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SCAR Delegates Report 2021

Online

Secretariat Report

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Summary

Since the 2018 SCAR Delegates meeting, the Secretariat has continued to support SCAR's remit of facilitating high quality international research and providing objective and independent scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings and other organizations, working closely with the Executive Committee (Excom). In parallel it has continued to develop and refine its own internal processes to increase its effectiveness.

The expansion of the Secretariat to include a Communications and Information Officer (CIO) since December 2018, has helped the Secretariat manage its day-to-day workload and to increase the efficiency of both internal and external communications.

The Secretariat has worked to support the Executive Committee and SCAR Groups through the COVID-19 pandemic. A key focus of 2020 was to organise the SCAR 2020 Online meetings in August 2020, building on preparations for the cancelled Open Science Conference in Hobart in 2020. More recently the priority has been the arrangements and organisation of the first online SCAR Delegates Meeting.

The Secretariat has worked from home since the closure of the Scott Polar Research Institute in March 2020, but has worked effectively within the limitations of lockdown.

Background

The SCAR Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day running of SCAR's operations and acts as a hub for information, discussion and enquiries from the SCAR community and beyond. Based at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, the SCAR Secretariat has expanded over the years from one person to four and provides SCAR with continuity and institutional memory. It consists of Chandrika Nath (SCAR Executive Director [ED], full-time), Eoghan Griffin (SCAR Executive Officer [EO], full-time), Rosemary Nash (SCAR Administrative Officer [AO], 60%) and since September 2019, Johanna Grabow (Communications and Information Officer [CIO], 60% - 100%).

The expansion of the Secretariat to include a Communications and Information Officer (CIO) since late 2018, has helped the Secretariat manage its day-to-day workload and to increase the efficiency of both internal and external communications. It has also given the Secretariat the capacity to take on additional tasks such as management of the Antarctic Environments Portal (see below). The expertise of the CIO was vital in enabling the Secretariat to facilitate the SCAR 2020 Online meetings after the in-person Open Science Conference in Hobart was cancelled.

Highlights of activities are given below, covering external facing activities such as meetings, events and partnerships, as well as work done to improve internal processes within the Secretariat, and at developments in communications.

Meetings and events

The Secretariat staff play a key role in supporting the organization of SCAR meetings, both those internal to SCAR and wider events such as SCAR's Open Science Conferences.

SCAR Executive Committee Meeting, Plovdiv, Bulgaria 2019.

The SCAR Secretariat staff provided administrative support for the organisation of the 2019 SCAR Executive Committee meeting, managing travel and other logistics as well as scheduling, agendas and communication with participants. All outstanding Secretariat actions from the 2019 ExCom meeting have been completed.

SCAR 2020 Online

Although the physical 2020 Open Science Conference (OSC) and XXXVI SCAR Meetings had to be cancelled, key elements of the OSC took place via SCAR 2020 Online. The SCAR Secretariat and the SCAR Vice President for Science worked with a Conference Management Team on delivering the online conference. A book of abstracts submitted to the original OSC was published, with authors offered the opportunity to upload a presentation, poster or audio-visual material to a dedicated website. Most activities took place via the OnAir event portal, an event management platform. Registration for the conference and access to the platform was free and open to all. In total, 24 key events – an opening ceremony, four plenary events, one panel discussion, three mini-symposia (with a repeat slot for two), four workshops (one repeat event) and a closing ceremony – were run on the platform from 3rd to 7th August. This was done through a combination of live-streaming during the week of the original OSC and recorded presentations. In addition, a total of six text-based discussion fora in three time slots was run using the chat programme Slack.

A number of convenors of the parallel sessions self-organised virtual events for their online session, with a total of 21 side events. These side events were run using Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft teams. The sessions were scheduled to take place in the week before the conference (27th to 31st July) or the week after (11th to 13th August) to avoid clashes. Recordings of these meetings were later made available on the SCAR 2020 Online website and via a dedicated YouTube channel.

In all, 2,712 participants from 60 countries attended, 584 virtual displays were created and 89 videos uploaded. Further details are available from <https://www.scar2020.org/>.

