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Antarctic Environments Portal

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Working Paper submitted by SCAR

Summary

The Antarctic Environments Portal has been designed and developed to support the work of the CEP by providing accurate and up-to-date information on issues of relevance to the Committee's work.

Since January 2020 SCAR has assumed oversight and management of the Portal. A new website has been designed and launched with the aim of ensuring easy access to Information Summaries.

This Working Paper provides examples of how Information Summaries published in the Portal link directly to issues of priority interest for the CEP.

The Paper recommends that the CEP continue to support the Portal, acknowledge the support that the Portal can provide to the CEP's Climate Change Response Work Programme and identifies any additional Information Summaries it would like to see prepared.

Background

The Antarctic Environments Portal (the Portal; environments.aq) was launched in 2015 and endorsed by the ATCM by means of Resolution 3 (2015).

The Portal ensures that the current state of knowledge on key issues is commonly available to all CEP Members, as well as Antarctic Treaty Parties and the public. The Portal aims to:

- Meet the urgent and increasing Antarctic policy information needs
- Provide reliable, policy-ready summaries on priority issues
- Raise awareness of emerging issues
- Support informed discussions and wise decision-making
- Make information available to all Parties irrespective of their Antarctic investment

Portal update

Until the end of 2019, the Portal was based at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand and supported with funding generously provided by the Tinker Foundation. In January 2020, with the conclusion of the Tinker Foundation funding, the Portal was formally transferred to SCAR.

SCAR have established a Portal Board comprising the SCAR President, Executive Director, and Chief Officer of SC-ATS. A representative of Gateway Antarctica, University of Canterbury remains on the Board to assist with continuity. The Board meets quarterly to discuss ongoing business. The Portal Editor reports to the Portal Board. SCAR's Executive Director acts as the Portal Manager and SCAR's Communications and Information Officer as Assistant Editor, supporting the Portal Editor.

Since January 2020 funding for the Portal has generously been provided by Australia, the UK, New Zealand and the Netherlands, which will support SCAR's management of the Portal for the next two years. Support in kind has been generously provided by France and Spain who assist in translating Information Summaries into their respective languages. SCAR expresses its gratitude for all the support that it has received.

During 2020 a new website was developed for the Portal. This was launched in November 2020. The new website provides a structured approach for presenting and accessing the Information Summaries, which are grouped under six categories: Marine, Terrestrial, Human Activities, Inland Aquatic Environments, Atmosphere, and Cryosphere. The new website also allows for supplementary material such as published reports and infographics to be appended to the Information Summaries.

Since the launch, the new website has been viewed by over 3,300 users, with most users logging in from the US (606), the UK (275), Australia (238), China (229) and France (171). The Information Summaries on Microplastics in the Southern Ocean, Persistent Organic Pollutants and Environmental Remediation have been viewed most.

A dedicated Facebook page (1,060 followers; www.facebook.com/AntarcticEnvironmentsPortal) and a recently established Portal mailing list (currently 125 subscribers) notify the users about Portal progress.

The work of the Portal has been presented at a range of webinars and symposia, among them the 13th Polar Law Symposium (11th November 2020), the APECS Antarctica Day webinar (1st December 2020) and the VI APECS-Brasil Symposium (2nd February 2021).

Support to the work of the CEP

Information Summaries published on the Portal website aim to provide ‘state-of-knowledge’ reports targeted at the specific issues that the CEP is addressing through its agenda and work programmes; not least the research and information needs that have been identified in the climate change response work programme (CCRWP), as well as the science knowledge and information needs that are included in the CEP’s five-year work plan.

Table 1 below provides some examples of how currently published Information Summaries directly support the work of the CEP.

Further, it is contended that, collectively, the state-of-knowledge reports provided in the Portal contribute to fulfilling one of the CEP’s core functions of advising the Antarctic Treaty Parties on the state of the Antarctic environment (Article 12(1)(j) of the Protocol refers).

Content Management Plan

It is important that CEP Members (as the intended primary users) continue to have input to identifying specific needs for the content that is published on the Portal. The Portal Content Management Plan is appended to this Working Paper and has been developed to help facilitate a dialogue with the Committee over planned content for the Portal.

Comments and suggestions on the planned Information Summaries as set out in the Content Management Plan are encouraged. Feedback can be provided during discussions at the CEP meeting or at any time to the Portal Editor (editor@environments.aq).

