



## Research note

# Who amends the *International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi, and plants*, the participation that the Latin American Herbaria have and how it can be increased?

## ¿Quién modifica el *Código Internacional de Nomenclatura para algas, hongos y plantas*, que participación tienen los herbarios latinoamericanos y como puede ésta incrementarse?

Lourdes Rico-Arce

Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 3AB

✉ L.Rico@kew.org

**Abstract.** Changes to the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature* are decided upon every 6 years at Nomenclature Sections that are part of International Botanical Congresses (IBC). How the Code is amended? The “decision” to conserve the name *Acacia* with a new type from Australia, one of the most heated and polarized debates over botanical nomenclature, casting doubt over the legitimacy of the procedure and botanical decision-making is taken as example. Despite a website [www.aciavote.com](http://www.aciavote.com), for which by July 2011, the votes were: 7 659 opposing the re-typification of *Acacia*, including 101 votes from people in Australia, and only 110 accepting the re-typification, did not make any affect to influence to amend the Code? Only delegates present at the Nomenclature Section and the number of active institutional votes that they carry can decide the changes to the Code; from 878 distributed to registered herbaria only 396 of these were taken to Melbourne. Australia and the United States were the countries with the largest number of votes. There is little participation of Latin American Countries, in general of developing countries, how this can be increased and effective throughout herbaria institutional votes? In this note the steps to follow up are given.

Key words: nomenclature, *Acacia*, herbaria institutional votes.

**Resumen.** Cada 6 años se debate sobre las modificaciones que se efectuarán en el Código Internacional de Nomenclatura en el marco del Congreso Internacional de Botánica. ¿Quién decide modificar el código? Se toma como ejemplo la “decisión” de conservar el nombre del género *Acacia* con un nuevo tipo de una especie australiana, que es uno de los debates más controversiales y polarizados en la historia de la nomenclatura botánica, a la vez que puso en duda lo legitimidad del procedimiento efectuado. A pesar de los resultados que tuvo el sitio web [www.aciavote.com](http://www.aciavote.com) a fines de Julio del 2011, 7 659 se opusieron a la retipificación, que incluyeron 101 de personas Australiana, en contra de solo 110 aceptando esta retipificación, lo cual no tuvo influencia alguna en la toma de decisiones al respecto. Únicamente la opinión de delegados participantes y el número de votos institucionales que ellos portan son los que deciden. De los 878 votos institucionales que se proporcionaron a herbarios registrados, solo 396 fueron llevados a Melbourne para hacer efectivos. Australia y los Estados Unidos fueron los países con mayor número de votos. En general, existió poca participación de los países latinoamericanos o en desarrollo. ¿Cómo puede incrementarse esta participación y hacerla efectiva a través de los votos institucionales? En esta nota se dan los pasos a seguir para ello.

Palabras clave: nomenclatura, *Acacia*, votos institucionales de herbarios.

Changes to the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature* are decided upon every 6 years at Nomenclature Sections that are part of the International Botanical Congress (IBC).

An *Acacia* website was set up in 2010 to raise public awareness over the procedure of the decision taken in Vienna at the Nomenclature session in 2005 <[www.aciavote.com](http://www.aciavote.com)>;

by July 2011, the votes were 7 659 opposing the re-typification of *Acacia* (including 101 votes from people in Australia), and only 110 accepting the re-typification (pers. comm. A.E. Wyk). Who makes decisions to ammend the Code?

The Nomenclature Section at Melbourne, Australia, took place 18 to 22 July 2011 (the week before the XVIII IBC), and its decisions were accepted by the Congress at its plenary session on 30 July. With regard to the name

*Acacia*, on the first day when ratification of the *Vienna Code* took place, some session members opposed the inclusion of *Acacia penninervis* as the conserved type of *Acacia* in Appendix III (conserved names of genera). This had been introduced into the *Code* after “approval of the controversial proposal to retypify *Acacia*” at the Vienna IBC in 2005 where the “decision” to conserve the name *Acacia* with a new type from Australia (*Acacia penninervis*) was taken, replacing the original African type (*Acacia nilotica*). This effectively restricts the name of *Acacia* to the group of largely Australian “wattles”, discontinuing its use for the true acacias, which are widespread in the tropics (outside Australia with the exception of 7 native species).