The conference organisation report is available in the SCAR Library: <https://www.scar.org/library/conferences/scar-open-science-conferences/scar-2020-online/5594-report-on-the-organization-of-scar-2020-online-2020/file/>.

Open Science Conference 2022 in Hyderabad

The tenth SCAR Open Science Conference (OSC) is scheduled to be held in Hyderabad, India, between 19-28 August 2022. The OSC normally spans 5 days and the exact dates of the meeting are yet to be determined. Currently the OSC is planned as a physical meeting, but hybrid options are also being explored.

An International Scientific Organising Committee (ISOC), advising on scientific content, and a Local Organising Committee (LOC) has been formed. The SCAR Secretariat and ISOC aim to meet quarterly in the run-up to the conference. During a first ISOC meeting in January 2021, timelines and plans for parallel sessions were discussed.

Support to SCAR groups and the wider SCAR community

Support to SCAR groups and the wider SCAR community is a priority for the Secretariat. Since the 2018 Delegates meeting, the Secretariat has worked to improve the representation of SCAR groups on the SCAR website and to build awareness of the work of SCAR groups through the monthly newsletter. Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat has worked closely with SCAR groups to help them continue with their business in changing circumstances. A particular focus has been on supporting the Scientific Research Programmes (SRPs) ending in 2020 and the new SRPs planning to launch their activities in 2021. The Secretariat was also involved in the design of the 2019 structural review questionnaire and its promotion to the SCAR community and beyond. The 2019 Executive Committee meeting in Plovdiv, Bulgaria included a dedicated, day-long workshop for the Programme Planning Groups.

Diversity and Inclusion

As a body of the International Science Council, SCAR aims to ensure that all researchers can participate in SCAR's activities regardless of background. Since 2018, the Secretariat has engaged in a range of activities to support diversity and inclusion, including on an ad-hoc basis, by promoting diversity and inclusion through SCAR social media, and participating in a variety of webinars.

The SCAR 2020 Online meeting included a workshop on "Inclusive collaborations in Antarctic research". Following the meeting, a scoping group was established under the responsibility of the Vice President for Capacity Building Education and Training, with a remit to recommend the best approach for SCAR to make progress on these issues. A full report on the work of the group and its recommendations is included in

the CBET Report (Paper 22: https://www.dropbox.com/s/x36iptnn4ld136b/36-22_CBET_Report.pdf?dl=0).

Partnerships

The Secretariat supports SCAR in maintaining good links with external stakeholders in a variety of ways, including keeping formal agreements up to date, representing SCAR at key meetings and drawing up reports on SCAR's activities for partners.

Since 2018, several agreements with partners have been drawn up (or updated) including:

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between SCAR and the International Polar Heritage Committee (2019-2024) relating to collaboration on areas of mutual interest.
- A 'Letter of Intent for Collaboration and Partnership' between SCAR, Polar Educators International, the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) and the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS) (2019-2021) aimed at updating the Polar Resource Book published during the last IPY.
- An updated trilateral MoU with SCAR, IASC and APECS on mutual cooperation (2019-2021).
- A Letter of Agreement with the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) relating to funding of the SCAR-WMO Fellowship Scheme in 2019.
- A Letter of Agreement between SCAR, IASC and the International Association of Cryospheric Sciences (IACS).
- An updated agreement with the European Polar Board (EPB) is to be signed on 23rd March 2021.
- An in-principle agreement with the International Arctic Science Committee, the International Arctic Social Science Association and the University of the Arctic, to consider an International Polar Year in 2033.

The SCAR ED attended the 2019 annual meeting of the WMO's Panel of Experts on Polar and High Mountain Observations, Research and Services (EC-PHORS) in Geneva to report on collaboration between WMO and SCAR. In addition, SCAR and WMO worked together on input to the UNFCCC climate change conference in Bonn, 2019. The SCAR Secretariat has built good links with the Secretariat of the International Science Council and has facilitated SCAR community input into strategic reviews underway within the ISC. Following a restructuring within the WMO, the ED and EO met online in early 2021 with the Head of the World Climate Research Programme Secretariat, Dr Mike Sparrow, and discussed a range of activities and opportunities for SCAR and WCRP to add to their existing collaborations.

