

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

Division of Botany & Zoology Common Room
Australian National University
5.30 pm Thursday 26 November 1998

Attendance: 25 members.

1. Apologies

Jeremy Bruhl, Terry Donaldson, Steve Donnellan, Glen Ingram, Ebbe Nielsen, David Yeates, Alice Wells.

2. Business arising from Minutes of First Annual General Meeting

All to be dealt with under other items.

3. President's Report

Andy Austin summarized the current status of the Society, with a brief history of its origin and growth. He thanked Pete Cranston and Penny Gullan for their roles in the inception of the Society.

Since the last Annual General Meeting, the Council has instituted a formal Constitution & By-Laws for the Society (available on the SASB WWW Home Page at <http://www.sasb.org.au/constitution.html>). This was passed by all members who had voted. There has subsequently been one amendment to the By-Laws, which was also passed by all members who voted. Andy thanked Mark Harvey for his primary role in drafting the Constitution & By-Laws.

The Council has also been successful in lobbying Senator the Hon. Robert Hill, Minister for the Environment, with respect to funding for the Australian Biological Resources Study (ABRS). Andy met with the Minister, along with the presidents of the Australian Systematic Botany Society and the Australian Mycological Society. The meeting was successful in obtaining supplementary funding for ABRS, which is likely to be continued; and the Minister still refers favourably to that meeting. Clearly, this form of lobby pressure needs to be continued by the incoming executive, as it will be of immense benefit to systematics in the future.

The Council also had input into the Evaluation of ABRS and the Biodiversity Program of Environment Australia, both through a written submission and through interviews. A letter had also been written the Premier and to the relevant Minister regarding problems associated with the proposed move of the South Australian Herbarium.

A letter had also been sent regarding the poor profile of systematics within the Australian Research Council (ARC). For example, the discipline of "systematics" is not recognized, although "taxonomy" and "evolutionary biology" are listed. This is an ongoing problem, which may be exacerbated by the proposed changes to ARC funding.

The incoming Council will need to deal with the issue of incorporating the Society. This has a number of advantages, including legal reasons as well as taxation breaks for any money held by the Society.

Training in systematics is another important issue that needs to be addressed. During the year, Andy had given an invited address on "The future of insect systematic training in Australia" to the conference of the Australian Entomological Society. In this address, he pointed out that insect

systematics is better served in Australian universities than is the systematics of other animals. However, in centres such as Perth in Western Australia there is currently little or no training. However, there are encouraging signs. For example, Pete Cranston is the first affiliate professor (at the Australian National University) employed outside a university. Furthermore, the biological systematics teaching currently being implemented by the University of New England in conjunction with the Australian Museum and the National Herbarium of New South Wales, which will result in a named degree in biosystematics, is the first model of its kind in Australia.

Another possible issue is whether the Society becomes involved in publishing. The proposed nomenclature codes make interesting suggestions with regard to electronic and compact-disk publication.

Finally, Andy pointed out that it was an honour to be the inaugural President of SASB. However, there was very little glamour associated with it, as the first President usually has to deal mainly with procedural matters. He thanked each of the current Council members, and offered his congratulations to the incoming members of Council (Winston Ponder, Robin Wilson and David Yeates).

4. Treasurer's Report

This was presented by Andy Austin, in the absence of Steve Donnellan.

The Society currently has a balance of \$3,100, as a result of its role in the 1997 Joint Conference in Adelaide. This conference made a profit, largely as a result of the efforts of Bill Barker in obtaining sponsorship for the Software in Systematics symposium, along with an increased number of attendees due to a group of late registrants.

A number of potential uses for this money were discussed, including sponsorship of student attendance at conferences. No specific commitments were made.

5. Membership

David Morrison reported that as at 25 November 1998 the Society had 264 members. This was a 22% increase over that reported at the last meeting.

One of the more problematic aspects of the membership is keeping track of members when they move. Because there is no membership fee, members have no simple mechanism to remind them to contact the Secretary when they change their address (especially their email address). David encouraged all members to contact him when they change addresses; and he thanked those people who had conscientiously done so during the past year.

6. Society Meetings -- 1999 Conference

Mark Harvey presented a summary of the present state-of-play for the proposed joint meeting with the Australian Systematic Botany Society and the Invertebrate Biodiversity & Conservation group, in Perth 6-10 December 1999.

There had been a struggle for a title for the conference, but the likely one is: "Dampier 300 -- Biodiversity in Australia 1699-1999 and Beyond". The conference will commemorate the arrival in August 1699 of William Dampier, who collected the first plant specimens from Australia, at Shark Bay and farther north. Associated activities will thus include a museum display of William Dampier's specimens.

The conference will not be held at any of the Perth universities, due to the lack of nearby night-life. The chosen venue, the State Library in the Perth Cultural Centre, is near the TAFE college, the Museum and the Art Gallery, where there is a variety of types of accommodation, from 5-star hotels to backpacker-style. The chosen time is an appropriate one for anyone wishing to combine the

conference with a holiday.

Proposed symposia include:-

- Forum on Shark Bay (a proposed World Heritage Area)
- Arid zone biodiversity
- Coevolution
- Role of invertebrates in vertebrate conservation
- Sampling and monitoring protocols
- Analytical advances and interactive keys
- Subterranean biota
- Research funding and priorities
- Overview of the biota.

Andrew Burbidge will give the ASBS Nancy Burbidge lecture. There will also be tours associated with the conference, and a river cruise to a winery for dinner.

9. Other Business

David Morrison pointed out some changes that had occurred with regard to the SASB World Wide Web Home Page. The Web page is currently hosted by the Faculty of Science at the University of Technology Sydney. However, due to the recent resignation of Andrew Watts, Faculty Computing Officer of the Faculty of Science, it has become clear that the Faculty is no longer capable of providing the necessary infrastructure support. Discussions with the Dean of the Faculty have made it clear that this situation is unlikely to change in the near future. Consequently, it will be necessary to investigate the possibility of moving the Web pages elsewhere.

In the ensuing discussion, the major point to emerge was that the presentation of the Web page needs to be done properly, as it is the major tangible presence of the Society. Thus, if the Web page is moved then it needs to be moved to a location where long-term professional support is available, even if this involves ongoing financial resources. A number of suggestions for possible locations were made, including commercial Internet providers. David undertook to investigate these in detail, and then to consult with the Council about the move.

Judy West then raised further points with regard to the potential problems associated with the proposed changes to the ARC, as highlighted in the President's Report. For example, it is possible that museums and herbaria might be excluded from ARC funding. Given the success of the Society's lobbying with regard to ABRS, avenues need to be explored for the Society's role here as well. The ensuing discussion made it clear that a letter should be sent immediately. Dave Rowell undertook to provide a draft letter to Mike Crisp, who would then ask for input from the membership. The letter would be sent to the relevant Minister as soon as possible.

There being no other business, Andy Austin thanked everyone for their attendance at the meeting, and handed control of the meeting to the incoming President, Mike Crisp.

Mike Crisp offered his thanks to Andy on behalf of the members, and congratulated Andy on the job he had done as the inaugural President.

The meeting closed at 6.20 pm.