

**WP****23b**

Agenda Item:

7.2

Person Responsible:

A Terauds

**XXXIV SCAR Delegates Meeting****Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 29-30 August 2016**

# **Antarctic Environments Portal**

## **Executive Summary**

**Author: SCAR Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System (SC-ATS)****Important Issues or Factors:**

One of SCAR's central mandates is to provide objective independent advice to Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings on issues of science and conservation affecting the management of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. SCAR has fulfilled this role ever since the Antarctic Treaty came into force in 1961, and has provided the scientific underpinning for all of the international agreements that form part of the Antarctic Treaty System.

SCAR's strategic plan seeks to continue this role of providing clear, evidence-based advice to the Antarctic Treaty System. The demand for such advice has never been greater. The changing nature of Antarctic climate and environments means there is an increasing need for wise, effective and timely policy and decision-making by the Antarctic Treaty Parties, which in turn, increases the demand for the provision of policy-ready scientific knowledge and information by SCAR.

SCAR's Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System (SC-ATS) provides the direct link with meetings of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties and its advisory Committee for Environmental Protection.

The Antarctic Environments Portal has been developed as a tool for facilitating the communication of scientific understanding in a policy-ready format to ensure that the Committee for Environmental Protection and the Antarctic Treaty Parties have the best knowledge available at their fingertips. The Portal is now operational, has been fully tested and has received the endorsement of the Antarctic Treaty Parties (Resolution 3 (2015) appended).

The Portal is currently funded by the Tinker Foundation and managed by the University of Canterbury, New Zealand until mid-2018. This paper seeks the support of the SCAR delegates for SCAR to take on the operational management of the Portal following the cessation of the Tinker funding in June 2018, dependent on a cost-neutral funding arrangement being found.

**Recommendations/Actions and Justification:**

The delegates are requested to approve action by the SCAR Secretariat (with the support of New Zealand colleagues) to explore cost-neutral options for SCAR to take over the operational management of the Portal after June 2018.

**Budget Implications:**

The intent would be for this outcome to be cost-neutral for SCAR and that any financial costs involved in SCAR taking over the operation of the Portal would be off-set through the acquisition of external funding and/or in-kind support.

## SCAR and the Antarctic Treaty System

The establishment of SCAR predates the Antarctic Treaty and SCAR has been intimately involved with the development of the Antarctic Treaty System since the first Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) in 1961.

SCAR's early advice on Antarctic environmental conservation led to the adoption by the Treaty Parties of the Agreed Measures on the Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora in 1964. SCAR advice on seal conservation assisted Parties with the negotiations and adoption of the 1972 Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals, and SCAR's Biological Investigations of Marine Antarctic Systems and Stocks (BIOMASS) programme laid the foundation for the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

Over time, SCAR has played a leading role in advising Parties on protected area management, species management and environmental impacts and monitoring.

Since 1987 SCAR has had Observer status to Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCMs), which is fulfilled by SCAR's Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System (SC-ATS). Since the entry into force in 1998 of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (the Protocol), SCAR also has Observer status, and a special advisory relationship to the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP).

More recently, SCAR's seminal report on (and subsequent updates to) Antarctic Climate Change and the Environment has been instrumental in driving priority work of the CEP; not least the Committee's development of its Climate Change Response Work Programme.

SCAR's enduring advisory role is highly valued by the Antarctic Treaty Parties and it is crucial that attempts be made to ensure that SCAR's advice is as effective and timely as it can be. The Antarctic Environments Portal has been designed to facilitate and enhance SCAR's advisory function.

## What is the Antarctic Environments Portal?

The Antarctic Environments Portal ([www.environments.aq](http://www.environments.aq); the Portal) is a web-based initiative that publishes high quality "state of knowledge" articles in a succinct, policy-ready format on issues of relevance to Antarctic environmental management and policy-making.

The primary purpose of the Antarctic Environments Portal is to provide the Antarctic Treaty's Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) and the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM), with ready access to up-to-date, summary information on the current state of knowledge on aspects of the Antarctic environment that are of interest or importance to policy-makers, so as to support discussions and decisions on Antarctic environmental management.

The Portal has been designed actively to assist SCAR's continuing role in providing objective and independent scientific advice to the ATCM and CEP on issues of science and conservation affecting the management of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean and on the role of the Antarctic region in the Earth system.

Behind the Portal lies a rigorous editorial process that ensures all published material meets the highest quality standards regarding political neutrality, impartiality and adequate representation of the current peer-reviewed published literature.

The quality standards of the Portal also require regular review of all articles to ensure that the material can be relied upon as being current and no more than 18 months out of date.

The Portal was initiated in 2012 and developed under the guidance of an international steering group, in which SCAR was involved and played an influential guiding role. The Portal was launched as a

completed product on the margins of the 38<sup>th</sup> Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) in 2015, and endorsed by the 38<sup>th</sup> ATCM by means of Resolution 3 (2015) (Appendix 1).

SCAR scientists and subject matter experts draft articles for the Portal. A contracted Editor (currently Professor David Walton, UK) manages the peer review and publication process in close collaboration with the Chief Officer of SCAR's Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System, Dr. Aleks Terauds, who is designated as the Deputy Editor for the Portal. The Editor and Deputy Editor are supported by an Editorial Group comprising two SCAR representatives (Dr. Carlota Escutia, Spain and Professor Akinori Takahashi, Japan) and two environmental / policy representatives (Dr. Polly Penhale, USA and Ms. Patricia Ortuzar, Argentina). Following peer review of all articles by scientific experts to ensure technical accuracy, a second review is undertaken by the Editorial Group to ensure the material meets the needs of policy makers.

