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Antarctic Conservation Strategy: Scoping Workshop on Practical Solutions

Final Report from the workshop held on 24-25 September 2013

Antarctic Conservation Strategy: Scoping Workshop on Practical Solutions

Background

A workshop, held at the British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge (24 – 25 September 2013), was convened jointly by COMNAP and SCAR to identify practical National Antarctic Program-led responses to short and longer-term conservation challenges in Antarctica (as identified by Chown et al., 2012). The outcomes of the workshop were to inform the drafting by SCAR of an Antarctic Conservation Strategy, the aim of which is to produce a more integrated, comprehensive and dynamic approach to conservation in the region and to inform conservation decision-making and policy. This is an on-going activity by SCAR, further information may be found in ATCM XXXV IP035 *Antarctic Conservation for the 21st Century: Background, progress, and future directions*.

Antarctic Conservation Scoping Workshop

The scoping workshop goal was to provide an opportunity to progress communication between conservation scientists and National Antarctic Programs. Specifically, the workshop aims were as follows:

1. Identify by means of a triage-type approach, those conservation challenges listed by Chown et al. (2012, *Science*, supplementary data) that can be addressed, how this can be done and what might be the current most cost-effective means to do so; More specifically, which challenges:
 - a) are within close range of being addressed,
 - b) cannot be addressed due to technical issues or are outside the scope of being addressed in a local context, or
 - c) can be addressed technically, but are financially unreachable.
2. Set out clearly a list of priority actions for National Antarctic Programs so they can start addressing the conservation challenges immediately.
3. Examine the major elements of the Antarctic Conservation Strategy and indicate what the logistic and operational implications might be of implementing such a strategy. This would be done with a view to including implementation requirements in the strategy, so providing a coherent and practicable strategy, rather than one based solely on conservation requirements some of which are not capable of being realized.

The invitation-only scoping workshop was held to consider specific practicable and implementable conservation actions and to stimulate broader discussion of possible innovative solutions and conservation science and management requirements. In consequence, COMNAP and SCAR agreed it should be kept small and focussed with a clear emphasis on those experienced with operational and logistics matters from a National Antarctic Program perspective. Twenty-six people were invited to attend, with broad representation across National Antarctic Programs.

Summary of Key Conclusions

The workshop was extremely productive with a significant number of suggestions as to what can be practically addressed being put forward. Some key conclusions were that some Antarctic conservation challenges, such as climate change impacts in marine and terrestrial environments, ocean acidification and pollution from global sources, could not be addressed by action within the Antarctic region alone. Nevertheless, Antarctic scientists could usefully undertake important monitoring and research to inform the global debate on these issues and, where appropriate and practical, show leadership by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution.

Participants felt that national Antarctic programmes were better placed to address local conservation challenges, such as invasive alien species, habitat alteration and activity impacts and pollution from local sources (including fuel handling, waste management and repair and remediation activities). In some cases, the risks presented by these challenges could be reduced by (a) the identification and dissemination of existing best practice, (b) the full implementation of existing regulations and guidelines, and (c) enhanced education of national Antarctic programme personnel visiting Antarctica.

Participants emphasised that Treaty Parties need targeted research, monitoring and evidence to support their conservation decision-making. Implementing solutions to some current and potential conservation challenges (such as sustainable marine resource use, commercial activities, hydrocarbon exploration, mineral extraction, biological prospecting and geo-engineering) was linked closely with the process of decision-making, for which a strong Antarctic Treaty System was essential. An Antarctic Conservation Strategy could help support a strong Antarctic Treaty System by collating evidence and research to support decision-making.

The full report can be found as an attachment to this Information Paper. The final workshop report reflects the views of the invited participants of the workshop and does not necessarily represent a COMNAP view since it has not been reviewed nor endorsed by the whole COMNAP membership.

Future Work

SCAR will review the outcomes and key points from the scoping workshop and will incorporate suggestions into the Antarctic Conservation Strategy. SCAR has also engaged with, and will continue to engage with, other key partners in the Antarctic Conservation Strategy as a whole. An open workshop will be held at the SCAR Open Science Conference on 26 August 2014 in Auckland, New Zealand, to further discussion and to finalise input into the strategy (see www.scar2014.com).

References

Chown, S. L., Lee, J. E., Hughes, K. A., Barnes, J., Barrett, P. J., Bergstrom, D. M., Convey, P., Cowan, D. A., Crosbie, K., Dyer, G., Frenot, Y., Grant, S. M., Herr, D., Kennicutt, M. C., Lamers, M., Murray, A., Possingham, H. P., Reid, K., Riddle, M. J., Ryan, P. G., Sanson, L., Shaw, J. D., Sparrow, M. D., Summerhayes, C., Terauds, A., Wall, D. H. (2012). Challenges to the future conservation of the Antarctic. *Science* 337: 158-159. Available at:

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COMNAP-SCAR. 2014. Scoping Workshop on Practical Solutions. Final Report. 44 p. (Attached to this Information Paper)