Supporting SCAR's provision of scientific advice

The Secretariat supported SCAR's input into the 2019 ATCM/CEP meetings and the 2019 and 2020 CCAMLR meetings, assisting with the submission of papers, organising registrations and other logistical support. In 2019, the SCAR Secretariat provided administrative and web support for the SCAR/CEP joint workshop on protected areas. In addition, the ED and EO worked with the WMO on SCAR input into the 2019 UNFCCC climate change conference in Bonn and have maintained links with a range of stakeholders involved in the COP meetings, to increase the

visibility of SCAR and of Antarctic research with the UNFCCC and COP meetings. The Secretariat has also helped coordinate meetings of the SCAR/IAATO collaboration on a Systematic Conservation Plan for the Antarctic Peninsula (<https://www.scar.org/policy/scar-iaato-scp/>), with the SCAR Executive Director co-chairing the co-ordination group for the project. The Secretariat supported SCAR's taking over the management of the Antarctic Environments Portal in early 2020. Further details are provided below.

Management of the Antarctic Environments Portal

In January 2020, SCAR took over operation of the Antarctic Environments Portal (www.environments.aq) from the University of Canterbury, which had operated the Portal from 2014-2019 with support from the Tinker Foundation. SCAR's Executive Director acts as the Portal Manager and SCAR's Communications and Information Officer as Assistant Editor, supporting the Portal Editor, Neil Gilbert. Secretariat staff participated in a two-day workshop in Cambridge in October 2019 to discuss plans for the Portal and to ensure a smooth transition. SCAR's primary aim in hosting the Portal is to fulfil its remit of providing objective and independent scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty System on issues of science and conservation affecting the management of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. The Portal Management Board meets quarterly to discuss ongoing business.

The Secretariat has been involved in a range of Portal related activities, including:

- Launching of a new website in November 2020 (www.environments.aq) with a new host and technical provider. The new website provides a structured approach for presenting and accessing Information Summaries and allows for supplementary material and resources;
- Implementing Google Analytics on the website to track usage;
- Piloting a series of infographics, so-called 'PortalGraphics', to help convey the key messages of the Portal Information Summaries;
- Updating the Portal content management plan;
- Setting up a portal mailing list for notifications about the Portal progress (currently 125 subscribers) and relaunch of a dedicated Facebook page.

Other relevant events – some highlights

The Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly at the UK Houses of Parliament in December 2019 involved parliamentarians from 13 countries and provided an opportunity for them to learn more about Antarctica and be able to press their legislatures to support and prioritise the work of the Treaty. The Assembly highlighted the importance of Antarctica in the understanding of our planet and featured presentations from SCAR President Professor Steven Chown, Professor Tim Naish and PhD Student Iqra Choudry. The SCAR Secretariat also prepared a series of infographics to celebrate 60 years of Treaty-supported Antarctic Science. The SCAR Executive Director was part of the advisory committee for the meeting. Earlier in the year, the Secretariat organised a display on SCAR as part of an exhibition on polar science in the House of Commons hosted by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology.

In October 2019, the SCAR ED and EO attended a meeting hosted by the International Cryosphere Climate Initiative (ICCI) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris. This was intended to coordinate material and speakers to present at COP25, which was eventually held in Madrid and hosted by Chile. SCAR supported several speakers at the Madrid event, which marked the first COP to feature a Cryosphere pavilion. This initiative was strongly supported by the Chilean hosts, and the

Secretariat continues to liaise with ICCI to investigate opportunities to engage at COP26, planned for Glasgow in October 2021.

Internal processes

2019 internal audit

In April 2019, the ED commissioned a ‘light touch’ audit of the work of the Secretariat as outlined in the Executive Director’s report (Paper 19:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/5qpsbqrnz9paqv/36-19_Executive_Director_report.pdf?dl=0).

