

# **A Proposal for a Joint IASC/SCAR Bipolar Action Group**

*Developed by Colin Summerhayes and Volker Rachold as a follow-up of a meeting of the SCAR and IASC Presidents and Executive Directors held at the IASC Secretariat in Stockholm, 6 June 2007*

## **Background**

The IASC/SCAR Letter of Agreement recognizes that there are many common interests between SCAR and IASC in scientific research in the polar regions and that there is much to be gained from developing a synergy between SCAR and IASC in polar and bipolar research. This synergy will become even more important during the IPY and the post-IPY process. IASC and SCAR have already started to take over some responsibilities in the IPY process by organizing the mid-term IPY Conference (2008 SCAR/IASC Open Science Meeting). SCAR's major science programs have been adopted as IPY programs, but will continue after the IPY. Both, IASC and SCAR are ex-officio members on the IPY Joint Committee (JC) and, thus, are already vehicles for translating IPY science into policy advice to the ATCM and the Arctic Council.

In early 2006, IASC appointed an international group of experts to evaluate IASC activities over the 10-year period, 1996-2005, and recommend strategies for the future. The report of this Review and Strategy Group clearly identifies the need for IASC to continue efforts to improve relations with SCAR with an emphasis on collaboration in areas of mutual interest and in support of creating an IPY legacy.

## **Phase I: Joint IASC/SCAR Bipolar Action Group**

It is proposed that IASC and SCAR form a Joint Bipolar Action Group (AG) of 5-7 people to address bipolar issues, in particular to develop instruments, such as workshops, programs and networks. The IPY International Program Office should be involved in this AG from the beginning because the AG would also be tasked with developing mechanisms to nurture the IPY legacy, with a special focus on the roles of IASC and SCAR.

In a recent paper entitled "Broadening the Legacy of IPY", David Hik and Karen Kraft Sloan have summarized the following legacies that have most often been articulated:

- Establishment of permanent observation and monitoring networks (e.g. SAON in the Arctic and SOOS and PAntOS in the Antarctic)
- Managing the explosion of data that IPY will create and ensuring access to it
- Raising the public profile of the polar regions
- Training the next generation of polar researchers
- Sharing logistical information more broadly and more efficiently

- Coordination of funding for polar science by various national and international agencies
- Increasing the capacity of Arctic residents to support and engage in research activities
- Improving the links between observation and monitoring and modeling
- Environmental IPY legacy

All of these legacy issues are highly relevant for both IASC and SCAR. A joint Bipolar AG (BipAG) would be important to both to help to ensure the IPY legacy, and to adequately represent IASC's and SCAR's interest in the post-IPY process. IASC is currently undergoing a major restructuring as suggested by the IASC Review and Strategy Group and the proposed SCAR/IASC AG would become an important element in the new IASC structure.

## **Phase II: Joint Standing Committee of IASC and SCAR**

It is foreseeable that in the longer term a stronger body than BipAG will be needed to oversee the complex IPY legacy issues on behalf of SCAR and IASC, and indeed on behalf of ICSU/WMO. There will be a need for such a body to take over from the IPY JC when it is dissolved. A logical solution would be that the proposed BipAG could be expanded into a Joint Standing Committee of IASC and SCAR, possibly with additional support from ICSU and WMO. This body would then report to IASC and SCAR and either through them, or directly on their behalf, to ICSU and WMO. In essence, it is proposed that this Joint Standing Committee of IASC and SCAR would inherit the role of the present ICSU/WMO IPY JC. There is a precedent for the formation of such inter-agency committees, in the form of JCOMM, the Joint Technical Commission for Oceanography and Marine Meteorology, shared by the WMO and UNESCO's IOC.

## **Secretariat Implications**

It would seem likely even at this early stage that implementing the complex legacy of the IPY will require a larger Secretariat than is currently available between SCAR and IASC, though it is not yet clear whether a staff as large as the present IPY IPO will be needed. Given the unipolar nature of much polar work, it would seem likely that the tasks of the present IPY IPO could be split between SCAR and IASC, thus enlarging slightly both of the present Secretariats. The appropriate staff in those Secretariats would then report both to their separate bodies and to the proposed Joint Standing Committee, and thence to ICSU and WMO. An appropriate model exists in the form of the WMO and IOC Secretariat staffers who report to JCOMM and to its parent bodies, IOC and WMO.

## **Next Steps**

This proposal will be presented at the next SCAR and IASC Executive Committee Meetings (SCAR: July 2007, IASC: October 2007). Once approved, the paper should be made available to the October 2007 meeting of the IPY JC as a mechanism for dealing with the IPY legacy.

It is suggested that BipAG should be formed in autumn (i.e. after the IPY Joint Committee Meeting in late October), so that it can begin identifying needs for the future. It is envisaged that SCAR/IASC would fund one BipAG meeting per year with a budget of around EUR10,000, and that most of the work would be done by e-mail or by meeting in the margins of other meetings.