

F. Antarctic Beech Campground, **Border Ranges National Park**, 5.5.92

Queensland

G. Border Track, **Lamington National Park**, 6.5.92

Acknowledgments

Other major participants on the 1992 fungal collection expedition in eastern Australia were Dr J. Trappe and T. Lebel (Oregon State University, Corvallis Oregon USA), and Dr M. Castellano (USDA Forest Service, Corvallis Oregon USA). National Parks & Wildlife Services of New South Wales and Queensland issued collecting permits.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR FROM ASBS NEWSLETTER¹

from *Australian Systematic Botany Society Newsletter* 90, 5 (1997).

On the distribution of ABRS grant funds to Flora and Fauna

An open letter to Dr Hal Cogger, Chairman, Australian Biological Resources Study Advisory Committee

From the report in *Biologue* 17 on the ABRS grants for 1997, it is clear that for this round the Advisory Committee abandoned the 50:50 split in funding between flora and fauna that has been adopted previously. This year the proportion of grant funding going to flora projects amounts to 44% of the total, with fauna projects receiving 56%. No explanation for the decision is given in *Biologue*.

One can argue inconclusively till the Linnaean system is superseded whether the botanists or zoologists have the larger task in discovering and classifying our large biota, but this kind of action is both a slap in the face to the botanical community and unlikely to increase cordiality between them and zoologists. In our efforts to further the cause of systematics in Australia we need co-operation, not division.

I trust that the Advisory Committee redresses this situation by reversing the proportions for 1998 grants, and thereafter returns to equivalent funding.

Alex George
'Four Gables'
18 Barclay Road
Kardinya, WA 6163

from *Australian Systematic Botany Society Newsletter* 91, 4-6 (1997).

Distribution of funds under the ABRS participatory grants program

Dear Dr Short,

Thank you for forwarding a copy of Alex George's open letter to me, as published in issue 90 of the ASBS Newsletter. His letter criticises the 1997 distribution of funds under the Australian Biological Resources Study's Participatory Grants Program.

In seeking to respond to his criticism, I have framed my reply around the following three questions:

1. What has been the policy basis for the traditional 50:50 split between 'flora' and 'fauna'?
2. Is this current (1997) deviation from the 50:50 split the result of a shift in policy on the part of Environment Australia, ABRS or the Advisory Committee?
3. Is it the intention of the Advisory Committee, as argued by Dr George, to redress '... this situation by reversing the proportions for 1998 grants, and thereafter return[s] to equivalent funding'?

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In answer to the first question. Enquiries made of the present Secretariat and of some past members of the Advisory Committee suggest that the equal distribution of grant funds between flora and fauna has been a long-standing practice, but one based on precedent rather than policy. This distribution has been questioned by individual members of the Advisory Committee from time to time (including during the period of my Chairmanship) but, until last year, was not departed from to any significant extent.

The second question requires an understanding of the triennial nature of most ABRS grants. When a grant is made, there is a tacit understanding that, subject to satisfactory reports on progress *and* the availability of funds from the Government, the project will be supported for three years. This means that projected triennial funding is based in part on anticipated grant renewals, and so must be adjusted each year if the annual allocation to ABRS falls short of the amount provided for in the forward estimates. This happened in 1996/97, at a time in the three-year cycle when the renewal commitments for 'fauna' for 1997 exceeded those for 'flora'. It was this problem which led to the 44% (flora):56% (fauna) split to which Dr George takes such exception.

However, by the very nature of the process, this situation is soon to be reversed. While flora renewals for 1998 total \$330,000 compared with fauna renewals of \$395,000, renewal commitments in 1999 are \$199,000 for flora but only \$64,000 for fauna. Also, nine new flora grants were awarded in 1997 totalling \$246,000 (plus an additional \$65,000 for herbarium loans, etc.) compared with five new fauna grants totalling \$54,190 (of which three were for \$2,000 or less).

