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Report of the Special-purpose Committee on Virtual Participation in the Nomenclature Section

Members Special-Purpose Comm

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Report of the Special-purpose Committee on Virtual Participation in a Nomenclature Section

Abstract The Special-purpose Committee on Virtual Participation in a Nomenclature Section was proposed by the XIX International Botanical Congress (IBC) in Shenzhen, China in 2017, with the mandate to “investigate the possibility of and mechanisms for virtual participation and voting in the Nomenclature Section of an International Botanical Congress via the Internet” and to report to the XX IBC in Brazil in 2023. The wide access to the World Wide Web and availability of software for virtual meetings makes the possibility for virtual attendance and voting at a Nomenclature Section seem attainable and advisable. In order to make informed recommendations we discussed various aspects of virtual attendance and voting such as: who should be able to observe; what would qualify a person to use institutional votes (IVs) and personal votes; if the accumulation of IVs should be allowed by a virtual voter; registration of virtual voters; how costs would be covered; and recommendations for virtual attendees. This paper provides the summary of our discussions that is necessary for understanding our proposals to changes in Div. III of the *Code* (Landrum & al. in Taxon XX: xxx-xxx. 202X). This and that document should be consulted together.

Keywords *Code*, Electronic vote, International Botanical Congress, Nomenclature, Nomenclature Section

Introduction

A Special-purpose Committee on Virtual Participation in a Nomenclature Section (NS) was proposed by the XIX International Botanical Congress (IBC) in Shenzhen, China in 2017 (Wilson 2019). The mandate of this committee is “to investigate the possibility of and mechanisms for virtual participation and voting in the Nomenclature Section of an International Botanical Congress via the Internet” to make nomenclature governance more inclusive. Several people at the NS in Shenzhen offered to participate on this committee but to complete the committee with 18 members, colleagues were invited from diverse geographic areas. Eight of our committee’s members had written an article (Landrum & al. 2017) proposing that governance at a NS should be made more inclusive through virtual attendance and electronic voting and that we believed that the technology now available is sufficient. Our article seems to have been the impetus needed to create this committee.

We realize that the ability to virtually attend and vote at a Nomenclature Section cannot be considered standard until it is tried. We, therefore, propose that our recommendations be tried at the next NS in Brazil in 2023. This trial would test the feasibility of virtual participation and if successful we hope that it will become the norm for NSs in the future and be included as part of Division III of the *Code* (Turland & al. 2018). We propose amendments to the *Code* that may be voted on near the end of the next NS if there is an agreement that the trial has gone well.

When we first proposed the idea of a virtual NS (Landrum & al. 2017), which emphasized limitations due to lack of funding, personal health and/or mobility concerns, and the carbon footprint of international travel, the pandemic of 2020 had not yet happened. This tragic event has shown us that virtual meetings are now often desirable, or even indispensable, and have become frequent. Examples of national and international meetings that have taken place recently are: Plant Biology 2020 Worldwide Summit; XXXI Reunión Anual Sociedad de Botánica de Chile in 2020; Botanical Society of America in 2020; EarthOptimism2020; Jornada de Botânica (JOBOT) [add more here]. As we write in 2021 virtual meetings are continuing and we expect that they will persist for most of this year at least.

Our discussions were conducted by email and at least one in-person meeting of two members, mainly in 2019 and 2020. What seemed clear to some of us at the beginning appeared to be more complicated as the discussions progressed. The questions before us were: Who should be able to attend a NS virtually? Who should be able to cast votes? What should the requirements for voting be? Should voting be restricted to Institutional Votes or should it include Personal Votes?

We here briefly discuss these and other topics and show the results of our voting. One member was out of contact during 2020 and was not able to vote and is recorded as abstaining. For an idea to be accepted and become part of our proposal we required at least 60% support, i.e., 11 votes in favor.

