

The International Committee on Nomenclature (ICN)

Mandate

The 24th General Assembly of the International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS) meeting in Amsterdam in 1991, passed a Resolution encouraging “ways of increasing harmonization in the different Codes” of biological nomenclature. An Exploratory Meeting between representatives of the five different Codes was held at Egham, Surrey in March 1994 and its report *Towards a harmonized Nomenclature for Life on Earth* (Biology International, Special Issue No. 30, 1994) and a *Draft Glossary of Terms used in Nomenclature* (IUBS Monograph No. 9, 1994) were presented to the 25th General Assembly of IUBS in Paris in September 1994.

The International Committee on Nomenclature (ICN) was established jointly by IUBS and the International Union of Microbiological Societies (IUMS) in June 1995, in accordance with Resolution No. 3 of the 25th General Assembly of IUBS. The new body was mandated “to expedite work towards a unified system of nomenclature”. Originally established in 1994 as an “Interim Commission” by IUBS prior to ratification by IUMS, the name was then changed to “Committee” by agreement of its members and the sponsoring unions to conform to the ICSU practice for the names of inter-union bodies.

Composition

The ICN comprises a Chairperson agreed jointly by the two unions, and members appointed to represent the five different Codes by the organizations with mandates for those Codes. These comprise two representing each of botany, bacteriology and zoology, and one representing each of cultivated plants and viruses.

The make-up of the ICN is currently as follows: D L Hawksworth (UK; chairperson); W Greuter and J McNeill (botany); P H A Sneath and B J Tindall (bacteriology); A Minelli and P Tubbs (zoology); M A Mayo (viruses); and P Trehane (cultivated plants).

Actions since the 25th General Assembly of IUBS (1994)

The ICN has met at Egham, Surrey, on 6-12 May 1995, 8-10 March 1996, and 21-25 April 1997. Several members have also met informally at different meetings as opportunities arose, and comments on drafts and other issues have been effected through mail and e-mail. The following key actions have been taken by the ICN since 1994:

- (1) First *Draft BioCode* and proposals for harmonized terms sent to the pertinent nomenclatural authorities for comment in June 1995.
- (2) *Draft BioCode: The prospective international rules for the scientific names of organisms* published. Copies were made available at the Fifth International Congress of Systematic and Evolutionary Biology (ICSEB V) in Budapest and the IUMS Congress in Jerusalem, both in August 1996, distributed, on request from IUBS, to Ordinary and Scientific Members of IUBS, published in both *Taxon* (45: 349-372, 1996) and *Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature* (53: 148-166, 1996), and made available on the world wide web (<http://www.rom.on.ca/biodiversity/biocode/biocode.html>), along with a General Introduction explaining the similarities to and differences from the existing Codes (<http://www.rom.on.ca/biodiversity/biocode/intro.html>). Listserv established at listserv@cmsa.berkeley.edu in July 1996 for discussion of Draft BioCode (send e-mail message: “Subscribe BioCode Yourfirstname Yourlastname”, where Yourfirstname Yourlastname are actual first and last names of the subscriber).

- (3) Symposium *The new bionomenclature: the BioCode debate* held during ICSEB V in Budapest in August 1996 and the proceedings and discussion published (Biology International, Special Issue No. 34, 1997). A mini-symposium *Biological Nomenclature in the 21st Century* was held independently at the University of Maryland in November 1996 and the papers from that were made available on the world wide web (<http://www.life.umd.edu/bees/96sym.html>).
- (4) *Draft BioCode* (1997) prepared taking note of the comments received from all sources on the 1996 draft. This is now available on the world wide web (<http://www.rom.on.ca/biodiversity/biocode/biocode1997.html>).
- (5) Next steps and recommendations to be made to IUBS and IUMS agreed in April 1997.

In addition, the dialogue between the various Code representatives has led to suggestions for modifications to the existing specialist Codes. The harmonized terms proposed have already been adopted in the 1995 edition of the International Code for the Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants (Regnum vegetabile No. 133, 1995) and are also starting to be used more widely in nomenclatural discussions.

Actions by the 26th General Assembly of IUBS (1997)

The 26th General Assembly of IUBS, at which 24 Ordinary Members (mainly national academics of science and equivalents) and 26 Scientific Members (mainly international scientific organizations) were represented, received a report from the ICB. This was considered and debated at the first Plenary Session of the Assembly, by the *ad hoc* Scientific Programme Committee, and at the final plenary session of the Assembly. As a result of these discussions, the following resolution was adopted unanimously, with no abstentions, by the General Assembly.

The General Assembly:

- (1) Endorses the composition of the ICB and its work to date and requests it to continue to pursue its mandate.
- (2) Commends to the mandated bodies for existing Codes of biological nomenclature the adoption, after due consideration, of the harmonized nomenclatural terms proposed by the ICB in future editions of the existing Codes.
- (3) Encourages all bodies responsible for the current Codes to study the *Draft BioCode* (1997), and to make it widely available, and to respond to the ICB.
- (4) Requests the mandated bodies for the existing Codes of biological nomenclature to implement appropriate provisions of the *Draft BioCode* (1997) in due course by including selected items from the *BioCode* in future editions of their Codes, for example those relating to the registration of new names and protected lists of names.

Acknowledgments

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(Derived from Report of the ICB to the 26th General Assembly of IUBS by David L. Hawksworth, Chair, International Committee on Bionomenclature, 27 October 1997)