Until now, the Advisory Committee has nearly always given grant renewal commitments priority over new grants. Whether, given the diminishing allocation to ABRS by Government, this policy can or should be maintained will doubtless be explored by the Advisory Committee at its August meeting. But I would stress that the unequal allocation to flora and fauna for 1997 was the pragmatic result of differences in renewal commitments and was not a decision, *in principle*, to give a higher proportion of grant funds to fauna.

Let me now turn to my third and final question. The Advisory Committee, as indicated in the previous paragraph, made no *in principle* decision to depart from a 50:50 split between flora and fauna. However, Dr George's letter, and a major shortfall in anticipated funding for 1997/98, will both be on the agenda for discussion at the August meeting of the Committee. I will certainly advise you and your readers if the Committee proposes to depart from past practice in the allocation of funds under the Participatory Program.

Finally, it is probably only fair that I inform your readers and Dr George of my personal views on the underlying issues in his criticism.

Dr George suggests that 'one can argue inconclusively ... whether the botanists or zoologists have the bigger task in discovering and classifying our large biota ...'. While I'm sure that most Australian biologists would agree that both botanists and zoologists still have massive tasks ahead of them in discovering and classifying their respective components of our biota, there can surely be little disagreement that the diversity represented in 'zoology' is very significantly greater than that represented in 'botany'. One needs only quote the estimated species diversity figures provided in *Australian State of the Environment 1996*:

Protozoans	65,000 species
Fungi	160,000 species
Bacteria	40,000 species
Plants	42,000 species
Animal	335,000 species

It is pertinent to compare these numbers with the numbers of new grant applications received by ABRS for 1998:

Flora	37 applications totalling \$1.74 million
Fauna	79 applications totalling \$3.18 million

While neither of these sets of figures automatically suggest to me that taxonomic research on 'fauna' should be given greater support than that of 'flora', they, combined with the grant situation I have described above, do suggest to me that Dr George's claim that *any* departure from a 50:50 split of funds represents a 'slap in the face to the botanical community' is vexatious hyperbole.

While neither of these sets of figures automatically suggest to me that taxonomic research on 'fauna' should be given greater support than that of 'flora', they, combined with the grant situation I have described above, do suggest to me that Dr George's claim that *any* departure from a 50:50 split of funds represents a 'slap in the face to the botanical community' is vexatious hyperbole.

My view is that it is high time that ABRS abandoned its flora/fauna split (which continues to be reflected in its granting processes, editorial committees and publications), including a futile and intellectually dishonest attempt to fit microorganisms into a flora/fauna framework. Funding priorities should surely be set on the basis of national and international goals and needs, and not on some taxon-based demarcation dispute.

I believe that Alex George's letter has done ABRS a great service in catalysing debate on the issue. I look forward to learning of the views of the broader biological community, including both taxonomists and end-users of taxonomic information.

Hal Cogger,
Chairman,
Australian Biological Resources Study Advisory Committee
16 June 1997

ABRS FORUM

During the combined ASBS, SASB and AMS conference at the end of this month, on the afternoon of Tuesday 30 September (about 4.30–5.30 pm), there will be an open forum on ABRS, chaired by Dr Andy Austin. Information will be presented on the structure of ABRS and funding over the last two years. The forum will provide an opportunity for the Australasian Mycological Society to have some direct communication with the ABRS Advisory Committee and Director. The president of our Society has asked for time to put forward a mycological perspective. If you have any comments please contact Jack Simpson at the email address on the verso of the front page.

C. Grgurinovic

CENTENARY FELLOW OF THE BRITISH MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Dr Jack Warcup has been elected a Centenary Fellow of the British Mycological Society. Dr David Moore, the President of the British Mycological Society will present the Fellowship at the President's Reception on Wednesday 3 September from 6–7 pm before the Conference dinner. Invitations will be distributed at the conference.

J. Simpson

PRE-CONFERENCE FIELD TRIP SUNDAY 28 SEPTEMBER

There are two spare seats in the bus for latecomers. Please contact Dr Greg Kirby at <Greg.Kirby@flinders.edu.au> Departure time will be 9 am. Greg will contact participants individually.