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Presented by: Australia,
Belgium,
New Zealand,
Norway,
SCAR
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Antarctic Environmental Portal content development and editorial process

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Information Paper submitted by Australia, Belgium, New Zealand, Norway and SCAR

Introduction

In order to ensure that the scientific contributions to the Portal meet the required standards a number of key principles have been adopted and a rigorous content development and editorial process has been put in place to support the Portal. Key elements of the content development and editorial process are described below. A flow chart illustrating the editorial process is attached as Appendix 1. Details about the content development and editorial process can be found in the Antarctic Environments Handbook, available from the Portal editor upon request (editor@environments.aq).

Editor and Editorial Group

Editor

An Editor is responsible for the development of Portal content and the updating of content published on the Portal website. The Editor commissions new material, scopes the subjects that have been selected for coverage, selects the authors (with advice from SCAR), initiates reviews (primarily through SCAR) and collates the comments from reviewers, corresponds with the principal author on any revisions, edits the final text to an appropriate level of accessibility, checks the references provided, and ensures that citations are correct and that any web-links work.

Editorial Group

An international Editorial Group has been established to oversee content related matters in the Portal within the framework (as recorded in WP 21).

The Terms of Reference of the Editorial Group are:

- 1) to ensure the independence and political neutrality of all of the information and data contained in the Portal, including comments submitted through the functions provided for this purpose.
- 2) to ensure the information is presented in language that is accessible to policy makers and managers at the Antarctic Treaty and elsewhere, and to scientists and the public worldwide
- 3) to ensure that the subjects presented are topical, relevant to governance of the Antarctic and kept up to date by regular review, and revision where appropriate

The Editorial Group comprises 6 to 7 members, including the Portal Editor and a representative of SCAR. The other Editorial Group members are appointed to provide expertise in science (scientific advisors) or environmental management and policy (environmental policy advisors). The Editor acts as the Chair of the Editorial Group.

- SCAR is represented by the Chair of its Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System (SC-ATS).
- Two scientific advisors, who will serve for a term of 2+2 years, will be nominated by the SCAR Executive
- Two environmental policy advisors with appropriate expertise, also serving a term of 2+2 years, will be appointed by the Editorial Group.

- The Group may invite one additional member.¹

The composition of the Group is managed to ensure diversity of expertise and geographic representation.

Content Development

The Portal contains two types of summaries:

- Information Summaries synthesizing the state of scientific knowledge on specific topics which address issues that have been identified by the CEP/ATCM as priorities. Information Summaries are to be based on the peer reviewed scientific literature.
- Emerging Issue summaries, summarizing scientific knowledge in fields which may not be currently on the CEP Work Plan and agenda (but which nevertheless may be related to prioritized issues), which recent publication shows is changing significantly or constitutes a new discovery of potential relevance for management. The Emerging Issue summaries follow a similar format and review process as Information Summaries and are also based on published research.

The Portal will focus on providing a synthesis of the current scientific understanding of given issues. The Portal may also include introductory information to provide the background as to why a specific topic area has been identified as important in an Antarctic policy and management context.

The science used in preparing the Information Summaries and Emerging Issues summaries will be from peer reviewed papers published primarily in international scientific journals.

Content strategy and commissioning

The Editorial Group (see above) is responsible for maintaining a content strategy. The content strategy is currently based on the CEP's area of interests (as reflected in the CEP five year work plan). The content strategy is focussed on the needs of policy makers, and reflects issues that are of obvious relevance to on-going management and policy discussions. The editorial group will be open to feedback from environmental managers and policy makers on the desirability of a topic to be prioritized in the content strategy.

Information or Emerging Issues summaries will normally be commissioned by the Editor (on the basis of the content strategy) from a recognised expert or experts in the field.

Content can also be proposed independently by any member of the science community. Individuals with a proposal should contact the Editor with their suggestion before undertaking any significant development of a new idea to ensure it fits with the content strategy.

All scientific contributions to the Portal (i.e. each Information Summary and Emerging Issue summaries) will normally be co-authored by a minimum of three scientists from different countries to ensure a thorough and balanced perspective on the issue as well as to provide an appropriate geographical representation.

The authors of Information Summaries and Emerging Issue summaries will be credited on the Portal, allowing content to be cited.

Content Review

Scientific review

All Information Summaries and Emerging Issues summaries will be peer reviewed for scientific content and accuracy by independent scientists selected by SCAR.

¹ At its first meeting the Editorial Group noted the desirability of having the Project/Portal Manager as part of the EG as the 7th member, to at least provide a degree of continuity between project completion and Portal establishment.

The key requirements for Information Summaries and Emerging Issue summaries to be accepted into the Portal are accuracy, accessibility, independence and relevance. Reviewers are asked to consider the following questions in reviewing the texts:

- 1) Is the contribution comprehensive in terms of its coverage of the subject? If not what is missing?
- 2) Is the material surveyed up to date and balanced?
- 3) Are gaps in knowledge and uncertainties clearly indicated?
- 4) Are the references cited the most appropriate for this topic? If not what should be included and why?
- 5) Is the text easily understandable by non-experts?
- 6) Are the illustrations appropriate and necessary?
- 7) If material does not do the complexity of the issue justice, what would be the suggestion as to appropriate subtopics for this item?
- 8) Does the contribution provide a useful basis for policy making, from an expert point of view?

Editorial group review

All accepted contributions will be further reviewed by the Editorial Group before publication to ensure that the texts meet the essential political neutrality that is required of information to be displayed in the Portal.

The final decision on acceptability of both commissioned and submitted material rests with the Editorial Group. In reviewing the edited material the Group will bear in mind the relevance of the subject, the completeness of the list of Key Events, the topicality of the references, the simplicity of the prose and that the article avoids any political directions or statements.

Revision and updates

All Information Summaries and Emerging Issues summaries on the site will be reconsidered at least once in an 18-month cycle and revised as necessary to take account of new science.

A higher frequency of review can be set if the level of new knowledge generated on the topic is high.

Any Information Summary can be reviewed if the availability of substantial/important new scientific findings is such that it is deemed advisable, e.g. based on the editors' own knowledge, advice from SCAR, assessment of comments received, or the original author's advice.

When a regular review is conducted the original author of an Information Summary shall be offered the opportunity to prepare an updated version.

Minor reviews (update references, links, etc.) can be implemented by the Editor at any time. If the author indicates that a more extensive revision is needed, then the normal review process will be initiated at the discretion of the editor.

Commenting

Any (logged in) user can comment on an Information Summary or an Emerging Issue summary. The following framework is provided for the commenting policy of the Portal:

- 1) individual comments will not be made publically available
- 2) relevant information from comments will be regularly synthesized by the Editor and posted as a comment to the summary in question (focusing in particular on information that would provide new insight into the topic which is important to highlight before an update is made available). Where appropriate the commentator(s) name will also be included in the synthesis.
- 3) comments will need to be submitted in English regardless of which language version of the summaries they are posted to – this is a requirement if the Editor is to take on board comments in preparing the synthesis

- 4) the synthesis of comments will be translated and posted on the relevant language version of the summary in question

Conclusion

The Antarctic Environments Portal has developed a rigorous process for content selection, author selection, content development, peer-review, style editing (including translation) and publication. This has been carefully designed to ensure that end-users of the material published in the Portal can have complete confidence in the information.

Care has also been taken to ensure that SCAR plays a significant role in helping to support the editorial process, and that the Portal provides a useful mechanism to assist SCAR in fulfilling its role as an independent advisor to the Antarctic Treaty System.

Appendix 1: Workflow

