Systems Biology Markup Language (SBML) Level 2 Proposal: Multistate Features

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Contents

1	Intro	oduction	1
2	Why	this extension?	2
3 Specie		2	
	3.1	Feature	3
		3.1.0.1 State	3
		3.1.1 Example of a Feature	3
	3.2	InitialState	3
		3.2.1 FeatureState	4
		3.2.2 Example of an InitialState	4
	3.3	Complete example of a specie element	4
	3.4	Issues	4
4	Reactions		
	4.1	kineticLaw	5
		4.1.1 stateEffect	5
		4.1.1.1 specieState	6
		4.1.2 example	6
	4.2	States of nascent molecules	7
		4.2.1 Example	7
	4.3	First possibility: reaction unchanged	8
		4.3.1 specieReference	8
		4.3.2 example	8
	4.4	Second possibility: extension of the reaction element	9
		4.4.1 specielnstance	ç
		' .	10
5	Com		11
	References 14		

1 Introduction

This document describes a proposed extension for inclusion in Systems Biology Markup Language (SBML) Level 2. It describes features enabling the inclusion of complexes with several alternative states in models.

This document is not a definition of SBML Level 2 or part of it. This document simply presents various features which could be incorporated into SBML Level 2 as the Systems Biology community wishes. This document is intended for detailed review by that community and to provoke alternative proposals. Throughout this document issues that the authors believe will require further discussion have been highlighted.

For brevity the text of this document is with reference to SBML Level 1 (Hucka et al., 2001), i.e. features are described in terms of changes to SBML Level 1. This document uses UML diagrams in the same way except that new features are shown in red.

All types proposed in this document will be derived from the SBase type.

2 Why this extension?

An alternative introduction to the problem of multistate reactants can be found in Andrew Finney's initial proposal "Complex Species: species with multiple states" (Finney, 2001).

Many biological macromolecules possess multiple internal states which can affect reaction rates. Typical examples are:

- Different relative atomic coordinates \Rightarrow Conformational changes or folding
- Covalent modification ⇒ glycosylation, phosphorylation, methylation
- Non-covalent modification ⇒ metal or ligand binding

In modelling reaction systems that involve such molecules, it is possible to treat all the different states as separate species. However the number of possible reactions increases exponentially with the number of reacting species (of course in most cases, not all states will affect every reaction, so the number of reactions which need to be computed separately will be somewhat less than this). Writing out all of these reactions separately is tedious at best, and devastating at worst. It is desirable to have an efficient notation which compresses the redundant information. In addition, some simulators (e.g. Stochsim (Morton-Firth and Bray, 1998) or MCell (Stiles et al., 1996)) explicitly consider individual molecules, not populations of molecular species. This calls for a mechanism in SBML which can distinguish between specific instances of the same specie.

3 Specie

Andrew's initial proposal (Finney, 2001) allowed a subset of the state-dependent reaction instances that involve different reactant states, but have identical rates, to be grouped together and expressed as a single reaction. This was achieved by defining several new SBML elements such as complexSpecie (for defining species with multiple states) and complexSpecieInstance (for distinguishing between specific instances of the same specie that take part in a reaction). However, in the case that different states have a different effect on the reaction rate, these had to be defined as separate reactions.

We take a similar, but slightly different approach that introduces some new elements, but attempts to incorporate much of the multistate-specific information by extending the existing SBML 1 elements with optional attributes.

The proposed structure of the Specie type is shown in figure 1.

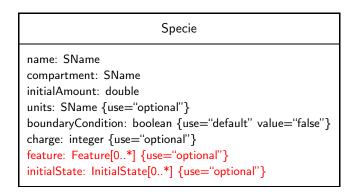


Figure 1: The definition of the proposed extended Specie type. Addenda are shown in red.

The "state" of a multi-state molecule is defined collectively by the states of all "features" that it possesses. A "feature" here is a characteristic of the specie which can be in one of at least two states that affect certain reaction rates. Therefore the extended specie element possesses now two new attributes, a listOfFeatures and a listOfInitialStates.

3.1 Feature

The listOfFeatures lists all the features of the specie which can possess several alternative states.

Feature

name: SName
state: State[2..*]

Figure 2: The definition of a specific Feature attached to a Specie type.

3.1.0.1 State

Each feature element contains a listOfStates child, containing at least two state element (otherwise one doesn't need this feature, do we?).

State name: SName

Figure 3: The definition of one of the states possibly taken by a specific feature of a specie type.

