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Plans for a fifth International Polar Year 2032/33

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Summary

Since 2021, an interim planning group has been engaging in early discussions to plan for a 5th International Polar Year in 2032-2033. Aside from the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) and SCAR, the initial planning efforts for the 5th IPY are currently supported by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), International Science Council (ISC), University of the Arctic, International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA), the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS) and other partners worldwide representing both poles. This paper provides an update on discussions to date and on next steps.

Background

An International Polar Year (IPY) provides an opportunity for intensive, coordinated research efforts focussed on the polar regions, as well as for awareness raising and capacity building on a global scale. There have been four IPYs: 1882–1883; 1932–1933; 1957–58 (part of the International Geophysical Year) and 2007–2008. The 4th IPY was co-sponsored and led by the International Science Council (formerly ICSU) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). As a thematic body of the International Science Council, SCAR had a prominent role in formulating and promoting IPY 2007-2008. Since 2021, an interim planning group has been engaging in early discussions to plan for a 5th International Polar Year in 2032-2033. Aside from the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) and SCAR, the initial planning efforts for the 5th IPY are currently supported by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), International Science Council (ISC), University of the Arctic, International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA), the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS) and other partners worldwide representing both poles.

Organizing the 5th IPY 25 years after the last IPY reflects the urgent need for coordinated international research to tackle the biggest challenges of polar research, for both the polar regions themselves and for the world as a whole.

The European Polar Board and the International Arctic Science Committee are supporting authors on this paper.

Progress to date

In 2021, an interim planning group consisting of representatives from SCAR, IASC and a number of partner organizations including the ISC and WMO, started engaging in early discussions to plan for an International Polar Year in 2032-2033, 25 years after the last IPY. Participants agreed that organizing a 5th IPY 25 years after the last IPY in 2007-08 reflects the urgent need for coordinated international research to tackle the biggest challenges of polar research, for both the Polar Regions themselves and for the world as a whole.

Over the past year, these discussions have gained momentum and support. A SCAR community-wide survey in early 2022 indicated widespread support. In September 2022, the SCAR Delegates expressed support for a future IPY and endorsed the creation of an IPY planning committee within SCAR to participate in the planning discussions of the wider polar community. Delegates also supported the holding of a joint SCAR-IASC Polar Conference in 2030 in the lead up to the 5th IPY.

In December 2022, SCAR and IASC issued a joint statement to confirm that preparatory work had started. In February 2023, informal discussions involving SCAR, IASC, the European Polar Board (EPB), ISC and other stakeholders were held at Arctic Science Summit Week to coordinate the next steps in the planning process.

The 5th IPY is neither envisioned as a single focal year with heightened activities, nor as a polar decade. It will involve a multi-year, build-up phase leading up to the IPY, and a legacy phase for reporting and implementation of identified actions afterwards. Projects will be able to contribute to the IPY during either or both of these phases. This will provide the flexibility for urgent issues to be tackled without delay under the umbrella of the IPY. It will also create a focal point for the polar research community and wider stakeholders. Some projects may involve activities during the lead-up phase with results reported during the IPY. Other projects that require longer planning phases may involve dedicated field and measurement campaigns during the IPY itself, with results reported afterwards. Coordination between key actors from an early stage will be vital to the IPY's success. Sharing research experience and skills between researchers in both polar regions will be important, as will identifying common research questions and approaches, wherever appropriate.

Next steps

Aside from IASC and SCAR, the initial planning efforts for the 5th IPY are currently supported by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), International Science Council (ISC), University of the Arctic, International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA), the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS) and other partners worldwide representing both poles.

Together, this initiative aims to build an IPY that reflects the aims, objectives and needs of each organization and the international research community, as well as Indigenous Peoples and other residents of the Polar Regions and wider stakeholders. Over the coming months and years, many individuals, stakeholders, rightsholders and research funding bodies working on, having an interest in, or residing in the Polar Regions will be encouraged to participate and help shape this large community effort.

The partners involved in the discussions are currently working on the next concrete steps for the planning process, which include:

- Mapping out the stakeholders in both polar regions that need to be included in the discussions, to determine how and when to engage them.
- Preparing a draft concept note with initial ideas for the planning process of the 5th IPY and a timeline. Both will be shared with the polar research community and other relevant stakeholders for consultation and feedback towards the end of 2023, to ensure that their input can be incorporated from the start of the process.