Conduct of Standing Scientific Group Meetings

1) As the SCAR restructuring continues to be institutionalized, it is important to look at all SCAR operations and those of its subsidiary bodies to ensure that procedures are streamlined and that the time together is used to greatest effect and highest efficiency.

2) It has been noted that the conduct of the Standing Scientific Group (SSG) business meetings, that are held once every two years, are managed in different ways by the three SSGs. This is in part due to differences in the number and types of subsidiary bodies administered by each SSG, the activities SCAR relies on the SSGs to perform, and the historical leadership of these groups.

3) While it is not the intent of the SCAR Executive Committee or Secretariat to mandate how these meeting are conducted, it is in the best interest of all that these groups follow best practices and reduce time spent on bureaucratic and administrative activities.

4) In the spirit of the SCAR restructuring, it should be the goal of each SSG to maximize the time at these meetings to be a forum for the exchange of the latest and best Antarctic scientific information, foster research and exploration related to Antarctica and its role in the Earth system, promote networking and foster the development of international partnerships.

5) The SSGs should conduct their meetings in a manner that encourages the widest possible participation by national representatives while fostering deliberative and thoughtful scientific discourse.

6) The SSGs are charged with assisting the Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System (SCATS) in providing scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty System when requested.

7) The SSGs have a certain amount of routine business that must be conducted to ensure efficient operation of the Group including consideration of budgetary issues.

8) In concert with the wish to use time efficiently, there has also been a request by the Delegates to reduce the number of days spent in meetings. This has evolved in parallel with the coupling of the SSG Business Meetings with the SCAR Open Science Conference (OSC) placing additional demands on the limited time SCAR participants can dedicate to SSG meetings. The SSG business meetings have been reduced to two (2) days and the OSC has been increased to four (4) days in St. Petersburg.

9) The designation and focus of SCAR science on major Scientific Research Programs has caused some SSGs to re-evaluate their role in SCAR and implement changes that more effectively support this new structure.
10) The new SCAR structure has also greatly reduced the resources allocated to the SSGs to conduct their business and funding is now provided in pre-agreed “block grants”, currently $17,000/year. The budget procedures have been revised to reflect these changes and funding above and beyond the “block grant” must be justified in a budget request filed on the proper form and submitted to the Delegates Standing Committee on Finance for consideration.

11) The reduction in the time allocated to SSG business meetings and changes in the role of the SSGs in SCAR suggests that changes in the way the SSG business meetings are conducted are needed. It is recommended that SSG management consider the following actions and adopt those that are most appropriate to the functioning of their SSG:

- The number of recommendations sent forward to the Delegates meeting should be greatly reduced and the recommendations should be limited to critical issues that SCAR can have an impact on. Hortatory recommendations should be added to SSG report language but not forwarded to the Delegates for formal approval. All recommendations must have a specific action requested, a target entity the SSG wishes to take the action, and a compelling justification for the recommendation in plain language.
- SSGs should develop plans to better publicize their activities in the printed press, on the web, and within scientific conferences. This should include the convening of Symposia on a regular basis and co-sponsoring of activities with other scientific bodies.
- SSGs meetings and reports should highlight and focus on informing the Delegates about scientific achievements and advancements.
- SSG meetings and reports should emphasize science and decrease time spent on administration (administrative activities could be conducted electronically during intersessional periods and simply agreed on at meetings).
- SSGs should develop and administer surveys and other forms of polling and assessments to ensure that the SSG science portfolio and agenda is responsive to SCAR members’ interests and that it is focused on highly topical or frontier subjects in Antarctic science.
- SSGs should explore stronger links with their respective unions and other scientific bodies to increase impact, broaden participation, and leverage limited resources.
- SSGs should make their national reports more prominent (on the web), provide these reports to the Secretariat in a timely manner, exhort national representatives to widely disseminate the reports to their respective in-country constituencies, and actively communicate SSG activities to their National Committees.
- SSGs should work to an annotated agenda prepared well in advance of the meeting to allow national representative time to prepare and to encourage broader participation in discussions. SSG members should be assigned specific agenda items to report on to improve participation. The annotated
agenda should form the basis for the SSG report to the Delegates, so minimizing time spent on report writing in plenary.

- SSG meeting notes should always be taken by someone with English as a first language.
- SSG chairs should ensure that all attendees at SSG meetings are engaged in the meeting. Non-English speaking members should be especially encouraged to participate and their participation should be facilitated as much as possible by recognizing and addressing language barrier issues.
- SSG officers should make sure allocated funds are expended in a timely manner by the SSG subsidiary programs or unspent funds should be reallocated to activities that have been deferred. In no instance will carry forward be allowed beyond the 2-year budget period, unless compelling reasons are provided in writing before the Delegates meeting.