3.1.1 Example of a Feature

The following example describes a protein which can exist under various conformations, according to its degree of folding. Therefore we define a feature named "Folding", which here can take three alternative values: "unfolded", "folded" and "inactivated" (the latter can correspond to a degradation, a misfolding, or even to an interaction with some kind of other molecule such as a chaperone).

3.2 InitialState

The listOfInitialStates expresses the initial amount of each state of the specie (that is specific sets of values taken by each of the features) which is present at the beginning of the simulation. All features with an initialAmount different of zero must be listed in the listOfInitialStates.

InitialState

name: SName
initialAmount: double
units: SName {use="optional"}
featureState: FeatureState[1..*]

Figure 4: The definition of a specific InitialState of a given Specie type

The sum of the initialAmount of all the initialStates (Figure 4) in a listOfInitialStates must equal the initialAmount of the corresponding specie (i.e. all instances of the specie are under one state or another).

3.2.1 FeatureState

The listOfFeatureState element describes one state of the specie, i.e. a unique list of values taken by all the features.

FeatureState

feature: SName
state: SName

Figure 5: The definition of a particular state taken by a specific feature of a specie type

3.2.2 Example of an InitialState

3.3 Complete example of a specie element

```
<specie name="Specie1" initialAmount="1000">
   <listOfFeatures>
        <feature name="Folding">
            States
                <state name="unfolded">
                <state name="folded">
                <state name="inactivated">
            </listOfStates>
        </feature>
        <feature name="Phosphorylation">
            <listOfStates>
                <state name="noPhosphate">
                <state name="Phosphate">
            </listOfStates>
        </feature>
   </listOfFeatures>
   <listOfInitialStates>
        <initialState name="nonactivated" initialAmount="500">
            <listOfFeatureStates>
                <featureState name="Folding" state="unfolded">
                <featureState name="Phosphorylation" state="noPhosphate">
            </listOfFeatureStates>
        </initialState>
        <initialState name="activated" initialAmount="500">
            <listOfFeatureStates>
                <featureState name="Folding" state="folded">
                <featureState name="Phosphorylation" state="Phosphate">
            </listOfFeatureStates>
        </initialState>
   </listOfInitialStates>
</specie>
```

3.4 Issues

In this proposal, we have attempted to express multistate molecules by extending the complex element present in SBML 1. This contrasts from Andrew's initial approach of introducing a novel complexSpecie element. We think our approach works quite well, but have we left anything out? Are there any objections to extending the complex element using optional attributes?

Confusion could arise from the dual meaning we use for the word "state". A *feature* is one of the many characteristics of a specie, which can take a discrete number of **states**. At the same time, a **state** of the *specie* itself is defined by a specific set of feature **states**.

The compartment element could be conserved for SBML 1 compatibility. However its removal would be coherent with the extension proposed by the ECell group. If a specie is defined at the root of the model, it is defined for every compartment (The initialAmount has to be expressed as a concentration then). If a specie is defined in a subset of the various compartments, we don't need to specify the compartments since all the definitions are located within the compartments themselves.

4 Reactions

We present two alternatives of how to extend the reaction element to enable the distinction between specific instances of species. One does not require any change of the reaction element, but affects the specieReference instead, while the other affects the reaction element itself. We would appreciate feedback on which you think is better.

Before that, we will present parts of the extension which are common to both options, dealing with the modification of reaction rates, and with the states of nascent species, created or modified by reactions. We utilise the concept of a "reaction modifier", which defines the effect of the reactant state on a reaction. This allows all state-dependent instances of a reaction to be expressed as a single reaction.

4.1 kineticLaw

Because the value of a reaction rate modifier can depend on the state of more than one species, we need to tie it to kinetic parameters rather than individual specie concentrations.

In this proposal a listOfStateEffects is an optional element, child of the kineticLaw element (Figure 6).

```
formula: string
parameter: Parameter[0..*]
timeUnits: SName {use="optional"}
substanceUnits: SName {use="optional"}
stateEffect: StateEffect[0..*] {use="optional"}
```

Figure 6: The definition of the proposed extended kineticLaw element. Addenda are shown in red.

