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Antarctic Environments Portal

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Information Paper submitted by SCAR

Summary

The Antarctic Environments Portal is a web-based resource whose primary aim is to support the work of the decision-making bodies of the Antarctic Treaty System, and in particular the Committee on Environmental Protection, by providing impartial and up-to-date, peer-reviewed briefings based on the best-available science. In January 2020, SCAR took over the management of the Portal from the University of Canterbury (New Zealand), including the operation of the portal website that has been designed to provide easy access to the Portal's briefings (known as Information Summaries).

The Antarctic Environments Portal is recognised as an important contribution to the delivery of strategic science support in the SCAR Strategic Plan (2023-2028).

The Portal Management Board is developing a business plan that will set out options for a flexible and diverse funding structure for the future delivery of the Antarctic Environments Portal.

This Information Paper provides an update on the management and operation of the Portal, including examples of how Portal articles are linked to issues of priority interest for the CEP.

SCAR invites the CEP and Parties to continue to support the Antarctic Environments Portal and engage with its ongoing provision of impartial science advice to the Antarctic Treaty System.

Background

The Antarctic Environments Portal (the Portal; environments.aq) was launched in 2015 and endorsed by the ATCM by means of Resolution 3 (2015).

The Portal ensures that the current state of knowledge on key issues is easily available to all CEP Members, Antarctic Treaty Parties and the public. The Portal aims to:

- Meet urgent and increasing need for information on scientific issues of relevance to Antarctic policy.
- Provide reliable, non-technical summaries on priority issues.
- Raise awareness of emerging issues in Antarctic research and policy.
- Support informed discussions and informed decision-making.
- Make information available to all Parties irrespective of the stage of development of their Antarctic programme.

Prior to 2020, the Portal was based at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, and supported with funding generously provided by the Tinker Foundation. In January 2020, the Portal was formally transferred into the management of SCAR. The Portal Editor, Dr Keith Reid, reports to the SCAR Portal Management Board comprised of the SCAR Executive Director, Dr Chandrika Nath; SCAR Vice President for Science, Prof Deneb Karentz; Chief Officer of SCAR's Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System (SC-ATS), Dr Susie Grant; and Assoc. Prof. Daniela Liggett. The Board meets periodically to discuss ongoing business and priorities for the Portal. The SCAR Executive Director acts as the Portal Manager, and SCAR's Project Officer, Johanna Grabow, acts as Assistant Editor.

The Portal Editor works with a Portal Editorial Group that comprises: Prof Carlota Escutia, University of Grenada, Spain; Dr Polly Penhale, National Science Foundation, USA; Assoc. Prof Akinori Takahashi, National Institute of Polar Research, Japan; and the Chief Officer of

SC-ATS, Dr Susie Grant. The Portal Editorial Group was pleased to welcome Amanda Lynnes, IAATO's Director of Environment and Science Coordination, in 2022, and continues to explore opportunities to ensure that its membership includes members with scientific, management and policy roles.

Portal update

Website and communications

The Portal website (environments.aq) provides a structured approach for presenting and accessing the Information Summaries, which are grouped under six categories: Marine, Terrestrial, Human Activities, Inland Aquatic Environments, Atmosphere, and Cryosphere. The site receives around 850 unique users per month from across 74 different countries, with 40% of users being from Australia, the US, the UK and Russia. The number of visitors rises to around 1,350 users per month in the lead up to and during the ATCM as well as the CCAMLR meetings.

