



Towards an International Association of Stratigraphic Geologists

As chair of the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) I would like to welcome this important new addition to geoscience periodicals and to look ahead to cooperating in new developments in the organization of our science.

I believe that the goal of the journal, which is to encourage the application of new techniques to the broader issues in our discipline, will be consistent with the stated objectives of ICS (as posted on www.stratigraphy.com). These objectives include establishing a standard geological time scale, compiling and maintaining regional and global stratigraphic databases, developing standard stratigraphic procedures and terminology, and supporting education in the stratigraphic sciences.

The scientific activities of ICS, to accomplish these objectives, are carried out in projects and conferences in cooperation with other IUGS-affiliated international organizations, as well as non-governmental and inter-governmental bodies.

The strength of ICS comes from the support and participation of leaders in stratigraphic science, who provide solid academic standards, high levels of expertise, and wide international representation. ICS is one of the most important activities of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS), and provides a wide range of basic data and information on its popular website www.stratigraphy.org. It also maintains links to other important projects such as Chronos, Norges, ICGP and IODP, and works closely with stratigraphic activities in national geological surveys and the petroleum industry.

In recent years, although ICS has made good progress with standardizing the essential framework of stratigraphy in such areas as GSSP's, stratigraphic charts, and the 2004 Global Time Scale, much work remains to be done. Organizationally, ICS can be criticised for becoming bogged down in philosophical debates about stratigraphic nomenclature, or that it has a non-business mentality, often ignoring funding potential of its activities and products. Its greatest weakness, however, is that ICS does not have a coherent structure, but rather is made up of a loose bundle of subcommissions, each dedicated to its own stratigraphic periods. Each subcommission attracts its own specialists whose attention is naturally directed to Cambrian, Jurassic or Quaternary – but not on the goals and interests of the ICS as a whole.

Hence, ICS has two challenges, one scientific, and one organizational.

The scientific challenge to ICS is to complete the modernization of stratigraphic standards as soon as possible, so that the profession can go forward with improvements in geological process-oriented stratigraphy. Better resolution in the history of global change, as seen through the eyes of a dynamic stratigraphy that focuses on the hitherto unresolvable global records of high-frequency geological processes, is an exciting and socially responsible goal for the international stratigraphic community. In this human era, global changes and global environmental challenges are ever more pressing issues. Stratigraphy can play a vital and unique role in this, if the evidence in the strata can be unravelled and correlated to a level of detail and accuracy that allows deep historical insight into the short term forces that drive global changes. We at ICS see advances in geological pro-

cess-oriented stratigraphy as a meaningful new mandate, and one that will greatly improve resolution in the Geological Time Scale as well.

The organizational challenge to ICS is to find a way to bring stratigraphers together to work towards the general good of the profession, and to adopt business models that will support activities in international stratigraphy. This brings me to my main point. Rather than changing the organizational structure of ICS itself, which has evolved to efficiently serve its highly successful scientific program, I am taking this opportunity to propose the formation of a new independent professional group, the International Association of Stratigraphic Geologists, or IASG, for all who work in the stratigraphic disciplines. The IASG would work closely with ICS, in support of its role as the international monitor of stratigraphic standards, but would function as a fellowship and business organization like the International Association of Mathematical Geologists (IAMG) and the Society for Sedimentary Geology (SEPM).

As I see it, the IASG would naturally become the central organization for stratigraphers worldwide. It should be self-financing with a small membership fee, and have its own constitution. It would have close affiliation to key journals such as *Stratigraphy*, and would offer special student membership, professional and student prizes for achievements in stratigraphy, and special meetings and conferences. Finally, the association would develop and sell its own products, such as stratigraphic guides, CD's with regional and standard biozonations, time scale cards and charts, stratigraphic text books, journal(s), teaching compendia, slide series, stratigraphic highway guide books, index fossil collections, and so on, through a properly staffed publication and distribution office. ICS itself is not well positioned to undertake such projects, and in particular the total lack of a mechanism for generating independent funding has frequently left ICS without the resources to support its fragmented sphere of interest and activities. IASG, on the other hand, will be able to work closely with ICS in ways that go beyond its limited mandate, as I have outlined above.

In September 2005 in Leuven, ICS will hold the third meeting of its series, "The Future of Stratigraphy". The first meeting, in Urbino, was for chairs of ICS subcommissions, and the second meeting was the open IGC workshop during the 32nd IGC in Florence. The Leuven 2005 workshop will follow the successful Urbino format. A fourth, open, workshop will be in Oslo in 2008 during the 33rd IGC. The goal of creating the International Association of Stratigraphic Geologists will be at the top of the agenda in Leuven, and a special task group is formulating its goals and guidelines right now. For all who are reading this, we welcome your thoughts on this subject! Please contact me personally or via our stratigraphy.org website!

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