4.1.1 stateEffect

The stateEffect element specifies which parameter it will modify (by name), the actual value of the modifier (as a real-valued number) and a listOfSpecieStates. specieState (there might be a better name for this) is a new element used to specify the set of conditions under which this stateEffect applies. The elements of the listOfSpecieStates are interpreted using the AND operator, so the conditions in all elements of the list must be satisfied for the stateEffect to apply (figure 7).

```
StateEffect

parameter: SName
modifier: double {use="default" value="0"}
specieState: SpecieState[1..*]
```

Figure 7: The definition of the stateEffect element.

The "modifier" attribute is the coefficient which modulates the reaction velocity. It is multiplied with the term of the kinetic law which involves the specie to which it is associated. Within the framework of the mass action law, this is effectively equivalent to modifying the quantity of the reacting specie.

4.1.1.1 specieState

Each specieState element specifies a specieReference (or a specieInstance, see section 4.4) by its name and a listOfFeatureConditions.

SpecieState

specie: SName
featureCondition: FeatureCondition[1..*]

Figure 8: The definition of the specieState element.

FeatureCondition

feature: SName condition: formula

Figure 9: The definition of the featureCondition element.

4.1.1.1.1 featureCondition Each **featureCondition** element uses logic expressions (consisting of parentheses and the operators AND, OR and NOT) to define the states of each feature that the **stateEffect** applies to. For instance, if a feature has five states A, B, C, D and E, and a **stateEffect** applies to states A or B, one could either write "A OR B", or "NOT (C OR D OR E)".

(Comment: The data type "LogicExpression" could be called LogExpression, LExpression or even LExp, or again BooleanExpression or BoolExpression.)

States which do not match the listOfFeatureConditions of any of the stateEffects of a reaction are assumed to have a modifier of 0 (i.e. they cannot take part in the reaction).

4.1.2 example

Reactants A and B bind to produce reactant C. Both A and B can be in one of two states, active, or inactive (denoted by a subscript of 1 or 0, respectively). The rates are:

```
• A_0 + B_0 \rightarrow C — modifier = 0
• A_0 + B_1 \rightarrow C — modifier = 0.6
• A_1 + B_0 \rightarrow C — modifier = 0.2
• A_1 + B_1 \rightarrow C — modifier = 1
  <kineticLaw formula="kf * A * B - kr * C">
      <listOfParameters>
          <parameter name ="kf" value="1000">
           <parameter name ="kr" value="1">
      </listOfParameters>
      <listOfStateEffect>
          <stateEffect parameter="kf" modifier="0.6">
               <listOfSpecieStates>
                   <specieState specie="A">
                       <listOfFeatureConditions>
                            <featureCondition feature="Activity" state="inactive">
                       </or>
                   </specieState>
                   <specieState specie="B">
                       <listOfFeatureConditions>
                            <featureCondition feature="Activity" state="active">
                       </listOfFeatureConditions>
```

```
</specieState>

</listOfSpecieStates>
       </stateEffect>
       <stateEffect parameter="kf" modifier="0.2">
           <listOfSpecieStates>
               <specieState specie="A">
                   <listOfFeatureConditions>
                        <featureCondition feature="Activity" state="active">
                   </listOfFeatureConditions>
                </specieState>
                <specieState specie="B">
                   <listOfFeatureConditions>
                        <featureCondition feature="Activity" state="inactive">
                    </specieState>
           </listOfSpecieStates>
       </stateEffect>
       <stateEffect parameter="kf" modifier="1.0">
           <listOfSpecieStates>
                <specieState specie="A">
                   <listOfFeatureConditions>
                        <featureCondition feature="Activity" state="active">
                   </listOfFeatureConditions>
                </specieState>
                <specieState specie="B">
                    <listOfFeatureConditions>
                        <featureCondition feature="Activity" state="active">
                   </listOfFeatureConditions>
                </specieState>

</listofSpecieStates>
        </stateEffect>
   </listOfStateEffects>
</kineticLaw>
```

4.2 States of nascent molecules

If the newly created molecule is also a multistate complex, it is necessary to specify all the state of all of its features. This is easily implemented by creating a new element called nascentState (figure 10) which has a listOfFeatureStates element as child (see section 3.2.1). nascentState in turn becomes an optional child of the specieReference element (option 1 section 4.3) or the specieInstance element (option 2 section 4.4).

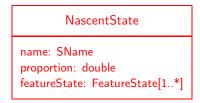


Figure 10: The definition of a specific nascentState of a given specie type

If the created molecules come to existence under a specific set of nascent states, which well defined probabilities, we fill the nascentState elements. Each element contains an attribute which specify the probability of that state (the default is 1. It is up to the parser to rescale everything if the sum of the proportion elements over all the nascentState elements is more than 1).