Right to observe a Nomenclature Section. We agreed that anyone who might want to observe a NS should have the right to do so. Observers in most cases would be people interested in the nomenclature of algae, fungi, and plants but might include non-taxonomists. Voting would not be allowed for people merely observing. *Right to observe (17 in favor, 1 abstaining).*

Right to cast Institutional Votes. At present Institutional Votes can be assigned to someone attending the NS in person by a colleague who is unable to go. So, at present, there are no special requirements for using an Institutional Vote. We agreed that an observer holding an Institutional Vote should have the right to use it. The requirements for voting are discussed below. *Right to use Institutional Votes (17 in favor, 1 abstaining).*

Accumulation of Institutional Votes. Being able to accumulate Institutional Votes as in-person participants do in the NS was less clear. One thought was that virtual voting allows anyone to vote and thus there is no need for Institutional Votes to be assigned to anyone except the original representative of an institution. Others have argued that Institutional Votes themselves are not fairly distributed and that they should be eliminated. But the qualified majority believed that virtual attendees should have the same rights as in-person attendees and therefore be able to accumulate Institutional Votes. Another point in favor of this view is that some potential voters might not have good access to the internet and therefore would not be able to vote virtually. *Accumulation of Institutional Votes will be allowed by virtual attendees (13 in favor, 4 against, 1 abstaining).*

Personal Votes. We discussed whether we should include virtual Personal Votes in our proposal. Those in favor believed that virtual attendees should have the same rights as in-person attendees. Those against believed that our proposal would be simpler and easier to pass by leaving out Personal Votes. The majority agreed that we should include Personal Votes. *Personal voting included (14 in favor, 3 against, 1 abstaining).*

Registration to vote. We were nearly unanimous in supporting some sort of registration to attend and vote at a NS beforehand, perhaps as much as a few weeks or months. We agreed that by requiring beforehand registration the organizers would have plenty of time in advance to plan the virtual meeting and that only people with a great interest in nomenclature would be thinking ahead far enough to register. *Requiring registration (16 in favor, 1 against, 1 abstaining).*

Cost for non-voting observers. We generally agreed that people observing the NS but not voting should pay nothing or a small fee. *Cost to virtual observers (free 11, modest fee 5, abstaining 2)*

Cost for voting attendees. This is a complex topic. One advantage of a virtual meeting is the low cost compared to an in-person meeting. Many people who rarely or never attend an IBC could attend a virtual meeting. But if the cost of attending a NS virtually is low, some might never bother to go to the in-person NS. Those persons attending a NS in person might consider it unfair that people attending virtually, and voting pay much less. Cost is also a way of including only those with a great interest in nomenclature. In the end, most of us agreed that for voting the cost should be the same for virtual attendees as for in-person attendees. In the past participating in the NS has required at least one-day of registration in the IBC. We hope that in the future this cost may vary according to the home country of the participant as it does for some societies (e.g., Asociación Latinoamericana de Botánica,). *People attending virtually and virtually voting attended should pay the same as in-person attendees (11 against, 6 in favor, 1 abstaining).*

Requiring IAPT membership for voting. Some of us believed that paying for one day of the IBC and advance registration in the NS should be the only requirements for virtual voting in a NS. Others thought that it was important to require membership in the International Association for Plant Taxonomy (IAPT) as a way of including only those people with some experience in nomenclature. Those arguing against requiring IAPT membership pointed out that it is not required for in-person attendees; and that taxonomists using the *Code* include mycologists, phycologists, and bryologists that are less likely to be IAPT members as are vascular plant taxonomists. *Requiring IAPT membership (7 in favor, 11 against).*

There were three recommendations that received at least 60% support.

Local Meetings. We recommend that virtual attendees at a NS consider meeting together as groups. This would allow people to discuss the issues among themselves and educate each other as to the issues at hand. *Recommend local meetings (11 in favor, 6 against, 1 abstaining).*

Delayed voting. Sometimes proposals are “made from the floor” without being published in TAXON beforehand. Because virtual attendees may not be attending a meeting continuously, some of us believe that there should be delayed voting on new proposals (or amendments made to published proposals) made at the NS “from the floor”. That would allow a virtual attendee to consider the proposal and be present when the voting takes place. Others argued that Delayed Voting would be impractical and make conducting a NS difficult. *Recommend delayed voting (11 in favor, 6 against, 1 abstaining).*

Recognition for participation. Attending a NS is a professional service that may not be recognized by non-taxonomists. Most of us believe that recognition of this service be provided by the organizers of the NS for virtual attendees. This might be a form letter to all virtual attendees who registered beforehand and made online contact with the organizers of NS. Some of us considered this an undue burden to place upon the organizers. *Recommend recognition for participation (14 in favor, 2 against, 2 abstaining).*

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