

SCAR Executive Committee Meeting in Washington D.C., USA, 9.-11. July 2007

WP 12 (Agenda Item 2.7.8)

Proposal for discussion

To create a new

International Union of Polar (or Antarctic and Arctic) Sciences

1. International Unions are (following the definitions of ICSU, cited from the web-sites of ICSU) societies or associations that:
 - are scholarly in nature
 - have an international geographic scope
 - have a very broad subject scope, such as physics, psychology, or history, and
 - usually have close ties with national associations of the same broad subject scope, and usually play a role in co-ordinating work of the national associations.
2. In 2008 at the Open Science Conference, the IPY would appear as mature. 2008 is also SCAR's 50th anniversary. This would therefore seem to be a key moment at which to address the pressing question of how to manage the legacy of the IPY, which naturally would require an in-depth discussion about the future of polar science organisations. Both SCAR and IASC ought to play prominent roles in managing the IPY Legacy. Both are associated with ICSU (SCAR as an Interdisciplinary Body, and IASC as an Affiliated Body). For these and other reasons the two of them should be working closely together in the future, under ICSU's banner, to manage the IPY legacy through a more effective bipolar approach to polar sciences. The process has begun through the SCAR-IASC Letter of Agreement (2006).
3. The foundation of a new International Union of Polar (or Antarctic and Arctic) Sciences, which then could become a member of the ICSU, could be an important step towards improving the international visibility of polar sciences in general. Unions have high visibility within ICSU, and vote at ICSU General Assemblies. In comparison, Interdisciplinary Bodies (SCAR) and Affiliated Bodies (IASC) have neither visibility nor voting rights, so tend not to influence the direction of events at the level of ICSU.
4. It is worth reflecting that when SCAR was formed during the IGY to continue the (Antarctic) legacy of the IGY, the original intention was for it to be a bipolar body. Only the politics of the Cold War prevented that development, restricting SCAR to a unipolar role. The Cold War is long past, and the advent of the IPY and the 50th anniversary of SCAR would seem to provide a fitting reason to resurrect ICSU's original intention, this time in the guise of an International Union. The rationale for a Union as opposed to a bipolar Interdisciplinary Body would be the growing realisation of the importance of the poles as harbingers of climate change within the Earth System, demanding a high degree of attention. Care would have to be taken to differentiate between what this new Union would offer, as opposed to what is currently offered, for instance by the WCRP's Climate and Cryosphere (CliC) programme. Perhaps CliC should be part of the new Union rather than part of the WCRP, or, at least, co-sponsored by both (CliC is already co-sponsored by SCAR).
5. One would have to reflect how to maintain manage the current interests of IASC and SCAR under the umbrella of the new Union. It ought to be easy in the future for SCAR and IASC to work together, given that IASC is evolving a structure similar to that of SCAR. One could therefore imagine the two existing side by side under a common (Union) umbrella. Alternatively it might be more advisable to generate a streamlined bipolar Union with a more disciplinary structure that incorporates elements of what is now done separately by SCAR and IASC.

6. Such a Union could provide a powerful force for interaction with other major environmental bodies of ICSU and its partners, such as the ESSP, the WCRP, the IGBP, the IHDP and DIVERSITAS.
7. Objectives (I have more or less copied - slightly rephrased - the objectives of the International Geographical Union; one can probably take any another Union also):

The International Union of Polar (or Antarctic and Arctic) Sciences has the following aims:

- a) to promote the study of polar processes and regions;
- b) to initiate and co-ordinate polar research requiring international co-operation and to promote its scientific discussion and publication;
- c) to provide for the participation of polar researchers in the work of relevant international organisations;
- d) to offer advice on polar scientific matters to international organisations, such as Antarctic Treaty and the Arctic Council;
- e) to facilitate the collection and diffusion of polar data and documentation in and between all member countries;
- f) to promote international scientific congresses, regional conferences and specialised symposia related to the objectives of the Union;
- g) to participate in any other appropriate form of international cooperation with the objects of advancing the study and location of polar sciences;
- h) to promote international standardisation or compatibility of methods, nomenclature, and symbols employed in polar sciences in the widest sense.

The International Union of Polar Sciences adheres to the International Council for Science (ICSU) and recognizes it as a coordinating body for the international organisation of science.