Following approval by the Editorial Group, all articles (which are written and edited in English) are translated into French, Russian and Spanish and published in all four Antarctic Treaty languages on the Portal website.

## **Why is the Portal needed?**

There are several factors that have given rise to the need for the Portal initiative.

### ***Changing Antarctic environments***

Evidence continues to mount as to the extent and pace of climate and environmental change in Antarctica. Indeed the speed of change contrasts with the decision-making processes of the Antarctic Treaty System, which are consensus-based and measured. The CEP is charged with advising Treaty Parties on the state of the Antarctic environment, the need for scientific research and the effectiveness of the implementation of the Protocol on Environmental Protection. Whilst SCAR has been doing this through Information and Working Papers since 1987 the information is not always easily accessible, topical or timely. A more actively managed and up to date source of robust and policy-ready information is needed to ensure that the Treaty Parties are as informed as they can be on the effects of a changing Antarctic climate, to ensure their discussions and decision-making are prioritised, targeted and timely.

### ***Timeliness, topicality and reliability of scientific research***

The volume of Antarctic research continues to increase, making it more challenging for policy-makers and environmental managers to stay informed on the current state of knowledge across many fields. By engaging leading researchers across many countries to both prepare articles and keep them up-to-date, policy-makers can be assured of easy access to the state of knowledge on issues of topical relevance to them, and confidence that the information is current and reliable.

### ***Ready access to state-of-knowledge summaries***

SCAR's advice to the CEP and ATCM has been provided through Working and Information Papers to Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings. The Portal is intended to complement and extend this traditional route. On completion of the meetings, all papers are archived on the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat website. Whilst the papers are searchable, they are not always easily accessible and past SCAR advice and information has the potential to be quickly forgotten.

By contrast the Portal ensures that the current state of scientific knowledge on key issues is always easy to access, and can be readily updated and is directly connected to the peer reviewed literature. In addition it ensures that all Parties, regardless of their resources, can have equal access to the information.

## What does management of the Portal involve?

The Portal has been designed to be low cost and easy to manage. The functional aspects of the Portal that require active management are:

- Management of the part-time Editor's contract and remuneration
- Management of the contract to provide technical, website support
- Facilitation of the translation of Portal articles
- Uploading of articles to the website once translated
- Oversight of the budget and invoices

The primary costs of the part-time Editor, translation of articles into Spanish and Russian, and technical website support including costs associated with hosting the website in the cloud, are currently met from the Tinker Foundation grant until June 2018.

France is providing additional support to the Portal initiative by managing the translation of articles into French. Other countries may be willing to offer similar support such as hosting the site on a fully supported server or supporting a topical workshop to lessen the financial costs of the Portal.

The annual budget for the Portal will vary depending upon the number of articles being processed in any one year, but subject to support options described above, the overall costs for a baseline budget is anticipated to be in the region of US\$20,000.

## Future Plans

The Portal is currently hosted and managed by the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand with the grant generously provided by the Tinker Foundation.

Options for the longer-term hosting and management of the Portal have yet to be fully resolved. However, given that the Portal aims to facilitate SCAR's crucial advisory role to the Antarctic Treaty System, there is a logic in SCAR taking over the management of the Portal in the longer term, provided to do so is cost-neutral and practicable.

Whilst the Tinker Funding ceases in 2018, there is time to explore a range of financial and in-kind support options, including other foundation grants, and on-going support from the Treaty Parties; France's current support for translating articles into French is one example.

## Recommendations/Expected Outcomes

It is recommended that the SCAR delegates approve the proposal for SCAR to take on the management and oversight of the Antarctic Environments Portal after June 2018, subject to adequate longer-term funding and/or in-kind support being secured.

## Appendix 1.

**ATCM Resolution 3 (2015)**

The Representatives,

*Recalling* Article 3 of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (“the Protocol”), in particular its requirement that activities in the Antarctic Treaty area shall be planned and conducted on the basis of information sufficient to allow prior assessments of, and informed judgments about, their possible impacts on the Antarctic environment and dependent and associated ecosystems and on the value of Antarctica for the conduct of scientific research;

*Recognising* that the increasing complexity of protecting the Antarctic environment in the context of increasing human activity and a changing Antarctic climate requires access to policy-ready information to support the effective implementation of the Protocol;

*Acknowledging* with appreciation the longstanding scientific advisory role to the Antarctic Treaty system of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (“SCAR”);

*Welcoming* the development of the Antarctic Environments Portal (“the Portal”) as a mechanism to provide state-of-knowledge reports on priority or emerging issues, which can be drawn on to support effective management and governance of the region, including effective implementation of the Protocol;

*Noting* that the Portal will also provide a mechanism to support SCAR in providing independent, scientifically based information to the Antarctic Treaty system;

Recommend that their Governments:

- 1) commend the Portal as an important mechanism for making high quality, accurate, non-political and up-to-date scientific advice available to the Committee for Environmental Protection (“CEP”) and the Antarctic Treaty Parties and as a useful tool for its use by Parties on a voluntary basis;
- 2) request SCAR to use the Portal as appropriate for providing state-of-knowledge reports on issues of policy and management relevance;
- 3) encourage scientists to participate in the preparation and review of articles for the Portal;
- 4) consider opportunities to support the management of the Portal; and
- 5) invite Members of CEP to contribute to the environmental policy relevance of the Portal through active involvement in the Editorial Group, and by providing feedback on the content of the Portal, including the identification of new material.