4.2.1 Example

Here is the result of a ligand binding affecting the activity of a specie. The specie has two features: the presence of ligand, and the activity.

In case the nascent state depends on the state(s) of the reactants, we have to enumerate the various reactions, with each listOfNascentState limited to one element.

If no nascent states are defined for a multistate product, the feature values are allocated randomly with a stochastic algorithm, or evenly with a deterministic algorithm.

And now, let's turn to the alternative proposals for the reaction element and its children.

4.3 First possibility: reaction unchanged

4.3.1 specieReference

In a first option, the reaction element is not modified, but the specieReference element, as shown in figure 11.

```
SpecieReference

name: SName
specie: SName
stoichiometry: integer {use="default" value="1"}
denominator: integer {use="default" value="1"}
nascentState: NascentState[0..*] {use="optional"}
```

Figure 11: The definition of the extended specieReference element under the first option. Addenda are shown in red.

The addition of the name attribute to the specieReference element allows different instances of the same specie to be distinguished within a reaction. This name would be used instead of the specie name in the kineticLaw. It takes the same value as the specie by default, so it need not be explicitly defined for reactants that don't need specific instances identified (i.e. if the reactant and product species do not have multiple states, as in SBML 1).

4.3.2 example

An example of a reaction which requires specific instances to be identified is the reversible transfer of a phosphate group between two molecules of specie A:

$$A1P + A2 \rightleftharpoons A1 + A2P$$

For this reaction, listOfReactants and listOfProducts would look like this (see figure 7 for the definition of stateEffect and figure 9 for the definition of featureCondition):

```
<parameter name="kf" value="100" />
       <parameter name="kr" value="0" />
   <listOfStateEffects>
       <stateEffect parameter="kf" modifier="1">
           <listOfSpecieStates>
              <specieState specie="A1">
                  <listOfFeatureConditions>
                      <featureCondition feature="Phosphorylation" state="Phosphate"/>
                  </or>
              </specieState>
              <specieState specie="A2">
                  <listOfFeatureConditions>
                      <featureCondition feature="Phosphorylation" state="noPhosphate">
                  </listOfFeatureConditions>
              </specieState>
           </listOfSpecieState>
       </stateEffect>
        <stateEffect parameter="kr" modifier="1">
           <listOfSpecieStates>
              <specieState specie="A1">
                  <listOfFeatureConditions>
                      <featureCondition feature="Phosphorylation" state="noPhosphate"/>
                  </or>
              </specieState>
              <specieState specie="A2">
                  <listOfFeatureConditions>
                      <featureCondition feature="Phosphorylation" state="Phosphate">
                  </specieState>
           </listOfSpecieState>
       </stateEffect>
   </listOfStateEffects>
</kineticLaw>
```

Note that both specieReference elements A1 and A2 point to the same specie A. To be compared with the second possibility described in the section 4.4

4.4 Second possibility: extension of the reaction element

The second option requires modifications of the reaction element as shown in figure 12.

```
Reaction

name: SName
specieInstance: SpecieInstance[0..*] {use="optional"}
reactant: SpecieReference[1..*]
product: SpecieReference[1..*]
kineticLaw: KineticLaw {minOccurs="0"}
reversible: boolean {use="default" value="true"}
fast: boolean {use="default" value="false"}
```

Figure 12: The definition of the proposed extended reaction element. Addenda are shown in red.

4.4.1 specieInstance

This solution follows Andrew's idea of explicitly representing individual instances of species with a new element, which we call <code>specieInstance</code> (depicted in figure 13). This is used to distinguish between individual instances of the species involved in a reaction. The <code>listOfSpecieInstance</code> attribute of the reaction element is optional, and would only need to be used in reactions where specific instances of reacting species need to be distinguished.

