

13 March 2019

CETAF AISBL Members

To Whom It May Concern:

**Personal statement supporting my election to the next CETAF Executive Committee**

In this letter, I wish to set out my reasons for seeking election to the next CETAF Executive Committee, provide background on my experience for this position, and explain a little on my vision on how CETAF might develop over the term of the next Executive.

As many of you will know, I have served as an ordinary member of the CETAF Executive since 2016. It has been a tremendous privilege to do this. Firstly, my involvement has given me the chance to work with a very talented cross-section of CETAF representatives from across the full spectrum of CETAF institutions. These interactions, coupled with the collaborative spirit and cooperation I have experienced when working within the CETAF Executive and Secretariat over the last four years, have been a personal highlight of mine. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity, which has greatly furthered my understanding of the operations, activities and occasional complexities of running our institutions. This personal highlight has hopefully contributed to some much more tangible outcomes across the CETAF community.

CETAF is now directly embedded within a series of EC funded projects (e.g. Biotalent, ICEDIG and SYNTHESIS+), using its convening power to better coordinate the activities of members, and providing new funding to support this work. The level of EC project participation has supported new posts within the Secretariat, but also made CETAF an essential partner in our community proposals. In turn, CETAF has become a more attractive organisation to be involved in, which perhaps explains why CETAF membership has grown over the past four years, in what has been a challenging financial time for many members. This new participation not only helps to make CETAF more financially stable, but also brings knowledge, experience and skills from new institutions, greatly contributing to our collective understanding and interpretation of the collections.

Over the last four years, the work of CETAF and the working groups, have transformed to become much more focused on delivering tangible products for use across our community. Examples include the CETAF stable identifiers framework, policy recommendations such as those relating to Access and Benefit Sharing, and advocacy activities such as the celebrations supporting CETAF's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. The latter generated significant press attention which is almost unprecedented for CETAF. These products, coupled with CETAF's increasing profile in convening conference activities, such as the 2017 BioSyst conference, and the upcoming Biodiversity Next meeting, have helped advance discussions on some important scientific activities, such as the future direction of taxonomic research and on topics like biodiversity monitoring, to investigate the recent decline in European insect populations.

Perhaps one of the most significant outcomes of CETAF's work since 2016, has been the role CETAF played in the development and coordination of DiSSCo – the Distributed System of Scientific Collections. CETAF and its members were instrumental in developing the intellectual case for DiSSCo and its eventual admission to the ESFRI roadmap. This role continues with CETAF as a permanent member of the DiSSCo Steering board and through the participation of

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our Executive Director in the DiSSCo Coordination team. Some members have challenged the dual role of CETAF and DiSSCo once DiSSCo becomes fully operational and I understand these concerns. For reasons set out by the Executive in the November 2018 statement on this issue, I see the combined actions of CETAF and DiSSCo as an unprecedented new opportunity for our community. CETAF's legal status and participation model, are a perfect complement to the technical services being developed by DiSSCo. The combined efforts of these initiatives are, in my view, going to be essential as our community transitions to address the big challenges facing science and society that can be answer through collections data, such as environmental change, food security and the decline in biodiversity. The alignment of CETAF and DiSSCo's activities on collections and the digital support for these services, is deeply synergistic. These activities will remain rooted in our institutional research activities on taxonomy and systematics, and will create a new relevance and role for our collections.

For these reasons, I see the next term of the CETAF as being a pivotal one for our community. First and foremost, we need to deliver on CETAF's commitments to the current portfolio of grants awarded by the European Commission. ICEDIG, SYNTHESYS+ and DiSSCo Prepare have major components being delivered by CETAF, and my senior roles within these projects give me unique insight to support CETAF through the Executive. Some of this may require minor updates to CETAF strategy, as we align our efforts around these initiatives. Related to this, we need to improve our ability to explain our role and relevance to the wider community. The CETAF Passport system provides some of this data, but we need to advance our methods of collecting and visualising this information in order to make this process more sustainable. In this regard, I would like to contribute to this effort by refining the CETAF passports and aligning our data collection efforts with similar efforts worldwide. A final priority for me is to help manage our evolving relationship with DiSSCo as we build the blueprint for this exciting programme and eventually move from the DiSSCo planning to construction phase.

I firmly believe our goals can only be achieved as a shared global enterprise, and CETAF European activities serve as a model for other continental regions in globalising this effort. Within the next few years, I anticipate that CETAF will become part of a more formal global alliance of organisations and stakeholders working to integrate and expand our knowledge of the natural world. This is a truly exciting time for our community and I would be privileged to continue my role on the Executive to support this effort.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Vincent S. Smith**

Head of Informatics and Diversity  
Natural History Museum, London  
+44 (0) 207 942 5127, v.smith@nhm.ac.uk