



## OUR MISSION

National support and leadership  
for the naming and classification of  
species for world-class science-based  
decision making

ABRS STRATEGIC PLAN 2007–2011



# What is taxonomy?

Taxonomy is the fundamental science responsible for the

classification (describing and naming) of life on earth.

Since Carl Linnaeus laid the foundations for the systematic study and classification of plants and animals in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the tools and methods of classifying and naming life on earth have undergone numerous technological and conceptual revolutions. Today, scientists use sophisticated computational and molecular tools, such as gene coding, to uncover the relationships between species, as well as traditional methods.

# Why taxonomy is essential

Through their work, taxonomists provide information that is fundamental to the understanding and management of our biological world. The work currently being done by the small community of taxonomists in Australia provides the following services essential to biodiversity protection:

- provides the basic description of Australia's biodiversity
- provides reliable information on biodiversity for informed decision making for land management and industry
- underpins Australia's biodiversity conservation effort
- enables scientific study, such as on the effects of climate change and drought, that is fundamental to investigations into Australia's biota, and
- distinguishes species that threaten Australia's biosecurity.

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## Who are we?

In 1973, the Australian Government established the Australian Biological Resources Study (ABRS) to coordinate research in taxonomy and document the flora and fauna of Australia. Today, ABRS is a program within the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

ABRS pursues its aims and objectives through the ABRS National Taxonomy Research Grant Program (grants and training schemes that fund taxonomic and related research), and through ABRS publications and identification tools. This information is now delivered electronically through the internet, CDs and widely recognised book series.

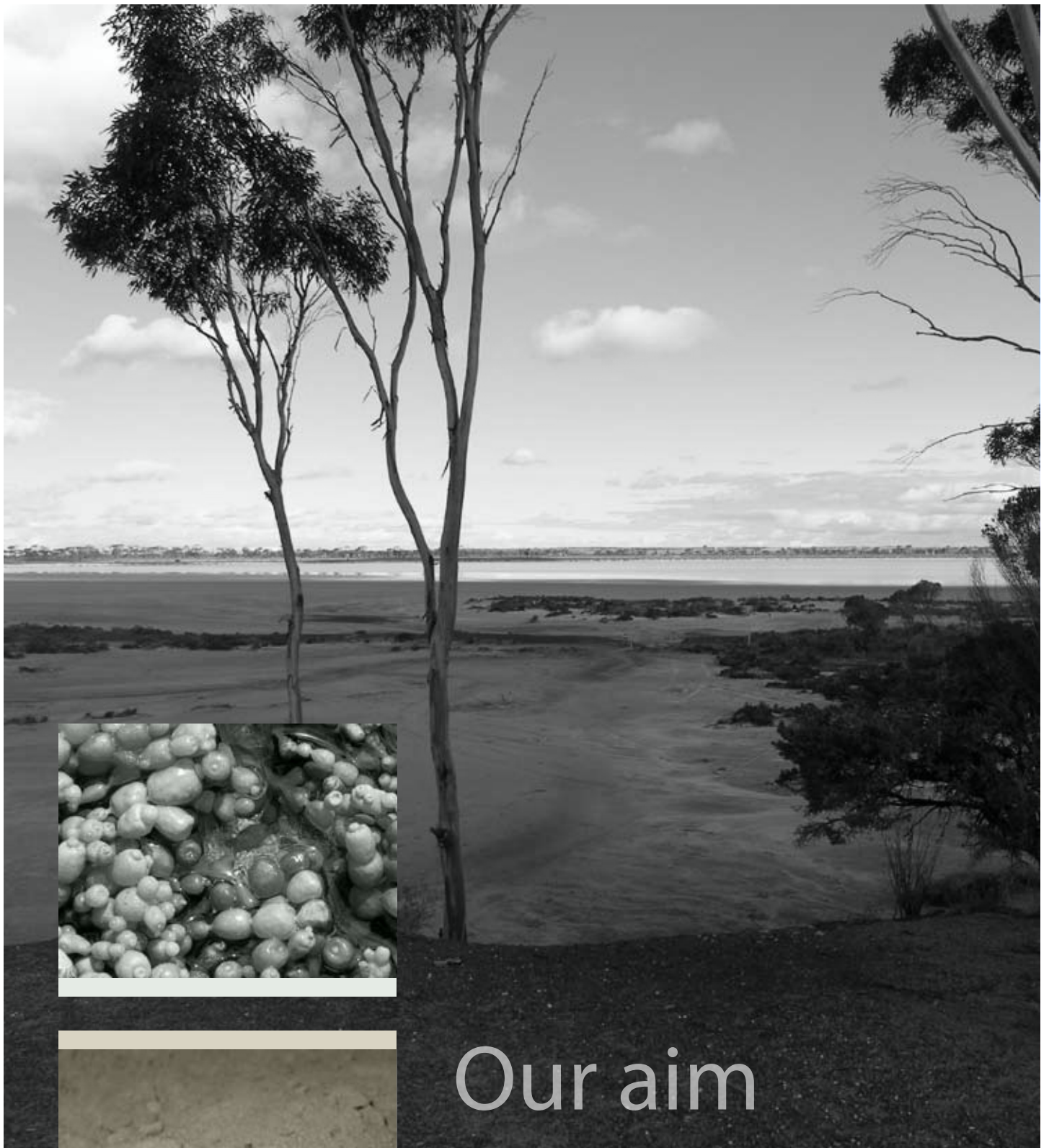
ABRS is Australia's national focal point for taxonomy. Through its support of taxonomic and systematics research on Australia's biodiversity, ABRS is a recognised world leader in making taxonomy information widely available. ABRS supports policy on taxonomy and systematics through the Convention on Biological Diversity and the National Research Priorities, and collaborates with other biodiversity information initiatives such as the Atlas of Living Australia, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility and the Encyclopaedia of Life.

