending to continue as the President-elect. Mike Crisp expressed concern about a President coming in "cold" under these circumstances. Winston considered that prior experience on the Council was desirable but not essential.

9. Close

There being no other business, Winston Ponder thanked everyone for their attendance at the meeting, and handed control of the meeting to the incoming President, Robin Wilson.

Robin Wilson offered his thanks for their efforts to Winston and the Council on behalf of the members, particularly to the outgoing Council members Mike Crisp (who has served as Councillor, Vice-President and President) and Chris Lambkin. His first action as President was to invite everyone to the pub.

The meeting closed at 5.45 pm.