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Eliminating slurs from the scientific names of algae, fungi, and plants will cause minimal nomenclatural change

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It was recently stated in *Megataxa* that: “Of course, we have a duty to eliminate obviously hurtful and discriminatory words from the scientific lexicon” (Pethiyagoda (2023: 24). However, contrasting with this statement, Pethiyagoda (2023) broadly supports retention of the status quo regarding the present-day names and epithets in use in the biological sciences, and the terminology used in other sciences. With reference to a proposal to amend the *International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi, and plants* (Turland *et al.* 2018), adoption of which would eliminate epithets with the root *ca[fff[e]r-* from the scientific nomenclature in use for algae, fungi, and plants (Smith & Figueiredo 2021), Pethiyagoda (2023: 21) further stated that: “They [Hammer & Thiele (2021)] cite, for example, a proposal by Smith & Figueiredo (2021)”. This statement is not correct. Both Hammer & Thiele (2021) and Smith & Figueiredo (2021) were published on “15 December 2021”, and Hammer & Thiele (2021) could not have cited Smith & Figueiredo (2021). To prevent any misconceptions that might result from Pethiyagoda’s statement, we here note that Hammer & Thiele (2021) and Smith & Figueiredo (2021) were not aware of each other’s work until it was published.

The proposal of Smith & Figueiredo (2021) deals exclusively with epithets derived from the word “caffra”, a term that is intrinsically associated with South (indeed, southern) Africa where, even though it is an illegal racial slur, its continued use in scientific names is mandated by the *Code*. The proposal addresses a lingering concern of many users of scientific names, and its adoption will result in minimal nomenclatural change. We believe that biological nomenclature and the various *Codes* that govern the scientific

naming of representatives of different groups of organisms can develop and improve through, *inter alia*, formally adopting modest proposals, such as those of Hammer & Thiele (2021) and Smith & Figueiredo (2021).

References

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