

## Brazil Tries to Cut Red Tape on Biodiversity Research

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The Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Natural Resources (Ibama) is seeking input - especially from scientists - on its proposed changes to laws governing the way Brazil's biodiversity is used for research and education.

The changes represent the latest in a series of efforts to simplify the bureaucracy that Brazilian researchers must deal with.

To collect comments on the proposals, the institute, which is part of the Ministry of Environment, launched a month-long consultation on 9 March.

The changes would unite under a single piece of legislation all regulations covering research in nature reserves and the collection of biological specimens from anywhere in Brazil.

They would also make it easier for researchers at museums, botanical gardens and universities to exchange biological specimens with institutions in Brazil and abroad.

Ibama's proposals are intended to remove bureaucracy created by 'anti-biopiracy' laws introduced in 2001 to combat the unauthorised removal from Brazil of biological resources with potential commercial value.

Brazilian scientists claimed the 2001 rules hindered research on biodiversity by creating complex and time consuming procedures for those applying for research permits.

"One of our masters students has been waiting for nearly two years for government permission to collect samples of plants that she is studying," says Ruy José Válka, curator of the herbarium of the National Museum, based at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

Válka said that the herbarium, which houses more than half a million specimens of Brazilian plants, has had to virtually cease research collaborations with foreign institutions because of the current laws.

Ibama says that one advantage of the proposed changes is that some researchers will be able to apply for a permanent licence to collect biological material.

This will be restricted to full-time employees of research or teaching institutions whose work involves creating or maintaining inventories of biological diversity.

Permission would be limited to collecting groups of species the researchers are already working with, and researchers would still be required to notify Ibama of any collections.

The institute is also introducing an Internet-based application process in order to reduce the time researchers must wait for an answer from several months to a maximum of 30 days.

Ibama's proposals follow previous efforts to eliminate the red tape facing Brazilian researchers. In October 2003, the government exempted scientists from having to seek the approval of Brazil's Council for the Management of Genetic Patrimony to do research on biodiversity.

Ibama says it is relying on the scientific community to comment on the proposals, which will be available until 7 April at:

[www.lbama.gov.br/consulta/consulta\\_ins.htm](http://www.lbama.gov.br/consulta/consulta_ins.htm).

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