

Mid-term report on WFCC, (Brisbane, July 2000-October 2002)

Secretariat / Treasury

- Regular contacts were made with the persons responsible for putting together the strategic plan and budget to inform about the status.
- The WFCC funds were transferred from the Netherlands to the UK.
- The membership list was partially actualised on the basis of the WDCM database. Members were invited since May 2002 to renew their membership and pay their fees. Invitations to sustaining members were accompanied with an extended invitation letter and information package. Updating of the membership list is continued on the basis of the response to these invitations.
- On the basis of the first results of the cashing of the membership fees, D. Smith set up a draft budget estimate. During a working meeting of the president with D. Smith in London a strategic plan was discussed, drafted by D. Smith and proposed at the Executive Board meeting in Paris, July 2002. After review and amendment by the EB members via e-mail, the plan was made available to the WFCC members through the WFCC website for eventual comments.
- It was agreed to publish the WFCC Newsletter electronically from end 2002 on, and to provide hard copies only to sustaining members, to cut down the production costs.

Executive Board and promotional actions

- Two Executive Board meetings were held in 2001 (Orlando, May, and Heraklion, October), and one in 2002 (Paris, July). Two preparatory meetings were held in London (January 2001, D. Smith and A. Doyle, J. Swings, J. Mergaert; June 2002, D. Smith, J. Swings, J. Mergaert).
- Following the bio terrorist events in the US, concrete actions were undertaken to tackle allegations by the press and to inform and advise the membership. A preparatory meeting with C. Rohde and D. Smith was held in Hannover, December 2001, a statement was published via the website, relevant information on bio safety was collected and compiled in the Newsletter.
- Actions to enhance visibility of WFCC included visits of the president to institutions in Morocco, Taiwan, the Philippines, China, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore. Other actions were the acquisition of a new website address (www.wfcc.info) and an ISSN number for the Newsletter, the production and distribution of a general WFCC flyer, and a specific flyer with regard to the activities of the PQSR Committee.
- The president contributed to the production of 2 Newsletter editions.
- The presidency participated in the ECCO symposium in Kreta, October 2001, and organised a workshop on the “Bacterial species concept” in Gent, February 2002.
- A WFCC session entitled “Ensuring dangerous microorganisms reach the hands” was held at the IUMS congress in Paris, July 2002, with oral contributions from D. Smith and B. Holmes.

WFCC committees

- All committee chairs were regularly asked for an update of their activities and achievements, via e-mail or at meetings.
- Although some committees did not report on their activities, steps were made by the presidency, in collaboration with other WFCC members and BCCM to contribute to these WFCC Committees objectives.

Biodiversity

- Concrete steps were undertaken for WFCC to contribute and participate in international initiatives and organisations, such as EBRCN, ECCO, UNESCO, MIRCEN.
- WFCC has recently applied to become affiliate participant in GBIF.
- Several WFCC members are active in the OECD Task Force on BRCs.

Postal, quarantine and safety regulations

The PQSR Committee focused on mainly two outstanding topics, the bio-weaponry thematics and the shipping regulations. For reasons of public relations and worldwide distribution, the Committee has produced a multi-colour flyer, the intension of which is to raise awareness on the existence of the activities of WFCC and this Committee.

- In the light of the sequels of the anthrax attacks in the US there was a close collaboration with the PQSR committee, e.g. for collection of information, the compilation and presentation of the WFCC statements, reaction to the press and public authorities, and spreading information through the WFCC web site and the Newsletter. Two of the results of the anthrax craze were the irradiation of postal mail in the US, and the more rigid rules with regard of transport of biological material. Relevant information on irradiation was collected and practical advice for shipping biological materials to the US was put on the web site.
- A proposal by the PQSR Committee for less strict transport rules for class 2 organisms was submitted the UN Subcommittee of Experts for the Transport of Dangerous Goods at their regular meeting in Geneva held in July 2002. The PQSR Committee proposal has not been adopted whereas the UN Subcommittee exclusively concentrated on diagnostic specimens. As a consequence, a deregulation for the diagnostic specimens has already been implemented by IATA DGR 2003. All dangerous goods restrictions still fully apply for shipments of microorganisms classified in risk group 2 because they are regarded as being 'cultures'. The definition by the new UN Model Regulations, 2.6.3.1.3 is as follows: 'cultures are the result of a process by which pathogens may be amplified or propagated to generate high concentrations not normally found in nature, thereby increasing the risk of infection when exposure to them occurs'. As there is no doubt about agreement among the WFCC membership that the 'cultures' need a closer look and further discussions for envisaging a deregulation of shipping regulations, WFCC via the secretary applied for official observer status to the UN Subcommittee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods.
- PQSR Committee posted a survey/questionnaire to members via the web site in order to obtain a broad international overview, which could play an important role in developing a new position on transport regulations (deregulation of low risk organisms). The committee will make the results available to a member of the UN Subcommittee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods

WDCM

- Through WDCM e-fora were created for an easier and faster communication within the Executive Board, the Committees and among the members.
- A more visible web site address was installed.

Capacity building and education

- I. Kurtboke is organising a workshop "Commercial Use of Microbial Diversity" as part of the 13th International Symposium of the Biology of Actinomycetes (1-5 December, 2003, Melbourne, Australia).

- A WFCC training course, “Management of Culture Collections of Microorganisms”, planned to be held in Rabat, Morocco in May 2004, is in preparation in collaboration with USFCC and CCMM. Partial funding by UNESCO has been granted.

Standardization

- This committee has developed a draft summary on Authentication, defining the concept and listing the minimum standards for characterization of bacteria, metazoan cell lines, molecular entities, fungi, protozoa and viruses. The Document on Authentication has been submitted to the Secretary, D. Smith. That document is being considered further but should be available for publication with WFCC literature this year.

IPR

- P. Desmeth participated in a WIPO Seminar on Budapest Treaty in Casablanca (Morocco) in April 2001), organised in collaboration with and at the premises of the Moroccan Office for Industrial and Commercial Property (OMPIC), with the participation of World Trade Organisation official.
- P. Desmeth is finalizing a Material Transport Agreement, in the frame of BCCM. This document was generally approved at the ECCO meeting in Krakau, Poland, October 2002, and can serve as a template for a WFCC version.

Networking

- WFCC has recently applied to become affiliate participant in GBIF.

Endangered collections

- P. Green has been able to get agreement of SGM for a grant of £4390 to help the Uzbek collection National Collection of Agricultural Microorganisms, Institute of Microbiology, Tashkent.
- P. Green has got approval from SfAM committee to initiate an annual fund specifically to help endangered collections. It will be able to award up to £2500 per year.

Prof. Dr. J. Swings

Dr. D. Smith

Dr. J. Mergaert

V. Storms