The name *Acacia* is used well beyond the scope of the scientific community, and this implies numerous problems in other disciplines such as conservation and biogeography. This proposal triggered what has arguably been one of the most heated and polarized debates over botanical nomenclature, casting doubt over the legitimacy of the procedure and botanical decision-making (Moore and Cotterill, 2011). The events that took place during the voting in Vienna have been clearly described by several authors (Rijckevorsel, 2006; Moore 2007, 2008; Brummitt, 2010; Rico Arce, 2011). Despite papers published by Moore et al. (2010, 2011) there was no debate in detail of this issue at the Melbourne Nomenclature Section, which on the first day approved the *Vienna Code* including the *Acacia* entry. On a subsequent day, time was made available to discuss 2 possible compromise proposals, but neither received majority support. A third proposal by Rijckevorsel had been printed and circulated before this second debate took place; its core was the inclusion of a new rule in Article 14 allowing a substitute name for the true acacias, supported by an example: a name of “*Africacia*” as a working option. However, this proposal was not discussed formally as those opposing the *Acacia* retypification did not wish to do so (Rijckevorsel, in ms.). In addition, there was a report by one of the delegates on the results of the website <www.acaciavote.com> for which by July 2011, which did not have any influence at all, hence proving that the opinion of ecologists, conservationists and other specialists who often make (even more) use of the names does not count. In other words, they have no voice in the decision-making process.

Accounts of the Melbourne discussions have been published in *Taxon* by McNeill and Turland (2011) and Smith and Figueiredo (2011); Rijckevorsel has a paper in press. What happens next? Although ill feeling on the retypification of *Acacia* will linger indefinitely, the matter of retypification itself should now be settled

(Rijckevorsel, in ms). Users are entitled to use the name *Acacia* sensu lato, but whenever the different lineages of *Acacia* are recognized as separate genera, they now have to adopt *Acacia* for subgenus *Phyllodineae* and *Vachellia* for subgenus *Acacia*.

Summing up, it is important to point out that changes to the *Code* are made by those who are present at the Nomenclature Section and by the number of active institutional votes that they carry. Prior to the Melbourne nomenclature session, 878 votes were distributed to qualifying registered herbaria (McNeil and Turland, 2011), but only 396 of these were taken to Melbourne by delegates and made effective during the various card votes of the session. The 2 countries with the largest number of votes were Australia with 109 (69 delegates plus 40 institutional votes) and the United States with 103 (36 delegates plus 67 institutional votes); the total number of delegates participating in the session was 204, thus Australia and the United States with 105 delegates between them represented 51% of delegates and carried 27% of the total institutional votes (McNeill et al., 2011).

Many tropical countries were grossly under-represented or not represented at all and thus had little or no influence on the voting. Brazilian herbaria received 29 institutional votes, only 13 were represented at the nomenclature session; likewise, Argentina and Mexico obtained 19 and 14 respectively, for which only 6 and 10 were made effective. To give Latin American countries more participation, herbarium curators are able to apply for getting or increasing their institutional votes. These requests are considered by the Bureau of Nomenclature; applications must be sent to the Secretary of the IAPT, office in Bratislava (office@iapt-taxon.org). This awareness call, especially to Latin American herbaria, has been made before by Kiesling and Prado (2005). The next nomenclature session will take place in 2017 in Shenzhen, China, in the week preceding the International Botanical Congress. Latin American botanists are in very good time to apply for, or revise the number of, institutional votes for their herbaria. This will allow them to participate in the decisions to amend the *International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi, and plants* even if they cannot be present in China, as institutional votes can be delegated. In this way, opinions of ecologists, conservationists and other specialists who use names that are decided on by taxonomists or the nomenclature decision-makers can be made to count.

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