



Agenda Item: CEP 3

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Antarctic Environments Portal: Project completion and next steps

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

Summary

Wise management of the Antarctic environment requires access to high quality scientific information. Pressures on Antarctica, through a changing Antarctic climate and increasing human activity means that there is a pressing need to improve the availability of, and access to policy-ready information to support the effective implementation of the Protocol. The Antarctic Environments Portal (www.environments.aq) meets this need by placing policy-ready information on Antarctic environments at the fingertips of those involved in Antarctic management and governance. The Portal also supports SCAR's scientific advisory role to the Antarctic Treaty System.

The Portal development project is concluding. The Portal is being transferred to the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand from where it will be managed for an interim period of time. A Management Board will be established to oversee the Portal. An Editorial Group has been established to support the Editor. Funding to support the ongoing operation of the Portal is actively being sought.

Members are invited to: lend their support to the Portal; consider how it can be used to support the work of the CEP; consider whether and how it might engage with the Portal by providing Editorial Group members in the future, and provide thoughts on long-term management arrangements for the Portal.

Introduction

The role of the CEP includes providing advice on: the state of the Antarctic environment, and the need for scientific research and monitoring (Article 12 of the Protocol). Rapid changes are being observed in parts of the Antarctic environment. Further changes are expected over the next century, and these may be compounded by increasing human activity. For the CEP to fulfil its mandate in light of these pressures on the Antarctic environment, ready access to reliable, up-to-date, scientifically based information is urgently needed.

The Portal presents reliable information on priority or emerging issues, which can be drawn on to support effective management and governance of the region. It also provides a mechanism to support SCAR in providing independent, scientifically based information to the Antarctic Treaty System.

Background

The Portal project was initiated in 2012, and papers on the project were provided to CEP XV (2012) ([ATCM XXXV WP 57](#)) and CEP XVI (2013) ([ATCM XXXVI WP 28](#)).

At CEP XVII (2014), New Zealand, Australia, Belgium, Norway and SCAR provided a further update report on the Portal ([ATCM XXXVII WP 10](#)). As in previous meetings, the initiative was well supported and the Committee welcomed the fact that further development of the Portal had taken into account earlier comments provided by Members. CEP XVII encouraged the project sponsors to complete the development of the Portal ahead of CEP XVIII (paras 5 – 17 of the report of CEP XVII refer).

Progress since CEP XVII

Engaging the science community

The Antarctic research community has been engaged through the establishment of a contributor reference group, and through Portal presentations given at the SCAR Open Science Conference (OSC, Auckland, August 2014). On the margins of the OSC an APECS workshop (funded by Norway) was held to engage early career scientists as future contributors of information to the Portal.

Portal Content

The material available on the Portal is the primary reason for the initiative. New content (in the form of Information Summaries and Emerging Issues) has been commissioned by the Editor. Content currently under development involves 13 articles on 8 topics involving contributions from 50 authors across 15 countries. To the extent possible scientific content for the Portal is prepared by at least three authors from different countries to ensure a balanced perspective on the issue¹.

A climate change content development workshop was held in March 2015 (funded by Norway, and hosted by British Antarctic Survey). This successfully identified, and began to develop 12 sub-topics of relevance to the CEP's interests on this issue. These sub-topics were identified in order to support the CEP's climate change response work programme (CCRWP). Information summaries on some of these sub-topics are in preparation.

Editorial Process

A workshop held in New Zealand in November 2014 (funded by Norway) allowed the editorial process to be tested and refined. The process is rigorous and includes several review steps to ensure the material meets the standards of the Portal and SCAR, i.e. that it provides a balanced perspective of the current state of knowledge, and that it is independent, relevant to policy and management interests, up-to-date and a-political. SCAR scientists play a crucial role in both providing and reviewing material published through the Portal. The editorial process and associated guidance material has been consolidated into a Portal Handbook (see IP 11 for a summary).

An Editorial Group has been established to support the Editor. The Editorial Group is comprised of representatives from the Antarctic research and policy communities and includes:

- Professor David Walton – Interim Editor
- Dr Carlota Escutia – scientific advisor
- Ms Patricia Ortuzar – environmental / policy advisor
- Dr Polly Penhale – environmental / policy advisor
- Dr Akinori Takahashi – scientific advisor
- Dr Aleks Terauds – Chief Officer, SC-ATS

Terms of office on the Editorial Group is limited to two plus two years. In the future, environmental / policy advisors could be provided by the CEP. There may be merit in the Committee considering, in due course, a means by which it could propose future Editorial Group members.

Website

The Portal website resides in the cloud and is hosted by Amazon Web Services. The website is managed and maintained by Landcare Research Ltd, New Zealand (the designer and developer).

¹ To receive information on the posting of new content on the Portal, users can like the Portal on Facebook (www.facebook.com/AntarcticEnvironmentsPortal) or follow it on Twitter (@AntEnvPortal).

A number of aspects of the website have been further developed. This includes the addition of search functions and social media links, as well as improvements to the password protected part of the website to support the editorial process. The updated version of the website will be released ahead of CEP XVIII.

Governance

It is anticipated that the Portal will become a valuable and valued tool that is effective in supporting the work of the Committee and the Antarctic Treaty System more widely. Whilst interim hosting arrangements are currently being secured, longer-term management of the Portal has yet to be determined. There are a range of options for this of which one may be for the Portal to be managed by the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat.

The Committee may wish to consider issues and options related to the future management of the Portal.

In the interim the Portal is in the process of being transferred to Gateway Antarctica, University of Canterbury. Hosting it within an academic institution supports the independence and academic rigour of the Portal.

An interim Management Board will be established to oversee the operation of the Portal, support the Editor and support the host institution in the funding and management of the Portal.

Funding

The Portal project has been funded by New Zealand (Antarctica New Zealand, and Landcare Research Ltd) until June 2015, with additional funding and resourcing generously provided by Norway (the Norwegian Polar Institute and Norwegian Ministry for the Environment) from June 2014 to June 2015. Seed funding in 2012 was generously provided by SCAR and significant in kind support has been provided by the Australian Antarctic Division and the Universite Libre de Bruxelles.

Ongoing funding for the Portal is required to support: the part-time employment of the editor; website hosting and maintenance; translation of material, and other administrative expenses. Funding to cover these costs is actively being sought from an appropriate private foundation. Members will be notified as to the success of this application in due course. Any additional support that may be provided by individual Treaty Parties would be welcomed. An example of additional contributions could include support for translation of material and the hosting of themed workshops to define and develop content for the Portal such as the climate change workshop referred to above.

Next steps

The Working Paper authors remain convinced of the importance of ensuring that the CEP is as informed as it can be on the state of Antarctic environments. It is hoped that the Portal proves to be a valuable tool to assist the CEP in meeting its responsibilities, and assists SCAR in its role of providing independent scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty System.

The Committee is encouraged to make full use of the information available in the Portal to support its discussions, its advice to the ATCM and its planning of future priority work.

Recommendations

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

- 1) Welcomes completion of the Antarctic Environments Portal, and indicates its support for the final product (as the intended primary user of the Portal);
- 2) Considers ways in which the Portal can be used to support its discussions, its advice to the ATCM and its planning of future priority work;
- 3) Considers whether and how it might engage with the Portal by providing Editorial Group members in the future;
- 4) Provides thoughts with regard to the potential future management of the Portal.