



**IP**

**8**

Agenda Item:

5.2

Person Responsible:

S.L. Chown

**EXCOM 2013**

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# **The Antarctic Environments Portal**

## **A SCAR Collaboration**



## Executive Summary

**Title:** The Antarctic Environments Portal

**Authors:** SC-ATS Chief Officer, S.L. Chown

**Introduction/ Background:** The Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) is charged with providing advice to Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCMs) on the implementation of the Environmental Protocol, including minimizing or mitigating environmental impacts of activities in the Antarctic Treaty area, the state of Antarctic environments and the need for scientific research related to the implementation of the Protocol. SCAR in turn provides advice to the CEP, often in collaboration with Parties to the Treaty, about key scientific advances that have policy implications.

**Important Issues or Factors:** SCAR, New Zealand, and Australia see that there is a pressing need to improve the availability of, and access to, scientific syntheses and high quality information to inform decision-making to support the effective implementation of the Protocol. The Environments Portal being developed primarily by New Zealand is a vehicle to do just that.

**Recommendations/Actions and Justification:** SCAR continues its involvement, through SC-ATS, with the Poertal as a primary mechanism for delivering science advice to the Treaty.

**Expected Benefits/Outcomes:** A vehicle to give additional effect to SCAR's vision of re-establishing its pre-eminence as a scientific advisor to the Antarctic Treaty System (in keeping with the 2011-2016 strategic plan) in a cost effective manner, and which leverages the benefits of significant partnerships.

**Partners:** Antarctica New Zealand, Australian Antarctic Division, Monash University

**Budget Implications:** SCAR has already committed US\$ 10 000 to the Portal via SC-ATS. The budget expectations for 2013 and 2014 are in the order of \$ 2 500 p.a. for travel. Most of the major costs will involve time from SC-ATS (through Monash University) as part of the Conservation Strategy work.

## The Antarctic Environments Portal

### **Introduction**

There is a pressing need 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.

### **Rationale:**

- Antarctica's unique status as a natural reserve and Parties' commitment to the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment demands wise and informed management;
- If policy and management decisions are to keep pace with the change in Antarctic environments, an effective means of accessing summary information is needed;
- A core function of the CEP is to provide informed advice to the Parties on the implementation of the Protocol;
- SCAR's dual mission includes providing independent, sound, scientifically based advice to the ATS and other policy makers including the use of science to identify emerging trends and bringing these issues to the attention of policy makers. With regards the ATS, this is done through the Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System (SCATS). SCAR both provides advice in response to requests from the ATS and /or the identification of threats or issues on the horizon;
- Whilst there are a range of sources of available Antarctic data and information, to date there has been no centralised or standardised means for synthesising this in a format that readily supports management and policy discussions and decision making.

### **The Portal**

The Antarctic Environments Portal:

- Is a developing (beta version currently) online resource of policy-ready information on Antarctic Environments to support the work of the ATCM and CEP;
- Displays and collates information that informs priority issues identified in the CEP work plan and, if developed, the ATCM work plan;
- Is flexible and responsive, providing policy makers with ready access to the most up to date information relating to priority issues;
- Improves the availability of, and access to, scientific syntheses and other relevant high quality information. Synthesised information is important as the value of results and observations to informing decision-making, management and policy is significantly increased when combined to give a broader picture;
- Presents high quality, unbiased information. Science information in the portal would be based on peer reviewed work. Other relevant information may be included subject to robust quality control processes (the details of which are to be determined);
- Presents information in a format suitable for a policy audience (i.e. not raw data, or specialist/technical information, but instead summaries of information with independent expert interpretations, giving a clear indication of information gaps and uncertainties);
- Does not attempt to convey all information on all environments, rather to provide syntheses of key information on priority issues for the CEP and ATCM;
- Does not represent a completely new way of working or require significant effort or resources to establish and maintain, rather it would make existing information and resources more accessible.

## ***Progress***

The Antarctic Environments Portal in trial version was showcased to the Antarctic Treaty Parties at the XXXVI meeting in Brussels. As part of the beta version, SCAR provided three policy review – one on disturbance to wildlife (an update of an earlier review), one on climate change as a threat to the Emperor Penguin, and one on the Introduction of non-native species (co-written with New Zealand as the leader).

The Portal will fulfil an important role in conveying information to the Treaty. In this respect it will help address SCAR's Strategic Vision of re-establishing its pre-eminence as a scientific advisor to the Antarctic Treaty System.

As the Portal develops, so the protocols required for developing and submitting scientific information will be formalized. At the moment SCAR's involvement is through SC-ATS because this is the way that all policy advice is currently delivered. However, because the portal will eventually be open to the public, a set of arrangements that enables flexibility of submission of information will be developed. Quite how that will be arranged will be the subject of work by the Portal Steering Committee.

The Portal Steering Committee comprises Birgit Njaastad (Norway), Bruno Danis (Belgium), Ewan McIvor (Australia), Fraser Morgan (New Zealand), Jana Newman (New Zealand), Neil Gilbert (New Zealand), Aleks Terauds (Australia), Steven Chown (Australia/SCAR). The Committee Terms of Reference are:

- a. Provide leadership, oversight and expert guidance to the Project Manager of the Antarctic Environments Portal to ensure that the project meets its objectives;
- b. Raise awareness of and 'champion' the project;
- c. Review and provide comments on project documents, contribute to editing Portal content (up to June 2015).

## ***Benefits to SCAR***

The Portal provides a vehicle to give additional effect to SCAR's vision of re-establishing its pre-eminence as a scientific advisor to the Antarctic Treaty System (in keeping with the 2011-2016 strategic plan) in a cost effective manner, and which leverages the benefits of significant partnerships. It will also provide the most cost effective way of delivering the Antarctic Conservation Strategy (see IP7) into the public domain and to as wide a variety of Antarctic stakeholders as possible.

## ***Budget***

The Portal is being funded largely by New Zealand, with smaller contributions from other partners. SCAR has contributed \$ 10 000 to the project directly. SC-ATS will contribute by way of its Antarctic Conservation Strategy work and no additional expenditure is expected at this stage directly for the portal except for travel to meetings in the order of \$ 2500 for the next two years.