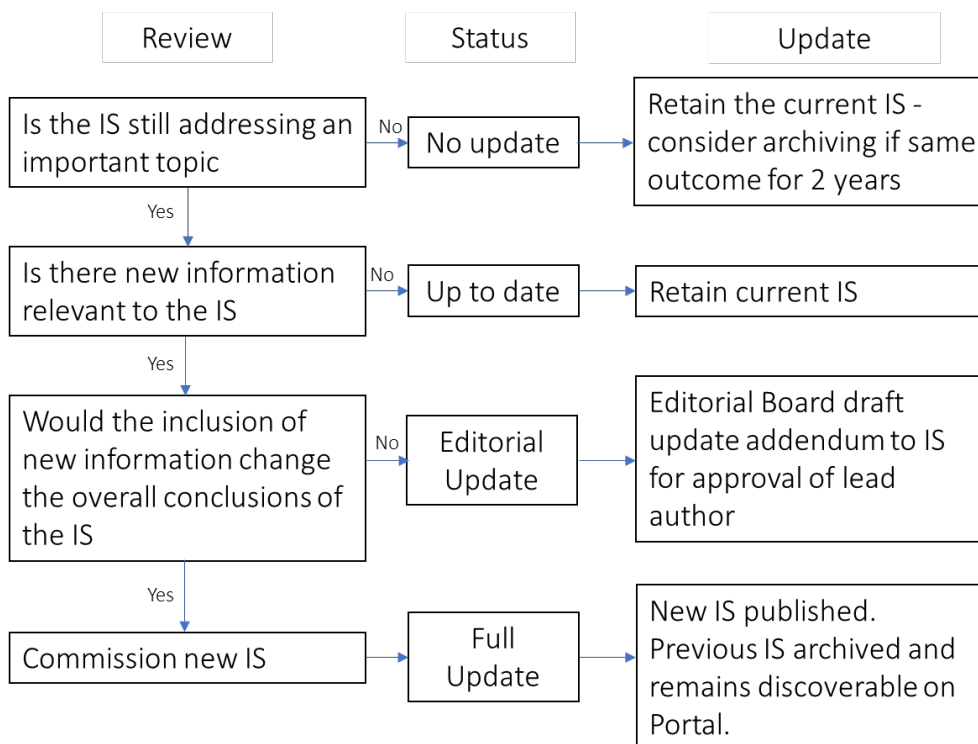
Additionally, content and news are shared through a mailing list (188 subscribers), the Portal Facebook page (1,125 followers) and through SCAR's Twitter account (9,500 followers) and Facebook page (3,100 followers). Popular Information Summaries on the website include three new articles on Antarctic Sea Ice, published in August 2022, and an article on Ten Scientific Messages on Risks and Opportunities for Life in the Antarctic, published in February 2022. In order to make the Information Summaries as useful as possible, the articles are accompanied by infographics that have been very positively received and are shared widely. SCAR is continuing to examine innovative and diverse ways to display information on the Portal.

New and updated information summaries (see <https://environments.aq/publications/>)

Six new Information Summaries have been published since the last ATCM. In August 2022, three new Information Summaries on sea-ice were published, covering physical processes, biological consequences and potential future changes in Antarctic sea ice. The infographics for these summaries were used in presentations at side events of the UNFCCC COP27 in 2022. Together with a new Information Summary on ocean temperature changes published in October 2022, these infographics provide a sound foundation for understanding the important physical changes taking place in the ocean environment around the Antarctic. In 2023, new Information Summaries on Antarctic krill and the krill fishery, led by SCAR's newly formed Krill Expert Group, and an update on the recovery of the great whales that feed on krill, provide important and up-to-date overviews of these two important and interacting topics.

In 2022, the Portal Management Board agreed to implement an annual review process to determine if the published Information Summaries cover topics that remain relevant, and to determine whether or not there is a need for an updated summary (Figure 1). This review is intended to reflect the need to balance the addition of new Information Summaries and ensure that existing material remains relevant and contemporary.

Figure 1 – Annual review and update process for information summaries on the SCAR Environments Portal.



