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SCAR Delegates Meeting 2021

Online

Executive Committee Report

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Summary

Since the last meeting in Davos, 2018, the Executive Committee (ExCom) focused its attention on the following matters, some of which were either precipitated by, or delayed by, the global pandemic, which was declared by the WHO on 11th March 2020.

SCAR Articles and Delegates meeting
Open Science Conference (switched online)
Scientific Research Programmes
Secretariat Arrangements
Capacity Building
Evidence-based Advice to the ATS
Budget Sustainability (given the pandemic)
Structural Review (delayed)

The ExCom met regularly (every six weeks) for the full interim period. A higher frequency of meetings took place to respond to the pandemic in its initial stages, and in particular when decisions about the OSC and Delegates meeting had to be made.

Several decisions about SCAR Business were made by the Executive Committee based on its assessments of the situation facing SCAR, given the pandemic, and based on information gathering such as that undertaken through the Delegates Business Consultation.

A key ongoing challenge facing SCAR is to maintain interest, activity and integration among our researchers and activities, at a time when everyone is facing a wide range of unexpected challenges, including limits to Antarctic and Southern Ocean fieldwork.

Executive Committee Report

The Executive Committee (ExCom) met every six weeks over the period between the Davos Delegates meeting and the current one. All meetings were held online and the minutes kept by the Secretariat. These meetings proved essential, especially over the period when the pandemic had just been declared and in the lead up to the OSC and Delegates meeting, which were eventually cancelled in their in-person form.

The ExCom and Chief Officers of groups also held an in-person meeting in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, July 2019, alongside the COMNAP Annual General Meeting XXXI. In Plovdiv, the SCAR and COMNAP Executive Committees also held a joint meeting as was the norm until the pandemic disrupted this practice.

Over the reporting period, since the Davos Delegates meeting, the ExCom covered a wide range of SCAR's Business. In no particular order, the following matters were the subject of the ExCom's work.

Open Science Conference

The arrangements for what was initially a meeting planned for an in-person gathering in Hobart occupied much of the discussion, as did the transfer of the meeting to an online format. In the end, a reasonably successful meeting was run, with broad participation, and the talks from which are still available online. The VP for Science was responsible for much of the success of the transition, along with the Executive Director and the Secretariat staff.

SCAR Articles and Delegates Meeting

Following cancellation of the SCAR Delegates meeting planned for Hobart 2020, much work was done to ascertain the extent to which SCAR Delegates and Science Groups could meet online. Initially the advice from the Charities Commission and SCAR's solicitors was not especially clear. Later it became clear that the safest way to proceed was either to conduct our business via special resolutions, in keeping with UK law, or to amend our Articles to enable meetings online (or of a hybrid form). The Delegates Business Consultation revealed that while most Members were willing to proceed with some business via resolutions (which would also have enabled alteration of the Articles to allow online meetings), three Members were not in agreement for various reasons. Thus, plans were then made to hold the format of meetings as we plan to undertake them in March 2021. To this end, SCAR engaged the solicitors Mills & Reeve, which had been responsible for drafting SCAR's initial documents on becoming a charity registered in the UK. Mills & Reeve have also advised on the format of the meetings to comply with UK law.

Structural Review

The structural review was undertaken by a formal survey of members, widespread discussion, and several discussions among the ExCom members. Following these discussions, a review document with recommendations was prepared by the VP for Administration. The document was due to be presented to Delegates in Hobart, but that presentation has now been postponed and will be a matter for the next Executive to complete. One thing that did become clear is that much (though not all) of SCAR's structure is fine. Rather, the largest challenge lies with implementation, and, in particular, clearly articulated expectations of Chief Officers and subsidiary groups.

Clear Terms of Reference for groups and expectations and obligations of Chief Officers need to be drafted. The latter are especially not well developed within SCAR.

Scientific Research Programmes

The Davos meeting saw agreement to the work of three Programme Planning Groups (PPGs). The ExCom (especially the VP for Science) worked with the PPG Chief Officers to bring full proposals to the point of review. These were then reviewed and revised in keeping with reviewer comments. The ExCom was faced with a decision of either waiting for a revision to the Articles (and hopefully their acceptance, hence allowing an online meeting including decisions about SRP proposals) or proceeding on the basis of the reviewers' reports and discussion among ExCom members. The ExCom had detailed and candid discussions about the matter. The decision was eventually taken that the risk of SCAR having no Scientific Research Programmes (SRPs) was too high not to proceed. The current three SRPs were thus approved, in keeping with the powers of the Directors as per the Articles of Association.

The SCAR ExCom also worked with the Chief Officers of the six SRPs that ended in 2020 to ensure that comprehensive reports and overviews were produced. Many of the outcomes are available in the published literature, and the Chief Officer overviews presented at the Online Science Conference are available via SCAR's YouTube channel.

