

## Reflections

by Bryan Henry



**A**s my term on the IUPAC Executive Committee comes to an end, I will use this article to look back on some of the changes and highlights that have occurred over the last six years. It has been a breathtaking ride! Working with the IUPAC community has been a wonderful pleasure and a great privilege.

The project system has matured since it was fully phased in within the 2002-2003 biennium. It has experienced both an overall increase in funds and an expansion to fully encompass the standing committees. The system has considerable flexibility, with opportunities for divisions or committees to obtain additional funds and for projects that reach beyond the usual mandates. With more than 1000 dedicated scientists worldwide involved in IUPAC projects, the system is one of our principal strengths. I have been both impressed and inspired by the reports of the division presidents and standing committee chairs. The Project Committee and the Evaluation Committee have both done an impressive job assessing proposals and monitoring project success, respectively. As we have learned the wrinkles of this new way of doing business, one of the beneficial side effects has been an increased dialog between officers and staff on the one hand, and divisions and committees on the other.

A welcome change in our General Assemblies has been the introduction of Round Table Discussions to allow small groups of Council delegates to discuss subjects of mutual interest in an informal and less challenging setting that is conducive to the easy exchange of ideas.

In July 2006, I had the great privilege of participating in the International Chemistry Olympiad, and that marked the beginning of IUPAC's involvement in this important event. We have made a commitment to provide ongoing financial support to the Olympiad to help to support the interest and enthusiasm of young people in chemistry.

Changes in the operational structure of IUPAC were proposed, but not accepted at two GAs. In response, an ad hoc Committee for Streamlining IUPAC Operations was established to look at operational efficiencies within the existing IUPAC structures.

The committee's recommendations were accepted by the Executive Committee in 2007 and implemented at the 2007 GA in Torino. I will not repeat the details of that report here (See "Streamlining IUPAC Operations," July-Aug 2007 *CI* <[www.iupac.org/publications/ci/2007/2904/oc.html](http://www.iupac.org/publications/ci/2007/2904/oc.html)>). However, two of the changes have had an immediate positive impact. The first change led to more detailed annotated agendas for Council, Bureau and Executive Committee meetings, with proposed time allocations for each item, references and links to any supporting documentation, and a series of expected actions and possible motions. These changes have allowed us to deal with our business more expeditiously and given us more time to think strategically and to engage in real discussions of important matters. Secondly, a series of schedule changes has resulted in a shorter overall General Assembly, and an earlier beginning for the newly elected Executive Committee and Bureau members.

The Streamlining Committee also recommended that priority be given to improving the communication potential and utility of the IUPAC Web site. A great deal of progress has been made in this area but we continue our efforts to improve our electronic communication with the chemistry community.

The Member Relations Committee was formed in early 2007 to improve communications and liaison with existing members. Two issues in particular were how to keep our existing NAOs as productive members of the IUPAC community, and how to facilitate the conversion of ANAOs to NAOs. The committee has made a good start, but it is clear that more needs to be done, particularly in improving communications between ANAOs or NAOs and the officers and secretariat of IUPAC.

The most important IUPAC event that has occurred in the last few years is the declaration of the International Year of Chemistry (IYC) by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2008. The IYC is a once in a lifetime opportunity to recognize past, present, and future achievements in chemistry. Midway through my presidency, I was approached independently by our colleagues from Russia and Korea about the possibility of an international year for chemistry. The Russians wanted to celebrate Mendeleev's contributions by declaring an IYC in 2009. It quickly became clear that such a timeline was far too short, but we identified 2011 as a year in which we could celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the International Association of Chemical Societies (which led to the

formation of IUPAC a few years later). In addition, we could celebrate the contributions of women to chemistry by recognizing the 100th anniversary of Marie Curie's Nobel Prize in chemistry.

I asked the Committee on Chemistry Education to oversee a process whereby we understood the procedures for the declaration of an international year and to carry through with our application. They did a marvelous job enlisting UNESCO support and mounting a campaign that ultimately led to the UN declaration. I would like to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to all those who were involved.

Of course, many other things occurred, but from my point of view these were the highlights. My great-

est joy and satisfaction came from interacting with the members of the IUPAC community. In particular, my colleagues on the Executive Committee are a dedicated and inspirational group. They are a great pleasure to work with as are the hard working members of the IUPAC Secretariat. My very heartfelt thanks and gratitude to you all. 🌐

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See also [www.iupac.org/publications/ci/indexes/stamps.html](http://www.iupac.org/publications/ci/indexes/stamps.html)

## Stamps International

### Merry Christmas Phosphates

Phosphate rock, a combination of phosphate-rich minerals that includes several types of apatites, is the only economically viable source of phosphorus for the production of phosphate fertilizers and a myriad of other phosphorus-containing products.

Although not widely distributed in nature, it is mined on a huge scale in certain regions of the world. About three-quarters of the world's production, a whopping 167 million tonnes in 2008, comes from only four countries, namely the United States, China, Morocco, and Russia. On the other hand, Christmas Island, a small territory located in the Indian Ocean about 360 km south of Java (Indonesia) but administered by Australia since 1958, is one of the most peculiar if not particularly large exporters of phosphate rock, mainly because its economy has relied almost exclusively on its exploitation for over a century.

The first stamp illustrated in this note is part of a set of 16 issued by Christmas Island in 1980-81 to promote its phosphate industry. It shows a long line of volumetric flasks and a woman analyzing samples of phos-



phate rock, presumably to establish their phosphorus content (usually reported as  $P_2O_5$ ). The other stamp, issued in 1988 to commemorate the centenary of the first permanent settlement on the island by the British, features the traditional way of mining phosphate rock. Interestingly, even though the annual output of phosphate rock on Christmas Island has remained steady in recent years at about 650 000 tonnes, the local economy has significantly shifted towards tourism, with a focus on nature walking, scuba diving, and bird watching. So, on 25 December, if the holiday season finds you longing for a trip to a paradisiacal island with a long history of phosphate mining, you know where to go . . .

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