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The Chief  
Division of Plant Industry

Dear Jim

Naming of CSIRO Herbaria

I have been considering for some time the suitability of the name Herbarium Australiense for the herbarium collections housed by CSIRO. As you know, the major collection is in the Division of Plant Industry at Black Mountain, and specialist collections are in the Division of Forest Research at Yarralumla and Atherton. I believe that the name Herbarium Australiense is not very appropriate for these collections, and suggest that the name be changed.

As far as I have been able to determine, the name was given by Calvert shortly after he was appointed to CSIR in 1930 and undertook responsibility for the formation of an herbarium collection. As I understand it, the collection was initially associated with plant introduction and quarantine work, and with survey work for genetic resources, etc. The name was apparently chosen as a low key one for this very small collection, mainly in deference to the large "national" herbaria in Sydney and Melbourne. Unfortunately Calvert used the name "Herbarium Australiensis", and partly because of the grammatical error it fell into disuse for a period. It was probably after N.T. Burbidge was appointed to the Division that the name was reintroduced. In the first five editions of Index Herbariorum (1952-64) the Herbarium is simply listed as "Division of Plant Industry, CSIRO", and only in the sixth and seventh editions (1974- ) is the title Herbarium Australiense included in the entry.

In the period since the name Herbarium Australiensis (-ense) was chosen the collection has grown from an embryonic working collection of a few thousand specimens to a comprehensive collection of about 400,000 specimens which is national in character. At this size it is at least comparable with all of the Australian State Herbaria except the much older Sydney and Melbourne Herbaria. Its collections are of high quality and relatively well housed. It is not a regional collection, and in fact its main development target is a balanced representation of the Australian flora, supplemented by a limited reference collection of exotic specimens. Its holding of northern Australian plants is probably the best and most important in the world, and in addition the Herbarium houses an extremely important and comprehensive New Guinean collection.

The status of the Herbarium as a national collection is now generally accepted by many institutions. It is placed high on exchange programs operated by the various State and many overseas Herbaria, which clearly see the Herbarium as the focus of a comprehensive and secure collection. The collections are therefore growing relatively rapidly and in a balanced way. In March 1975 Herbarium Australiense was gazetted by the Australian Government as a "... representative collection of the plants of Australia and adjacent territories ...". The gazettal "... emphasizes its status as a national heritage, which is the responsibility of the Australian Government

to preserve and further develop ...".

I believe that under these circumstances it would be appropriate and highly desirable that the Herbarium be renamed as the Australian National Herbarium. Not only are there positive reasons for the adoption of this name, but I think there are reasons why the name Herbarium Australiense is no longer very suitable.

Firstly, the name itself is somewhat out of character with the general nomenclature of sections, etc., within CSIRO, and particularly of its other designated collections. There seems to be little reason to adhere to a Latin name for the collection. Secondly, the name does not necessarily convey a clear meaning of the nature of the collection. There are quite a few other Herbaria with latinized names, such as Herbarium Jutlandicum, Amazonense, Rioclarensis, Humboldtianum, Bandungense, etc. Such binomials can be interpreted variously to mean, for example, collections representing a specific area, or housed in a specific place, or collected by a specific person, or even honouring a place or person. Translation of the Latin does not necessarily give a clear picture of the nature of the Herbarium.

Thirdly, this situation is reflected in the fact that, under the name Herbarium Australiense, our Herbarium is not universally recognized as an important, stable, government-sponsored collection with an active research program. This situation applies with respect to the general public in Australia. It also applies widely to scientific communities overseas, particularly in universities which carry out research relevant to our own interests. In the two and a half years since I assumed the position of Head of Herbarium I have frequently found myself in the position of having to explain the status and significance of the Herbarium to people for whom the present name did not provide a clear picture.

Positive reasons for adopting the name Australian National Herbarium thus include, firstly, the obvious one that it describes our status clearly and unambiguously in our own national language. Secondly, the name would be consistent with the nomenclature of other national collections in CSIRO, notably the Australian National Insect Collection and the Australian National Wildlife Collection. Thirdly, the name would be consistent with usage in many other countries where there are similar, government maintained botanical collections. For example, the title National Herbarium, preceded or followed by the name of the country, has been adopted in a spectrum of countries ranging from the United States, Canada and South Africa to the Philippines, Costa Rica, Sri Lanka and Trinidad and Tobago. The full list would be extended if one added additional national herbaria which are named as divisions of National Museums, for example in Japan and New Zealand.

I don't think there are major difficulties or implications in a name change at this time. If CSIRO can approve the change, it would involve little more than new labels, new letterhead, a new entry in Index Herbariorum and some letters of explanation or information to some other institutions. Clearly we should retain a subtitle ("formerly Herbarium Australiense") for some time. There should be no complications in applying the name to all CSIRO herbarium collections, including those presently in the Division of Forest Research. Finally, a name change has no implications with respect to the responsibility of CSIRO for the maintenance of the collections themselves.

However I do think that the exact wording is important, particularly with respect to using Australian National Herbarium in preference to National Herbarium of Australia. The former sequence would be less likely to lead to confusion with the National Herbarium of New South Wales and the National Herbarium of Victoria. These, incidentally, are older herbaria which are not national in the strict sense, although the Melbourne herbarium in particular

does hold important old collections from many parts of Australia. Both are State Herbaria with some restriction on their scope and activities.

In summary, I would like to urge a change of name from Herbarium Australiense to Australian National Herbarium. It would remove a name which I see as somewhat anomalous, and substitute a name which is simple and accurately descriptive. I think this matter is sufficiently important that it be resolved without delay.

Yours sincerely



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Head of Herbarium