Next steps and recommendations

SCAR will continue to support the Antarctic Treaty System by providing independent and scientifically rigorous information. This includes further development of the Antarctic Environments Portal and the publication of further Information Summaries in accordance with the Portal’s content management plan.

SCAR recommends that CEP and CEP Members:

- 1) Continue to support the further development of the Antarctic Environments Portal and the publication of Information Summaries, recognising its value in contributing to the work of the Committee;
- 2) Acknowledges the support that the Information Summaries provided in the Portal can provide to the CEP’s Climate Change Response Work Programme;
- 3) Identify and provide feedback to SCAR on any additional Information Summaries that they would like to see prepared.

Table 1. Examples of how Information Summaries published in the Portal link directly with issues of priority interest to the CEP.

| Information Summary | Link to Information Summary | Relevance to CEP's Work |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The introduction of non-native species to Antarctica | https://environments.aq/publications/the-introduction-of-non-native-species-to-antarctica/ | Agenda item 10a on the CEP's agenda. Priority 1 issue on the CEP's 5-year work plan. Enhanced potential for NNS establishments is a key issue in the CCRWP. |
| Pathways for the introduction of terrestrial non-native species. | https://environments.aq/publications/pathways-for-the-introduction-of-terrestrial-non-native-species/ | |
| Status of known non-native species introductions and impacts. | https://environments.aq/publications/status-of-known-non-native-species-introductions-and-impacts/ | |
| Non-native microbial introductions: what risk to Antarctic ecosystems? | https://environments.aq/publications/non-native-microbial-introductions-what-risk-to-antarctic-ecosystems/ | |
| Sources, dispersal and impacts of wastewater in Antarctica | https://environments.aq/publications/sources-dispersal-and-impacts-of-wastewater-in-antarctica/ | |
| Antarctic wildlife diseases | https://environments.aq/publications/antarctic-wildlife-diseases-2/ | Agenda items 10b and 10c on the CEP's agenda. Biodiversity knowledge is a Priority 2 issue on the CEP's 5-year work plan. |
| Human disturbance to Antarctic wildlife | https://environments.aq/publications/human-disturbance-to-antarctic-wildlife/ | |
| Important Bird Areas in Antarctica | https://environments.aq/publications/important-bird-areas-in-antarctica/ | |
| Southern elephant seals in the Antarctic Treaty Area | https://environments.aq/publications/southern-elephant-seals-mirounga-leonina-1-in-the-antarctic-treaty-area/ | |
| Ross Seal | https://environments.aq/publications/ross-seal/ | |
| Antarctic marine biodiversity | https://environments.aq/publications/antarctic-marine-biodiversity/ | |
| Changes in penguin distribution over the Antarctic Peninsula and Scotia Arc | https://environments.aq/publications/changes-in-penguin-distribution-over-the-antarctic-peninsula-and-scotia-arc/ | Agenda item 7 on the CEP's agenda. |
| Climate change as an emerging threat to Emperor Penguins | https://environments.aq/publications/climate-change-as-an-emerging-threat-to-emperor-penguins/ | Understanding the implications of climate change for Antarctic biota is a key element of the CCRWP. |
| Vulnerability of Southern Ocean biota to climate change | https://environments.aq/publications/vulnerability-of-southern-ocean-biota-to-climate-change/ | |
| The impacts of trampling and ground disturbances on Antarctic soils | https://environments.aq/publications/the-impacts-of-trampling-and-ground-disturbances-on-antarctic-soils/ | Agenda item 6 on the CEP's agenda. Repair or remediation is a Priority 2 issue on the CEP's 5-year work plan. |
| Micropollutants in Antarctic waters | https://environments.aq/publications/micropollutants-in-antarctic-waters/ | |
| Microplastics in the Southern Ocean | https://environments.aq/publications/microplastics-in-the-southern-ocean/ | |
| Clean-up of past waste disposal sites and abandoned work sites in Antarctica | https://environments.aq/publications/clean-up-of-past-waste-disposal-sites-and-abandoned-work-sites-in-antarctica/ | |
| Environmental remediation | https://environments.aq/publications/environmental-remediation/ | |
| Specially protected and managed areas in Antarctica | https://environments.aq/publications/specially-protected-and-managed-areas-in-antarctica/ | Agenda item 9 on the CEP's agenda. Overview of the protected areas system is a Priority 2 issue on the CEP's 5-year work plan. |