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A Proposal to Merge BCG With NSCG.

Steve Thompson (Secretary BCG) & Paul Brown (Chair NSCG), August 2001.

At the recent AGMs of both BCG and NSCG, there was a desire expressed to look again at the idea of merging the two groups. Many people at both meetings felt that there were considerable benefits to be gained from such a move, and that any drawbacks were outweighed by these benefits. An exploratory meeting was held on Thursday, July 27th, at the Natural History Museum, which concluded that such a merger appeared to be highly desirable, and what follows summarises the points that were discussed at the meeting.

We are seeking to gain benefits in two ways. The first is to improve the efficiency with which the groups are operated and the second is to improve the effectiveness with which we achieve our aims. The principal aim of both groups is to promote the care, development and use of the collections entrusted to our members and institutions. To support that aim, we are concerned with raising awareness of both our collections and our workers, and are aware of the ongoing problems facing the Geological and Biological Museum community.

With the above in mind, we believe the principal benefits to be the following:

- A single committee. We are only too well aware of how difficult it is to attract committee members who are able to offer the commitment necessary to do the job effectively. In addition, any communication problems that might exist between separate committees would be removed, and the problem of co-ordinating group activities would also be removed. The more groups that are involved, the worse this situation becomes. Good committee members are in high demand!
- A single meetings programme. There are few preferred slots in the year to run meetings, and all the groups go for them. Avoiding conflicting dates should elicit greater attendance. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for meetings by two groups to be on similar themes, which duplicates effort. Poor communication would cease to be an issue and meetings should be more economic to run.

- A single journal, and newsletter. One newsletter would carry more news and advertising and one journal would have more, and better, peer-reviewed papers, which would be of greater appeal to members and have a greater outside influence. Also, such a journal would have a larger and wider circulation and have more funds available for improving it. The merging of two sets of articles would go a long way towards relieving the pressure on editors to find copy for the publications and would avoid the repetition that occurs at present. There would be a considerable cost saving both in production and postage.
- A single subscription and set of finances. A single subscription would be greater than the current individual subscriptions, but substantially less than two. This would, of course, benefit those who currently belong to more than one group, but would also reflect the wider scope of the single organisation. The financial resource would also be considerably greater than that of an individual group, allowing us to achieve, for example, more one-off publications, improved publicity material, expensive keynote speakers, sponsorship of events, support for junior members, to name but a few.
- Greater influence. It is almost always the case that a bigger organisation has a bigger impact than a small one. Big trade unions or companies carry more influence, and are taken more seriously than little ones, and those of you who work in small museums will know of the extra advantages that the large museums have. However, there is more than simply being able to shout louder.
- A more streamlined operation, with the removal of conflicting meetings and duplication of effort, would mean that committees can be more effective and give members better value for money. Greater resources mean greater, and more focused efforts in the areas where we do act. Higher quality products mean greater impact on outside bodies.
- A single body is easier to deal with than a number of smaller bodies, which is crucial when we are trying to get people to pay attention to us such as government bodies and SPNHC. Furthermore, it is also more likely to attract would-be new members, including influential individuals who may be able to help us achieve our aims more effectively. It may also draw in members from abroad who might not join any of a

selection of smaller groups. A bigger and better run group is potentially more attractive and so becomes yet bigger and more influential. United we stand, divided we fall.

There are potential drawbacks, as various people have pointed out. The key issue is a perceived loss of identity of individual groups and their aims and a reduction in their voice and influence. None of the aims and purposes of the individual groups are in anyway incompatible with those of the single larger group. It is proposed that the aims, committee and constitution of any new group would be established in such a way that all of these aims would be explicitly included, promoted and mutually supported. Smaller groups can gain the support of a much larger membership. It was felt that other issues raised, such as affiliations to other groups and charitable status, are practical issues, to which there are satisfactory practical solutions. With the right people on committee, there need not be a reduction in any groups' voice or influence!

The question of which groups would be involved was addressed. There are three sister groups in the UK, the Biology Curator's Group, the Natural Sciences Conservation Group and the Geological Curators' Group. This proposal was raised, and is being discussed, by the first two of these groups. However, if the above potential benefits are actually realised by the merger of these two groups then it should be apparent that merging all three groups would be even more effective and beneficial to all concerned. There appears to be a feeling within GCG that they do not wish to be involved at the present time but they are invited to become involved to whatever extent they feel appropriate. Should they still decide not to be involved, this should not stand in the way of the continued co-operation, collaboration and mutual support currently enjoyed by the three groups.



A few potential drawbacks to merging.

The paper below is based on part on the discussion document produced by Paul Brown for the joint working group between NSCG and BCG. This meeting was held at the Natural History Museum on 26th July 2001 and was chaired by Rob Huxley. This paper includes contributions from Kate Andrew, Bob Entwistle and Vicky Purewal, together with some additional points made by Bob Entwistle, those parts in inverted commas are direct quotations.

1. Loss of identity for NSCG and for Natural Science Conservators and Conservation.

The BCG membership is much larger than ours. Will we be swamped? We parted from UKIC to gain a stronger voice and now have a greater influence through NCCR!

Would NSCG's healthy, monetary state be swallowed up by BCG?—NSCG's assets can only be passed on to another charity with similar objects, but NSCG could extend it's objects.

Some (especially the professional full time Conservators) would rather be members of 'THE' Natural Science Conservation Group, than a member of a smaller sub-group again. Jerry Weber of the Society of Archivists (which is a similar mix of archivists and conservators) said "if we were to go along this route, we may have to learn how to shout loudly to make our voice heard". Conservators within SPNHC don't seem to have this problem.

Within the NSCG membership, there is a dichotomy in views between those who consider themselves Professional and Accredited Conservators and those who are Natural Sciences Collections carers who are interested in Conservation and/or do the job of conservator part time. Most (but not all) Accredited Conservators want to remain independent and most (but not all) hybrid natural science museum workers want to merge.

The forty members attending the AGM in Oxford may have been principally those who are also BCG members, since it was a joint meeting. How