ABRS values our close relationship with key stakeholder groups such as the Council of Heads of Australian Herbaria (CHAH), the Council of Heads of Australian Faunal Collections (CHAFC), the Council of Heads of Australian Entomological Collections (CHAECE) and Taxonomy Australia (TaxA), as well as with the professional bodies with an interest in systematics and taxonomy around Australia.

Ultimately, ABRS provides answers to the following questions:

1. What plants, animals and other organisms occur in Australia?
2. What do we know about them?
3. How can we provide that information to you?





# Our aim

The naming and  
identification of all  
Australia's life



## Challenges for taxonomy

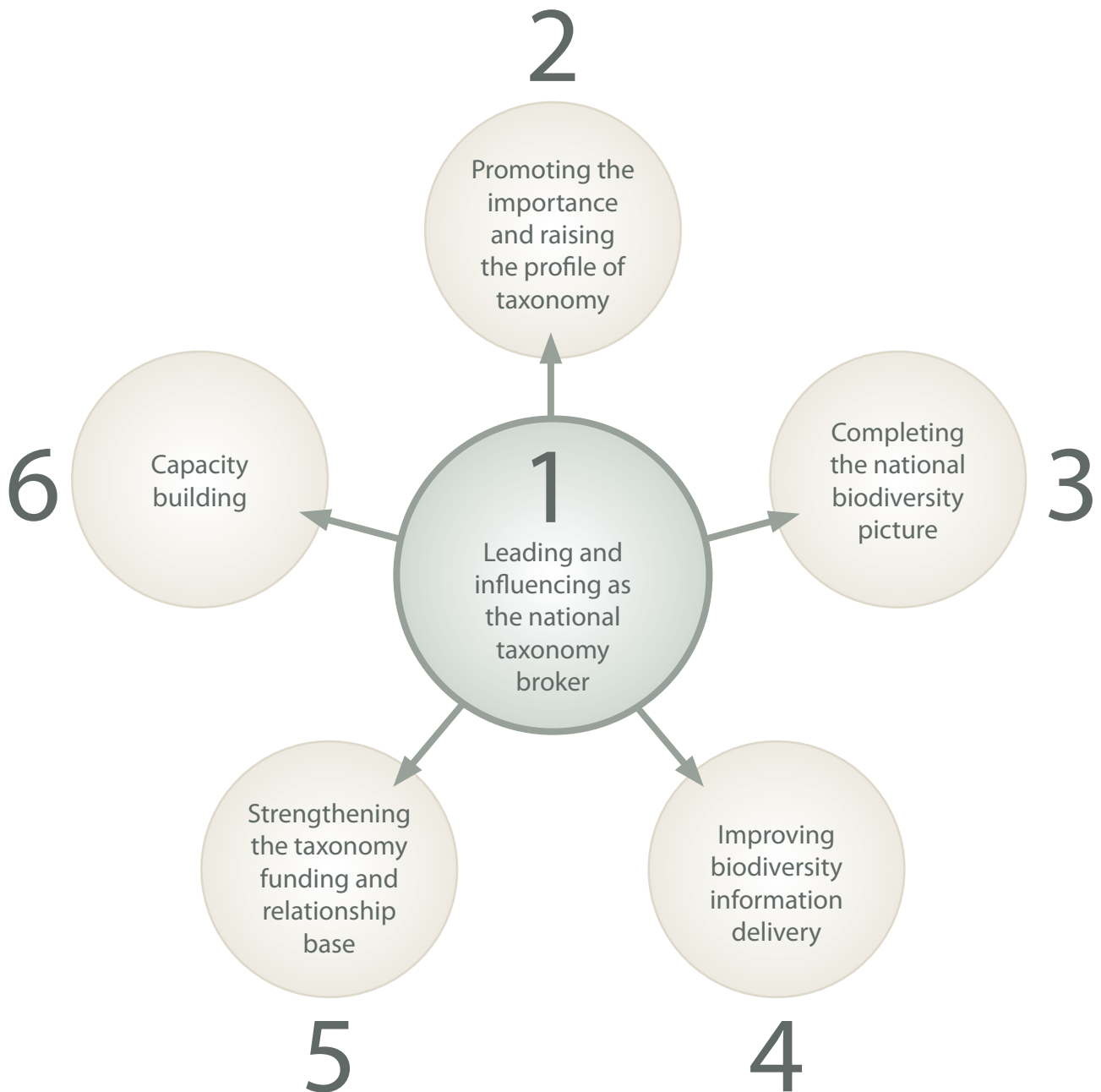
The maintenance and growth of taxonomy and investment in taxonomists is vital to good science-based decision making in Australia. Taxonomy now faces many new challenges as our environment and society changes. These challenges include:

