

Summary of the Inaugural Meeting of the Society of Australian Systematic Biologists

Andy Austin
Mike Crisp

The first meeting of the Society of Australian Systematic Biologists was held on the 4th October 1996 at the University of Melbourne, in conjunction with the "Beyond the Floras" Conference organised by the Australian Systematic Botany Society (ASBS). Approximately 40 people attended, and it was chaired by Andy Austin. What follows here is a brief summary of the proceedings of the meeting, as well as comments and suggestions from people who contacted us beforehand and could not be there. The meeting was mainly concerned about the aims of the Society, its relationship to other scientific societies in Australia, such as ASBS, and how the Society should move towards formally establishing itself.

Aims

The aims of the Society were presented and discussed as follows:-

- To represent the activities of all systematic and evolutionary biologists in Australia;
- To lobby government agencies and granting agencies for improved funding, training, etc.;
- To foster the training of systematists;
- To hold meetings that deal with general scientific issues (e.g. biogeography, biodiversity, phylogenetics, molecular systematics, data-basing, evolutionary biology, etc.).

Communication

It was strongly recommended that all communication for the Society would be via email, and that the Society should not be involved in publishing a journal as there are already numerous relevant journals in existence. Very pleasing is that David Morrison, at the University of Technology Sydney, has offered to run the email system, as well as a web site, and the former will be transferred from Mike Crisp before the end of 1996.

Relationship with other Societies

There was substantial discussion regarding the role of the Society with respect to other scientific societies in Australia, particularly ASBS. Numerous people expressed concern about the overlap between this Society and ASBS. However, it was pointed out that only about one-third of the current members are botanists, and that there is substantial impetus from animal systematics and those who work on other taxa (fungi, protists, etc.) to develop a general systematics society. One obvious point that came from the meeting was the need for the Society and ASBS to co-operate and maintain good communication in the future. Given the good will evident at the meeting, and from comments from a range of people, this should not be difficult to achieve. Tim Entwisle, the new President of ASBS, said that he wishes to maintain close liaison with us.

Society Structure

To meet the aims of the Society and service the needs of what could turn out to be a large membership, the Society will need to have a governing executive, and be constituted eventually as a formal scientific society. The suggestion that the Society could stay as an informal group that only communicates by email now has very little support. The Society will then need to consider how

such an executive might be formed and what positions it should comprise (e.g. President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Council Members). To achieve this and deal with other essential matters, it has been suggested that an Organising Group be formed.

Organising Group

The Organising Group would have specific aims as follows:-

- To determine an interim structure for the Society's executive, and how it would be formed (presumably by democratic election);
- To expand the membership of the Society;
- To determine the name of the Society.

It was strongly suggested that these aims should be achieved as soon as possible, and certainly within a period of 12 months. The Organising Group would comprise six people as follows:-

- Andy Austin (an insect systematist at the University of Adelaide)
- Mike Crisp (a botanist at the Australian National University)
- Mark Harvey (an invertebrate systematist at the Western Australian Museum)
- David Morrison (a botanist and protozoologist at the University of Technology Sydney)
- Cheryl Grgurinovic (a mycologist from the University of New South Wales)
- Steve Donnellan (a vertebrate molecular systematist from the Evolutionary Biology Unit, South Australian Museum).

The Organising Group will be co-convened by Andy Austin and Mike Crisp.

Next Meeting

Subsequent to the meeting on the 4th October 1996, a firm proposal for the next meeting has been forthcoming. The next Australian Systematic Botany Society meeting will be held in Adelaide, at the University of Adelaide between 29th September and 3rd October 1997, which is a common week for Australian Universities. Bill Barker, at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens Herbarium, is the convenor of the organising committee and Andy Austin has been asked to join the committee, and has accepted. It therefore seems eminently sensible for the ASBS meeting to be jointly organised by the two societies. There will be four symposia within the conference as follows:-

- computing in systematics
- east-west biogeography
- the interface between systematics and ecology
- molecular systematics.