The 2022 Editorial Group review found that all current Information Summaries addressed important topics and that the vast majority were up-to-date. For two topics, there was agreement that new information is available that could change the conclusions of existing Information Summaries:

- Non-native species: There are currently four Information Summaries on the Portal related to non-native species in the Antarctic and there is some duplication of material and information that is superseded by more recently-published material. The Editorial Group agreed that the topic remains relevant to the work of the CEP and that three of the existing summaries could be consolidated and updated into a single summary. This updated Information Summary is now in preparation.
- Emperor penguins: The Editorial Group also agreed that the current Information Summary on emperor penguins does not reflect the most up-to-date information, especially when considering the recent SCAR Expert Group on Birds and Mammals review of the threats to this species. The Editorial Group agreed that the topic remains relevant to the work of the CEP and an updated information summary is now in preparation.

New Information Summaries are also being prepared on Antarctic tourism, led by researchers from SCAR's Tourism Action Group (Ant-TAG), and on the role of Antarctic science in public perceptions of the region, led by researchers from SCAR's Action Group on Public Engagement with Antarctic Research (AG-PEAR).

All Information Summaries published on the Portal are currently available in the official languages of the ATS, and SCAR expresses its gratitude for the in-kind support for translations that has been generously provided by France and Spain. SCAR also expresses its gratitude to the authors of Information Summaries for generously contributing their time, and recognises the importance of maintaining diversity in the authorship of information provided in the Portal.

Business plan and future funding

SCAR's commitment to the delivery of the Portal is recognised in the SCAR Strategic Plan 2023-2028, specifically in relation to the following sections:

To improve and enhance provision of scientific advice to policy-makers, SCAR will:

- *Manage and expand the content of the Antarctic Environments Portal and continue to deliver concise science summaries for policy-makers.*

To improve communications with wide and diverse audiences, SCAR will:

- *Manage and update the Antarctic Environments Portal aiming to provide impartial 'state-of-knowledge' reports that address specific issues catered not only towards policy-makers but also SCAR researchers and the general public.*

To date, funding has generously been provided by Australia, the UK, New Zealand and the Netherlands to support SCAR's management of the Portal. It is anticipated that these funds will support the Portal until the end of 2023. The Portal Management Board is currently developing a business plan for the Portal, aligned with the SCAR Strategic Plan 2023-2028, with the aim of identifying further funding for the Portal for that 5-year period. Noting different funding horizons and budgetary cycles, it will set out proposals for a flexible funding model comprised of diverse funding streams, including a combination of funding provided by Parties, as well as possible funding from SCAR and other sources such as philanthropic organisations. At the recent SCAR Delegates' Meeting in September 2022, Delegates supported SCAR's continued efforts to find sustainable options for hosting the Portal over the longer term.

Support to the work of the CEP

Information Summaries published on the Portal website aim to provide impartial state-of-knowledge reports that address specific issues that the CEP has on its agenda and work programmes, with an emphasis on the science knowledge and information needs that are included in the CEP's five-year work plan. In delivering on this aim, the Portal contributes to fulfilling one of the CEP's core functions of advising the Antarctic Treaty Parties on the state of the Antarctic environment (Article 12(1)(j) of the Protocol).

The preparation of Information Summaries continues to be guided by the issues and environmental pressures identified in the CEP Five-Year Work Plan (CEP XXIV Report Appendix 1). The outcomes of the informal workshop on CEP strategic priorities and the Five-Year Work Plan and subsequent discussion by CEP XXV will also be central to the Editorial Group's 2023 review.

It is important that CEP Members (as a key user community) continue to have input to identifying specific needs for content on the Portal. Comments and suggestions on the status of current content and proposals for new Information Summaries are welcomed and can be provided during discussions at the CEP meeting, or at any time to the Portal Editor (editor@environments.aq).

Next steps and recommendations

SCAR will continue to support the Antarctic Treaty System by providing independent and scientifically-rigorous Information Summaries through the Antarctic Environments Portal.

SCAR invites the CEP and CEP Members to:

- 1) Continue to support the publication of Information Summaries on the Antarctic Environments Portal, recognising its value in contributing to the work of the Committee,
- 2) Communicate with SCAR on suggestions for new or updated Information Summaries.