- attaining the optimum taxonomic capacity required for Australia (the ABRS Survey of Australian Taxonomic Capacity 2003 – 2006 indicated the number of taxonomists at institutions was decreasing and the taxonomic workforce was aging), and
- increasing the communication opportunities between researchers and users of taxonomic information. This can result in better-focused research to address current knowledge gaps and establish a national direction for taxonomy.

As a result of a severely declining workforce and limited opportunities for communication, there is a lack of resources for studying many important species groups. A taxonomic workforce that spans Australian species could strategically support further research into the effects of our changing environment and human impacts.

# Our priorities

The work of ABRs can be described under six priority themes







### 1 Leading and influencing as the national taxonomy broker

ABRS will work to engage all Australians in recognising the value of taxonomy.

ABRS will pursue this by

- establishing a national policy framework for taxonomy
- closer consultation and collaboration with stakeholders and users, and
- strengthening national and international networks.



### 2 Promoting the importance and raising the profile of taxonomy

ABRS will utilise education, media and public relations as a means to communicate the value of taxonomy.

ABRS will pursue this by

- increasing our focus on public relations and media engagement
- collaborating with stakeholder and industry groups
- publicising the ABRS mission, and
- publicising ABRS priorities and actions.



### 3 Completing the national biodiversity picture

ABRS will work co-operatively with researchers nationally to co-ordinate information from across Australia to identify and address knowledge gaps and work towards completing Australia's national biodiversity picture.

ABRS will pursue this by

- identifying and prioritising knowledge gaps
- collaborating with the CERF Taxonomy Hub and other national initiatives
- helping to assemble existing information
- supporting future research needs, and
- collaborating with the international community, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, Global Biodiversity Information Facility, European Distributed Institute of Taxonomy, International Barcode of Life, Species 2000, Catalogue of Life and Encyclopaedia of Life.







#### 4 Improving biodiversity information delivery

ABRS will improve the delivery of information by concentrating on good customer service and the development of simple-to-use technology.

ABRS will pursue this by

- contributing to online resources such as the Atlas of Living Australia via our databases including:
  - ♦ Australian Faunal Directory
  - ♦ Flora of Australia Online
- improving IT platforms and linkages within ABRS
- supporting development of national standards in IT platforms and linkages
- collaborating with stakeholders and incorporating user needs
- exploring new ways of delivering information
- publicising high-quality information products to government and external users, and
- timely delivery of information.



#### 5 Strengthening the taxonomy funding and relationship base

ABRS will focus on building stronger relationships with clients and stakeholders to ensure future investment and funding for taxonomy.

ABRS will pursue this by

- seeking new partnerships and cooperative ventures
- exploring participation incentives with industry and government
- maintaining and improving existing relationships, and
- supporting conferences, workshops and symposia.



#### 6 Capacity building

ABRS will promote a robust national taxonomy research community through a focus on high quality research and strong early career foundations.

ABRS will strengthen Australia's national taxonomy capabilities by

- supporting career pathways for early career (postgraduate) researchers
- providing incentives for employment of taxonomists
- supporting training initiatives at undergraduate and postgraduate level for taxonomy
- examining efforts for a national standard for flora and fauna identification
- supporting an effective funding base and national focus for high-quality research, and
- developing and improving the ABRS National Taxonomy Research Grant Program.

## Contact details

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## Advisory Committee members

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**Dr Robin Wilson**  
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**Dr Anna Lavelle**  
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Chair, Council of Heads of Australian Faunal  
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Australian Museum

**Dr Brett Summerell**  
Council of Heads of Australian Herbarium (CHAH)  
Botanic Gardens Trust



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## ABRS website

[www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/abrs/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/abrs/index.html)

## Online resources

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**Australian Government**  
**Department of the Environment,  
Water, Heritage and the Arts**