SpecieInstance name: SName specie: SName nascentState: NascentState[0..*] {use="optional"}

Figure 13: The definition of specielnstance

4.4.2 example

Under this scheme, to express the reactants and products of the reversible phosphorylation example presented above, one would also need a listOfSpecieInstances. Note that the specieReference elements point to different specie elements, in fact specieInstance elements (to be compared with the first possibility presented in section 4.3). The definition would then looks like (see figure 7 for the definition of stateEffect and figure 9 for the definition of featureCondition):

```
<listOfSpecieInstances>
   <SpecieInstance name="A1" specie="A" />
    <SpecieInstance name="A2" specie="A" />
</listOfSpecieInstances>
<listOfReactants>
   <specieReference specie="A1" />
   <specieReference specie="A2" />
</listOfReactants>
<specieReference specie="A1" />
   <specieReference specie="A2" />
</listOfReactants>
<kineticLaw formula="(kf * Specie1A * Specie1B - kr * Specie1A * Specie1B) * compOne * N_A">
   <listOfParameters>
        <parameter name="kf" value="100" />
       <parameter name="kr" value="0" />
   </listOfParameters>
   <listOfStateEffects>
       <stateEffect parameter="kf" modifier="1">
           <listOfSpecieStates>
               <specieState specie="A1">
                   <listOfFeatureConditions>
                       <featureCondition feature="Phosphorylation" state="Phosphate"/>
                   </listOfFeatureConditions>
               </specieState>
               <specieState specie="A2">
                   <listOfFeatureConditions>
                       <featureCondition feature="Phosphorylation" state="noPhosphate">
                   </or>
               </specieState>
           </listOfSpecieState>
       </stateEffect>
        <stateEffect parameter="kr" modifier="1">
           <listOfSpecieStates>
               <specieState specie="A1">
                   <listOfFeatureConditions>
                       <featureCondition feature="Phosphorylation" state="noPhosphate"/>
                   </specieState>
               <specieState specie="A2">
                   <listOfFeatureConditions>
                       <featureCondition feature="Phosphorylation" state="Phosphate">
                   </listOfFeatureConditions>
               </specieState>
           </listOfSpecieState>
       </stateEffect>
   </listOfStateEffects>
</kineticLaw>
```