Evidence-based Advice to the ATS

Much effort was invested in evidence-based advice to the ATS (including the ATCM, CEP and CCAMLR) especially through interactions with the Chief Officer of the Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System (SC-ATS). The role was taken for most of the period by Dr Aleks Terauds (Australia) and then transitioned to Dr Susie Grant (UK). SCAR's advice was exceptionally well received at the Prague ATCM. The Treaty Parties recognised SCAR's contributions over 60 years through Resolution 7, which is worth repeating in full here (see the Annex). The SCAR lecture and SCAR's various contributions, including through the Joint SCAR/CEP Workshop on Further Developing the Antarctic Protected Area System, were all well received. At CCAMLR in 2019, SCAR was also invited, for the first time, to present a lecture to the Members. Owing to the pandemic this lecture did not take place in 2020, but is on the provisional schedule for the next meeting.

Capacity Building

The ExCom, through the leadership of the VP for Capacity Building, spent much time restructuring the arrangements for prizes and awards, and the actions SCAR needs to take to give effect to its values regarding equity, diversity and inclusion. Substantial emphasis on these matters has also been placed by the polar community generally and by the International Science Council. An especially important development is work that has been done, and still has to continue being done, to change perception of the profile of awardees such that nominators and applicants are not discouraged from submitting nominations and applications.

Secretariat Arrangements

SCAR's Secretariat arrangements have been thoroughly modernised. Not only has this resulted in greater efficiency, but it has also meant that the Secretariat now complies with UK law and almost fully complies with human resources expectations for UK employers. These developments have meant some extra cost, but this cost has to be borne to ensure compliance with UK law and expectations, and to see to a fair, rewarding and fulfilling workplace for SCAR Secretariat staff. The addition of a part-time Comms Officer has been absolutely essential to ensure that SCAR is able to function effectively as the internationally leading entity facilitating science in from and about Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, and providing evidence-based advice about the regions too. The Executive Director was responsible for driving and implementing the reform of internal arrangements, with the full support of ExCom.

The pandemic meant that Secretariat staff all had to work from home, and those arrangements remain in place. To the considerable credit of the Secretariat staff, these working from home arrangements have been effectively implemented.

Budget Sustainability (given the pandemic)

Led by the VP for Finance, the ExCom paid much attention to SCAR's financial position. A substantial amount has now been placed into ethical investment (as detailed in the finance reports) and is doing reasonably well, given that the investment is expected to deliver returns over a 5-10 year timeframe. In response to the pandemic, again led by the VP for Finance and supported by the SCAR Executive Officer, changes were made to budget arrangements to enable SCAR groups to respond flexibly to the situation to ensure that they could continue to work. In addition, the ExCom set US\$160,000 aside temporarily to ensure that cash flow problems that might result from economic difficulties globally would not leave SCAR and its Secretariat under-resourced. So far, such difficulties have not been reflected in SCAR's accounts. In 2020, 90% of the fees due to SCAR were received, a number typical of most years. The ExCom is mindful, however, that the economic impact of the pandemic may continue for several years. Therefore, future use of the amount set aside will be a matter for the Members and future ExCom to consider.

Acknowledgments

The ExCom benefitted from tremendous support by the Secretariat. We thank Eoghan Griffin, Rosemary Nash and Johanna Grabow for their dedication, enthusiasm, and advice. We also thank all of SCAR's Chief Officers, Delegates, and researchers for their support (and tolerance) over the pandemic period, especially when the OSC and Delegates meeting were cancelled.

Annex**Resolution 7 (2019) - ATCM XLII - CEP XXII, Prague****SCAR's Sixtieth Anniversary and the Role of SCAR in Providing Scientific Advice to Support the Work of the Antarctic Treaty System**

The Representatives,

Recalling the role of Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (“SCAR”) in initiating, developing and coordinating high quality international scientific research on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean as well as the role of the Antarctic region in global systems;

Acknowledging the significant and longstanding contribution that SCAR has made to support the Antarctic Treaty system;

Warmly congratulating SCAR on its sixtieth anniversary;

Recalling that the Antarctic Treaty promotes freedom of scientific investigation in Antarctica and cooperation toward that end;

Recalling also the designation of Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science;

Acknowledging the unique opportunities Antarctica offers for scientific monitoring of and research on processes of global as well as regional importance;

Recognising also the fundamental importance of scientific research to support the work of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (“ATCM”) and the Committee on Environmental Protection (“CEP”);

Recommend that their Governments:

1. acknowledge with gratitude SCAR's enduring and crucial role in providing objective and independent scientific advice to support and inform the work of the ATCM and the CEP;
2. promote to their nations the extraordinary benefit to humankind from science in, from and about Antarctica and the Southern Ocean;
3. reaffirm their support for scientific investigations in the region, including through the development of an appropriately-resourced scientific workforce for the future;
4. continue to encourage, facilitate and support scientific exchanges and open access to scientific outcomes and data;
5. enhance collaborations with SCAR in its important facilitation role for Antarctic and Southern Ocean science, and provider of scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty system and disseminating Antarctic science to other international fora; and
6. encourage the ATCM and the CEP to continue its cooperation with SCAR on issues related to the protection of the Antarctic environment, including, but not limited to, Antarctic biodiversity, area protection and management and the implications of climate change for Antarctica.