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Presented by:	New Zealand, Australia, Belgium, Norway, SCAR
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Antarctic Environments Portal: Progress Report

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Working Paper submitted by New Zealand, Australia, Belgium, Norway, SCAR.

Summary

At CEP XV (2012), New Zealand, SCAR and Australia introduced the concept of an Antarctic Environments Portal. This paper provides an update on the development of the Portal, addresses issues raised during informal intersessional discussions, and outlines the next steps for the project. Members are invited to provide further feedback, which will be taken into consideration in the development of a draft Portal by June 2014, and the launch of a fully functional Portal by June 2015. A mock-up of the Portal, highlighting its functionality, will be demonstrated during CEP XVI.

Introduction

At CEP XV (2012) New Zealand, SCAR and Australia introduced the concept of an Antarctic Environments Portal (Working Paper 57), to improve the availability of, and access to, scientific syntheses and high quality information to inform decision-making and support the effective implementation of the Protocol. The CEP supported the concept and looked forward to hearing about progress (para 7-10 of CEP report). Members welcomed the proposal, noting the importance of having ready access to information to support the Committee's work, and expressed their interest in contributing to the development of the Portal.

Over the last year we have been developing the Portal, and have held informal discussions through the CEP forum. This paper provides an update on the development of the Portal, outlines the next steps for the project and seeks further feedback from the CEP. This paper will be introduced accompanied by a demonstration of a mock-up of the Portal.

Comments made and questions raised during discussion at CEP XV and during the intersessional period have been carefully considered and incorporated into the planning and design of the project. The Portal is being developed in stages to allow further feedback to be taken into account.

Background: the benefits of an Antarctic Environments Portal

Antarctic environments are changing due to global and local pressures. The CEP has identified priority areas for action in its 5-year work plan to understand and address some of these changes and pressures. The priority actions include managing risks associated with non-native species in Antarctica, considering the implications of climate change for management of the environment, maintaining awareness of threats to biodiversity, considering long-term objectives for Antarctica and identifying opportunities for improving the effectiveness of the CEP.

In light of the changes to and pressures on Antarctic environments, the CEP's mandate to provide advice and formulate Recommendations to the Parties on the protection of the environment, and the wide range of complex issues on the CEP's agenda, there is an urgent need to make high quality, science-based information on Antarctic environments readily available to CEP Members to support their work.

Antarctic Treaty Parties work to understand Antarctica through research and our understanding of Antarctica is developing at a rapid pace. The Portal will facilitate the link between this Antarctic science and policy making. It will put evidence-based policy ready information at the fingertips of decision makers and support the informed management of Antarctica. It will enhance the CEP's advisory role to the ATCM, facilitate SCAR's advisory role to the ATCM and CEP, and assist in communicating information on Antarctic environments to the public.

Update on progress since CEP XV

Development of the Portal began following the CEP's general support of the concept of the Antarctic Environments Portal in June 2012. Antarctica New Zealand (AntNZ) is managing the project and collaborating with Landcare Research New Zealand, who are leading the technical design and development work. New Zealand has secured funding to develop a fully functional Portal by June 2015, and to maintain the Portal until June 2016.

Development is being led by New Zealand in partnership with SCAR, Australia, Belgium and Norway. A steering group comprised of scientists, policy and technical experts and a SCAR representative are charged with providing leadership, oversight and expert guidance to the Project Manager, reviewing and commenting on project documents and contributing to editing the Portal's content. The steering group Members are: Aleks Terauds, Australian Antarctic Division; Birgit Njaastad, Norwegian Polar Institute; Bruno Danis, Université Libre de Bruxelles; Ewan McIvor, Australian Antarctic Division; Jana Newman, AntNZ (Project Manager) and Steven Chown, Monash University, Chief Officer of SCAR's standing group on the Antarctic Treaty System. We welcome wider involvement in the project and encourage input from Members and interested parties.

AntNZ is working closely with SCAR and the steering group to ensure that the content available for the Portal is accurate, relevant and presented in a form appropriate for policy makers. This oversight will ensure that the project meets its objectives, and follows the guiding principles, as described in Working Paper 57, 2012. Partnership with SCAR is fundamental to the success of the project. The objectives of the project are strongly aligned with SCAR's dual mission to provide independent, sound, scientifically-based advice to the ATS and other policy makers, and to use science to identify emerging trends.

We will continue to seek feedback from the CEP to ensure that the Portal is a reliable, up to date, a-political source of useful information on priority issues.

Issues raised in intersessional discussions

Most of the comments raised in the informal intersessional discussions related to the management of the content of the Portal. Great care is being taken to ensure that the project meets its objectives and follows the guiding principles, including that the content will be structured around the priority issues identified in the CEP work plan and will be based on peer reviewed literature drawn from a wide range of sources. Content will be unique, flexible and be based on the best available, widely agreed evidence. The content of the Portal will not duplicate existing information or include recommendations or provide raw data directly. SCAR will be a primary provider of content, in line with their role as independent scientific advisors to the Antarctic Treaty System.

It is expected that the bulk of the content will be comprised of short reports that summarise the state of knowledge on the priority issues, alongside resources and links of relevance to the main users of the Portal. Links will include connections to data portals and repositories to allow the source of the original data to be identified. The portal will complement existing data repositories (e.g. biodiversity.aq) and will also include a simple mapping function, where different kinds of information can be overlaid and displayed. The Portal will have the capacity to include content in the four Treaty languages, though in the short term the majority of the information will be in English.

Users will be able to search, explore and browse the information. Information will be open, though there will be password-protected access for editors and an authentication system for users wanting to interact with or comment on the information. It is not intended to be a static resource; the Portal will continue to evolve as priorities change and as the knowledge base to support the information grows.

The Portal will include areas for dynamic, inclusive discussions to be held, for example, on emerging issues. A scientist may log in and note a growing literature on a new issue of relevance to the CEP. When an emerging issue has sufficient evidence and agreement, an editor would write a short summary of the issue. An editorial process will be needed to review and manage the content in the emerging issues area of the

Portal. Prioritisation of emerging issues could be done in a number of ways; CEP Members could prepare working papers suggesting that emerging issues warrant further attention or SCAR could observe that there was strong evidence and wide agreement amongst scientists that an issue was of significant interest to the CEP.

It is envisaged that Portal content will be largely delivered through processes that are already in place for bringing information to the CEP. SCAR will continue to provide advice to the ATCM / CEP using existing mechanisms. The Portal will be an additional, more dynamic mechanism, facilitating easy access to information at any time. AntNZ will work with SCAR and the Steering Group to ensure that the highest standards are maintained to ensure that the project meets its objectives, and ultimately addresses the needs of CEP Members.

Intersessional discussions also raised the issue of the cost and funding for this project. A key consideration for the project is to design and set up the Portal in such a way that it will be efficient to maintain. The cost of establishing and operating the Portal will be borne by New Zealand until June 2016. We will be actively investigating options for long term funding, likely involving a combination of interested Parties and private funders.

Next Steps

Comments received at this meeting will be taken into consideration in further work to finalise a complete Portal, in draft form, by June 2014. The project timeline envisages an official launch date for a fully functioning Portal of June 2015. We will be working to increase awareness of this project amongst the science community over the coming months and years, including by profiling the test Portal at the SCAR Open Science Conference in New Zealand next year.

Recommendations

New Zealand, Australia, Belgium, Norway and SCAR recommend that the Committee:

1. Note the progress to develop an Antarctic Environments Portal;
2. Provide comments and feedback to the proponents to support the further development of the Antarctic Environments Portal.