

THE CURRENT STATE OF OCTOPUS TAXONOMY

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ABSTRACT: Much has changed since the 1988 CIAC sponsored workshop on octopus systematics in Washington DC and the decisions reported in the resulting workshop publications. This paper provides an update on the status of octopus taxonomy 17 years on and reports revisions, omissions, corrections and additions (new species). Information on 374 nominal species is presented, of which we consider around half (186) to represent valid names. This tally is considered a significant underestimate of the total number of extant species. More than 150 undescribed species have been recognised in the past 17 years through examination of museum collections, primary field surveys and discovery of many cryptic species. The rate at which new species are being discovered is significantly higher than the rate at which new species are being formally described. This is largely due to a small, aging and diminishing cohort of octopod taxonomists. As these animals receive a higher profile in fisheries, biodiversity and behavioural studies, the need for thorough and detailed taxonomy is higher than ever before. The authors call for higher moral and financial support for this critical alpha taxonomy.
