

29 October 2020

To the CETAF Chair, CETAF Executive,
and members of the CETAF network
c/o Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences
Rue Vautier, 29.
B-1000 – Brussels,
Belgium

Dear Colleagues,

Resignation from the Executive Committee of CETAF

It is with profound regret and some personal sadness that I write to inform you of my decision to resign my role as an Ordinary Member of the CETAF Executive. Over the last year of my 5-year tenure on the Committee, I have found it increasingly difficult to reconcile my personal views about the direction of CETAF, with the balance of opinion among several vocal Committee members. I have therefore reluctantly concluded that it would be better to be unbound from the collective responsibility that membership of the Committee entails, so I can voice these views outside the Executive.

I hoped during my second term as an EC member that this would be an opportunity to reset our 2015 strategy to reflect major issues that are of growing concern and relevance to our community. Issues like the sustainability agenda (sometimes referred to as the Anthropocene challenge), the development of DiSSCo, and more recently COVID19, with all the ensuing financial repercussions, should in my view be shaping a forward-looking strategy for CETAF. These topics, alongside issues such as the decolonisation of collections, will have a profound and lasting impact on the CETAF community. This is especially true for the sustainability agenda, given the unique role of our collections in solving these societal problems. It is, therefore, a matter of regret that despite many hours of work by the Executive, and occasional discussion within our biannual General Meetings, these topics are barely referenced within the updated Strategy to 2025. Instead, we have only managed to change circa 50 words, that make minor improvements to a handful of CETAF targets.

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I particularly wish to call out our failure to re-evaluate CETAF's relationship with DiSSCo. Since DiSSCo entered the ESFRI roadmap in 2018, there is an increasingly blurred relationship between the responsibilities and operation of the two organisations. This exciting development should significantly impact the CETAF strategy and the fact that we hardly mention DiSSCo is frankly astonishing. It is my view that CETAF should either cede responsibility for the technical elements of CETAF's strategy to DiSSCo or commit toward a long term plan of integrating the two organisations while retaining CETAF's purpose and mission. Failure to do either undermines the intellectual proposition of CETAF and, I fear, will force some member organisations to prioritise in light of the current economic crisis. This issue needs proper consultation amongst the leadership of CETAF member institutions, given the implications and possible conflicts of interest within the CETAF Secretariat.

I am increasingly aware that my differences with some members of the Executive are making it impossible to advance other issues faced by the Committee. I am also mindful of my responsibility to the wider CETAF membership not to impede work on these topics. It is, therefore, better for me to resign so that the Committee can address these operational issues, without this distraction.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the efforts of the Executive during my tenure, including our current Chair, Leif Schulman. I also wish to call out the tremendous work of the CETAF Working and Interest Groups, which underpin CETAF's reputation within other communities, as well as the energy and enthusiasm of the CETAF Secretariat who underpin much of CETAF's European Commission funded work. It is these groups and the associated European Commission projects that reaffirm my commitment in the value proposition of CETAF, and for which I will use my newfound time to work with, as the institutional representative of CETAF for the Natural History Museum, London.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "V. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Vincent S. Smith

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Department of Life Sciences

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