

International Union of Geological Sciences  
International Commission on Stratigraphy

# INTERNATIONAL SUBCOMMISSION ON STRATIGRAPHIC CLASSIFICATION ISSC

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**NEWSLETTER N. 18**

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## Editorial

Dear friends,

2012 was a good year stratigraphically. Yes, of course we run into a few papers that get published without quite following the guidelines that are enshrined in the international Guide and national Codes like the North American Code of Stratigraphic Nomenclature that has been so influential. And we always hope that reviewers and editors would be more vigilant in stratigraphic matters. Sure, we always wish that students would receive unforgettable stratigraphic principles engraved on gold tablets. But from my reading of the literature, overall, experienced geologists do understand the principles and, moreover, are well aware of the practical aspects of their work: specific situations demand some flexibility. Still, the younger and less experienced practitioners always need guidance, which of course is part of our basic mandate.

A fairly small group of devotees attended the scheduled business meeting of ISSC at the International Geological Congress in Brisbane, Queensland, hosted by Helmi Weissert, one of our two indefatigable vice-chairs. Helmi says it was a fruitful meeting nonetheless. The main topic of conversation was the Sequence Stratigraphy paper by Octavian Catuneanu et al. in *Newsletters on Stratigraphy*. Of course we welcome criticisms, suggestions, alternatives, clarifications and so forth, because this is a dynamic and evolving topic. The subcommission has shown at each step that Stratigraphy is very much alive! Octavian and his group of luminaries as co-authors know this too. If you have something to say, please let us know.

The annual meeting of the Geological Society of America was held in Charlotte, North Carolina, in early November. The North American Commission on Stratigraphic Nomenclature held its annual gathering there and assorted issues were discussed. The session on stratigraphy that was to be co-sponsored by NACSN did not get enough dedicated submissions, so those that were submitted were assigned to other sessions. Still there were plenty of stratigraphically oriented poster and oral presentations that touched on conceptual matters. Other conferences around the world, such as the European Geosciences Union and various national meetings, hosted similar sessions dedicated to matters stratigraphic. ISSC is co-sponsoring events with NACSN at the 2013 GSA annual meeting in Denver, Colorado, and those interested are asked to consider submitting. Importantly, this is the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GSA and there are sessions dedicated to reviews of recent advances in various disciplines. In addition, we would like to draw your attention to the July 2013 conference on stratigraphy slated for Lisbon, Portugal. This should be an inspiring meeting, not least because of the great local geology and the fact that the Lusitanian Basin is currently being fingered to host the GSSP for the base of the Toarcian.

Jan Zalasiewicz and co-authors have a short paper in press in *GSA Today* that discusses terminological issues surrounding geochronology and chronostratigraphy. The idea here is to engage the geological community in advance of proposals in the forthcoming Chronostratigraphy paper that is in progress. We welcome your thoughts please! Jan and Helmi are the two co-chairs of ISSC and you can send any comments to them or me. By the way, those of you whose interests extend more widely will enjoy Jan's wide-ranging and clever essays in the newsletters of the Palaeontological

Association which are available on the association's website, as well as his recent "The Planet in a Pebble" book, aimed at the lay public.

Members of ISSC have continued to debate stratigraphic principles and approaches. In 2013 the chapters on Chronostratigraphy and Lithostratigraphy will be submitted. The one on Biostratigraphy will commence. Two papers were published in *Geological Society of America Bulletin* that should interest readers (Walker et al. and Raymond et al.). We attach these to the newsletter and we welcome your feedback which we will forward to the authors.

In 2009 the Canadian Stratigraphy Commission was set up. Not meant to be in conflict with NACSN, it is a forum for discussion of subject matter specific to Canada, much the same as other national stratigraphic bodies are focused on their own local issues. Matt Grobe of the Alberta Geological Survey, by the way, is leading a project to stabilize the stratigraphic nomenclature for the province, the sort of thing that all regions need to do from time to time and no doubt we will hear of similar projects elsewhere. It should also be acknowledged here that the Spanish translation of the North American Code spearheaded by Ismael Ferrusquía has proved to be a big hit in Latin America, minor idiomatic issues notwithstanding. We are always happy to receive contributions and news from readers about these guides, their strengths, limitations and omissions.