5 Complete example

Note that this example has intentionally been made independent of StochSim. In StochSim, the features of multistate complexes are represented by binary flags, so each can only have two states. In this example the feature "Folding" possess three states (this could be encoded in StochSim using two binary flags).

```
<sbml version="1" level="1">
    <model name="ExampleMultipleState" />
    <notes>
        <body xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml">
            This model exemplifies the use of the extension proposed by the StochSim team.
            The main reaction is Specie1 + Specie2 <=> Specie3
            Speciel possesses 2 features affecting the reaction rate.
              The "Folding" exists under three states "unfolded", "folded" and "inactivated", the "Phosphorylation" under two "noPhosphate" and "Phosphate".
            The features are regulated by two interconversions and one cross-phosphorylation.
            Specie1-unfolded <=> Specie1-folded
            Specie1-folded <=> Specie1-inactivated
            Specie1-folded + Specie1-inactivated-P <=> Specie1-folded-P + Specie1-inactivated 
        </body>
    </notes>
    <listOfParameters>
        <parameter name="N_A" value="6.022e23" />
   </listOfParameters>
    <listOfCompartments>
        <compartment name="compOne">
            <listOfSpecies>
                <specie name="Specie1" initialAmount="1000">
                    <listOfFeatures>
                        <feature name="Folding">
                            tofStates>
                                <state name="unfolded"/>
                                <state name="folded"/>
                                <state name="inactivated"/>
                            </listOfStates>
                        </feature>
                        <feature name="Phosphorylation">
                            <listOfStates>
                                <state name="noPhosphate"/>
                                <state name="Phosphate"/>
                            </listOfStates>
                        </feature>
                    </listOfFeatures>
                    <listOfInitialStates>
                        <initialState name="nonactivated" initialAmount="500">
                            <listOfFeatureStates>
                                <featureState feature="Folding" state="unfolded"/>
                                <featureState feature="Phosphorylation" state="noPhosphate"/>
                            </listOfFeatureStates>
                        </initialState>
                        <initialState name="activated" initialAmount="500">
                            <listOfFeatureStates>
                                <featureState feature="Folding" state="folded"/>
                                <featureState feature="Phosphorylation" state="Phosphate"/>
                            </listOfFeatureStates>
                        </initialState>
                    </listOfInitialStates>
                </specie>
                <specie name="Specie2" initialAmount="1000" />
                <specie name="Specie3" initialAmount="0" />
            </listOfSpecies>
            <listOfReactions>
                <reaction name="main">
                    <listOfReactants>
                        <specieReference specie="Specie1" stoichiometry="1"/>
                        <specieReference specie="Specie2" stoichiometry="1"/>
                    <specieReference name="Specie3" stoichiometry="1"/>
```

```
</listOfProducts>
                  <kineticLaw formula="(kf * Specie1 * Specie2 - kr * Specie3) * compOne * N_A">
                      <listOfParameters>
                          <parameter name="kf" value="2500" />
                          <parameter name="kr" value="100" />
                      </listOfParameters>
                      <listOfStateEffects>
                          <stateEffect parameter="kf" modifier="0.5">
                              <listOfSpecieState>
                                 <specieState specie="specie1">
                                     tOfFeatureConditions>
                                         <featureCondition feature="Folding" condition="folded"/>
                                         <featureCondition feature="Phosphorylation" condition="noPhosphate"/>
                                     </specieState>
                              SpecieState>
                          </stateEffect>
                          <stateEffect parameter="kf" modifier="1">
                              <listOfSpecieState>
                                 <specieState specie="specie1">
                                     <listOfFeatureConditions>
                                         <featureCondition feature="Folding" condition="folded"/>
                                         <featureCondition feature="Phosphorylation" condition="Phosphate"/>
                                     </listOfFeatureConditions>
                                 </specieState>
                              </stateEffect>
<!-- This is optional (since the default modifier is 0), and will be omitted in later listOfStateEffects -->
                          <stateEffect parameter="kf" modifier="0">
                               <listOfSpecieState>
                                 <specieState specie="specie1">
                                     <listOfFeatureConditions>
                                         <featureCondition feature="Folding" condition="unfolded or inactivated"/>
                                     </listOfFeatureConditions>
                                 </specieState>
                              </l></l></l></l></l><
                          </stateEffect>
</listOfStateEffects>
                  </kineticLaw>
               </reaction>
               <reaction name="folding">
                  <listOfReactants>
                      <specieReference specie="Specie1" stoichiometry="1" />
                  </listOfReactants>
                  tOfProducts>
                      <specieReference specie="Specie1" stoichiometry="1">
                  </listOfProducts>
                  <kineticLaw formula="(kf * Specie1 - kr * Specie1) * compOne * N_A">
                      <listOfParameters>
                          <parameter name="kf" value="1000" />
                          <parameter name="kr" value="10" />
                      </listOfParameters>
                      <listOfStateEffects>
                          <stateEffect parameter="kf" modifier="1">
                              <listOfSpecieState>
                                 <specieState specie="specie1">
                                     <listOfFeatureConditions>
                                         <featureCondition feature="Folding" condition="unfolded"/>
                                     </listOfFeatureConditions>
                                 </specieState>
                              </stateEffect>
                          <stateEffect parameter="kr" modifier="1">
                              <listOfSpecieState>
                                 <specieState specie="specie1">
                                     <listOfFeatureConditions>
                                         <featureCondition feature="Folding" condition="folded"/>
```

```
</specieState>
                         </listOfSpecieState>
                     </stateEffect>
                   </listOfStateEffects>
               </kineticLaw>
            </reaction>
            <reaction name="inactivation">
               <listOfReactants>
                   <specieReference specie="Specie1" stoichiometry="1" />
               tOfProducts>
                   <specieReference specie="Specie1" stoichiometry="1">
               </listOfProducts>
               <kineticLaw formula="(kf * Specie1 - kr * Specie1) * compOne * N_A">
                   tOfParameters>
                      <parameter name="kf" value="100" />
                      <parameter name="kr" value="0" />
                   </listOfParameters>
                   <listOfStateEffects>
                      <stateEffect parameter="kf" modifier="1">
                         <listOfSpecieState>
                            <specieState specie="specie1">
                               <listOfFeatureConditions>
                                   <featureCondition feature="Folding" condition="folded"/>
                               </or>
                            </specieState>
                         </listOfSpecieState>
                      </stateEffect>
                      <stateEffect parameter="kr" modifier="1">
                         <listOfSpecieState>
                            <specieState specie="specie1">
                               <listOfFeatureConditions>
                                   <featureCondition feature="Folding" condition="inactivated"/>
                               </or>
                            </specieState>
                         SpecieState>
                      </stateEffect>
                   </listOfStateEffects>
               </kineticLaw>
            </reaction>
            <reaction name="trans-phosphorylation">
<listOfSpecieInstances>
                   <specieInstance name="Specie1A" specie="Specie1" />
<specieInstance name="Specie1B" specie="Specie1" />
               </listOfSpecieInstances>
               <listOfReactants>
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<specieReference specie="Specie1A" stoichiometry="1">

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