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Antarctic Environments Portal

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Working Paper submitted by Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, United States and SCAR

Summary

The Antarctic Environments Portal continues to provide the CEP and Antarctic Treaty Parties with a reliable source of information on issues of policy and management relevance.

The Tinker Foundation has generously funded the Antarctic Environments Portal until 2018. The Portal is currently hosted by the University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

At their 2016 meeting the SCAR delegates agreed, in principle, to take over the operation of the Portal once the Tinker Foundation grant concludes, provided a resource-neutral means of managing and operating the Portal can be established.

A Content Management Plan for the Portal has been developed. This aims to provide a more structured approach to developing content for the Portal and for facilitating a dialogue with the CEP with regard to the content published on the Portal website.

The paper authors recommend that the Committee: 1) considers opportunities for supporting SCAR's management of the Portal after 2018, 2) reviews and provides comment on the Content Management Plan particularly with regard to content it wishes to see published on the Portal website.

Background

The purpose of the Antarctic Environments Portal (the Portal; www.environments.aq) is to provide the Committee and Antarctic Treaty Parties with easy access to reliable information on a range of issues relevant to the management of Antarctic environments. Information that is available through the Portal is prepared by Antarctic experts and is thoroughly peer-reviewed before being published.

The Portal also facilitates SCAR's mandate to provide objective independent advice to bodies of the Antarctic Treaty System on issues of science and conservation affecting the management of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

The purpose and value of the Portal was acknowledged by the ATCM through Resolution 3 (2015).

Scientists and subject matter experts draft summary information on policy-relevant topics for publication on the Portal website. An Editor in close collaboration with the Chief Officer of SCAR's Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System (SC-ATS) manages the review and publication process. The Editor is supported by an Editorial Group comprising two SCAR representatives and two environmental / policy representatives.

The grant generously provided by the Tinker Foundation supports:

- 1) Part-time employment of an Editor
- 2) Technical support for and cloud-hosting of the Portal website
- 3) Translation of content into the four languages of the Antarctic Treaty
- 4) Other administrative costs such as meetings of the Editorial Group

CEP XIX (paragraph 25 of the report of CEP XIX) reaffirmed the importance of the Portal as a reliable information source and agreed to:

- Maximise the use of information contained in the Portal to support its discussions (on a voluntary basis);
- Advise the Editorial Group on information summaries it wished to see published on the Portal website (e.g. in support of the five-year work plan or the CCRWP);
- Encourage scientists to work with SCAR in preparing content for the Portal;
- Consider and make recommendations to the ATCM on options for the future management of the Portal (in accordance with Resolution 3 (2015));
- Give thought to identifying future representatives to serve on the Editorial Group.

Developments since CEP XIX

Long-term Management of the Portal

The long-term management and operation of the Portal, beyond the period of funding provided by the Tinker Foundation, remains to be resolved. Resolution 3 (2015) recommended that governments consider options to support the management of the Portal. CEP XIX also encouraged further consideration of options for the future management of the Portal (paragraph 24 of the report of CEP XIX).

Options that have been raised in past discussions within the CEP have included transferring the operation of the Portal to the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat or to SCAR.

Following CEP XIX the Portal Management Board agreed to assess SCAR's interest in taking over the operation of the Portal. Following the submission of a paper to the 2016 SCAR delegates meeting (held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 29-30 August) the SCAR delegates approved 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.

This 'in principle' agreement from the SCAR delegates is welcomed and offers a potential long-term solution to the management of the Portal provided that a solution can be found to resourcing the Portal.

As noted in Working Paper 10 / ATCM XXXIX, France is currently providing support to the Portal initiative by managing the translation of content into French, which has reduced the overall budget for translation. Other countries may be willing to offer similar support including, for example, contributing to the costs of employing a part-time Editor.

The annual budget for the Portal will vary depending upon the number of publications being processed in any one year, but subject to support options described above, the overall costs for a baseline annual budget is anticipated to be in the region of US\$10,000 to US\$20,000.

The CEP is invited to discuss such options, and provide additional ideas to support the long-term management of the Portal through SCAR.

Content Management Plan

The primary function of the Portal is to make available state-of-knowledge reports in the form of Information Summaries and Emerging Issue publications, and spatial information. To establish a more structured approach to the development of Information Summaries and Emerging Issue publications, the Management Board and Editorial Group of the Portal have developed a Content Management Plan (see supporting Information Paper 14).

The Content Management Plan aims to identify a series of topics or issues for which knowledge summaries are required so as to ensure that the content published on the Portal website is contemporary and relevant to current issues being attended to by the CEP and ATCM.

The Content Management Plan is intended to be regularly updated and reviewed by the Editor, Deputy Editor and Editorial Group (e.g. at Editorial Group meetings).

The Content Management Plan also offers a useful mechanism for engaging with the CEP and for offering the Committee an opportunity to provide feedback on Portal content that it wishes to see prepared.

The Committee is invited to provide comment on the utility of the content management plan.

The Committee is also invited to provide feedback on content it wishes to see prepared for the publication on the Portal website.

Recommendations

To assist with the further development of the Portal initiative and to secure the long-term future for the Portal, the Working Paper authors recommend that the CEP, and CEP members:

- 1) considers opportunities for supporting SCAR's management of the Portal after 2018;
- 2) reviews and provides comment on the Content Management Plan particularly with regard to content it wishes to see published on the Portal website;
- 3) provide any additional feedback to the Portal Editor at editor@environments.aq