Veterans of stratigraphic commissions are rising to prominence, as it were, and for example, Nick Tew who has been a longstanding member of NACSN will be the new president of the American Geological Institute. This bodes well for stratigraphy in general.

As part of the GSA's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary activities are two books that review advances in geological thinking over the past 50 years. Fortunately, the editor was convinced that Stratigraphy deserved pride of place, as it were, and deserved of its own paper. I can tell you that Andrew Miall has written a true tour de force, and we all look forward to the final version.

One issue that should be reported, however, and that is that ICS has broken with the Jim Ogg–Felix Gradstein-led initiative with respect to the international table of geological time. This does not mean to say that the chapters in the monumental, Elsevier-published, Geological Time Scale volume are not approved by ICS subcommissions. In fact, most are written by subcommission members. However, the ICS-approved time chart is now a separate entity, called the International Chronostratigraphic Scale. Please note that the GSA timescale (Walker et al., 2012) is meant in the future to be coordinated with the ICS-, IUGC-approved version.

In the meantime, it is important that we update the mailing list for ISSC, especially to include younger stratigraphers and those in other countries whom we have overlooked. This will mean new contacts but also the deletion of others. If you find yourself deleted by mistake and not receiving our wonderful communications, please let Jan, Helmi or Maria Rose know.

Brian Pratt  
Chair, ISSC

## ***ISSC Business Meeting, Brisbane, August, 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012***

Report by Helmut Weissert

1) *A small but engaged group of stratigraphers (up to 15 persons) met on Sunday, August, 5<sup>th</sup> 2012 for the ISSC Business meeting*

2) Elections 2012-2016, Information on result of electronic voting:  
ISSC Chair Brian Pratt and Vice Chairs Jan Zalasiewicz and Helmut Weissert agreed to serve for another 4 years. They were all re-elected

3) ISSC-products

The paper on “Sequence Stratigraphy: Methodology and Nomenclature” by Catuneanu, Octavian; Galloway, William E.; Kendall, Christopher G.S.t.C.; Miall, Andrew D.; Posamentier, Henry W.; Strasser, André; Tucker, Maurice E. was published in Newsletters on Stratigraphy, Volume 44, Number 3, November 2011, pp. 173-245.

*The paper and the topic immediately stimulated an engaged discussion among the stratigraphers present at the Business Meeting. Several persons considered this new article to be too long. Some participants consider the new paper as too unbalanced, according to them, it is not reflecting the different possible approaches used in sequence stratigraphy. Many non-sequence stratigraphers still are waiting for the “perfect” summary paper presenting the possible approaches to sequence stratigraphy in an unbiased and transparent manner. The continuing controversy among sequence stratigraphers is also described as a controversy between a geometry based approach and an outcrop-stratigraphy based approach. Some participants suggested that a model-based approach is in conflict with a more “traditional” inductive approach to (sequence) stratigraphy.*

Papers on “Biostratigraphy” and “Lithostratigraphy”:

*Two ISSC-papers are still missing in the growing collection of ISSC papers on stratigraphy. We are all looking forward to these publications.*

4) Reports from ISSC members:

- Yuri B. Gladenkov: *“Structure and stratigraphic classification of the latest Russian Code”*. Dr Gladenkov reported on the new proposals on stratigraphic classification in Russia.

5) ISSC plans for 2012-2016:

- Chronostratigraphy and geochronology: a proposed realignment” – manuscript by Zalasiewicz et al., the paper will be published on GSA Today, v. 23, n. 3, March 2013  
- Revision of the Stratigraphic Guide by Hedberg and Salvador (Jan Zalasiewicz, Brian Pratt, in collaboration with ISC and with the broad stratigraphic community  
- Plans for a textbook (collected *Newsletters on Stratigraphy* papers) are still in a very early phase.

6) Varia

The first “International Congress on Stratigraphy” will be held in Lisbon, July, 1<sup>st</sup> to July, 7<sup>th</sup>. For further information see: <http://www.strati2013.org>