The audit consisted of one-to-one interviews with all Secretariat staff, further interviews with ExCom and examination of relevant paperwork. The overall feedback of the audit was very positive. The audit made a range of recommendations across various aspects of the Secretariat’s management of HR and finance covering areas such as:

- Continuing Professional Development for staff,
- Further work to develop the appraisal system and staff recognition,
- Guidance and support to staff on health and wellbeing,
- Measures to increase resilience to change and to strengthen forward planning.

Internal developments within the Secretariat

Since 2018, several changes have been made within the Secretariat to improve internal communications and build team cohesion, building on the findings of the internal audit and other feedback. These include:

- Use of task management software,
- Fortnightly team meetings,
- An annual teambuilding exercise,
- Major review and reorganisation of electronic information,
- Reorganisation of office space and archive holdings.

In addition, regular virtual meetings of the Executive Committee have taken place at least every two months, resulting in good communications between the Secretariat and ExCom. The transition to a new accountant (Days Accountants) to manage the Virtual Finance Office (VFO) has proven to be a success and has reduced the administrative burden on the Secretariat arising from the need to cross check financial processes extensively.

In 2021, some further areas to work on have been identified:

- Further work to ensure GDPR compliance.
- Review of IT support (potentially with free assistance by the Charity IT Association). This will include identifying options to develop a contacts database.
- Completion of a set of internal guidance notes to assist with smooth handover processes within the Secretariat.

Communications

The SCAR Secretariat regularly publishes material on the SCAR website, Facebook page and group, and Twitter. This includes updates on SCAR activities, research highlights, news from partners, opportunities and events. The Secretariat also sends out a monthly newsletter and news updates to the SCAR community via Mailchimp. This newsletter has a high uptake and the Secretariat is regularly approached following calls for research and photos.

Mailchimp, as well as Mailman, are also used to communicate with members involved in the SCAR community. SCAR group leaders and members can use a mailing list provided and set up by SCAR. The SCAR Secretariat also provides use of a Zoom license and assists in setting up online meetings.

The Communications and Information Officer (CIO) is responsible for the management of communications outputs, including social media, website content and the monthly newsletter. The CIO also keeps track of publications by the groups, manages a picture library and produces print and online publications, including posters, brochures and infographics. An overview of publications mentioning SCAR and the Horizon Scan has been set up and is continuously updated.

Highlights of recent activities

Social media is an effective way of communicating with the SCAR and wider Antarctic community. In the past year, SCAR has managed to grow its social media presence considerably. There are now over 6,200 people following the SCAR Twitter account and over 5,700 people in the closed SCAR Facebook group. The 2019 established Facebook page, open to the general public, now has 1,600 followers. The social media presence of SCAR proved to be especially valuable during SCAR 2020 Online, when information about upcoming sessions could be shared quickly. Twitter has proven to be the most successful platform, with a high engagement rate of subscribed users. SCAR will continue to share news and updates with the community and continue to expand its presence.

As part of SCAR 2020 Online, a dedicated YouTube channel was set up to store all session recordings, and recordings that participants of the parallel sessions have uploaded. This channel has now merged with the existing SCAR YouTube channel and dedicated playlists for different themes have been created. To date, over 500 people are subscribed to the YouTube channel.

Visual materials are created on a regular basis to promote SCAR activities, such as an end-of-year infographic summarising SCAR's activities and event-related images and brochures. Work is underway to translate SCAR brochures and other material into other languages.

In September 2020, SCAR collaborated with ECO Magazine on a special issue dedicated to the polar regions. SCAR worked alongside Arctic Circle and the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists on this special issue. SCAR also provided scientific advice, input and photos to an article by the International Hydrographic Organization. The CIO is currently facilitating the production of a video by producer John Weller, with input from scientists across SCAR, highlighting the importance of Antarctic research and explaining SCAR's role.

The SCAR community is highly engaged with SCAR communications and in 2020 the engagement rate has risen continuously with people working from home and more events moved online. Of particular interest to the community are core activities such as research outputs, online events, capacity-building activities and policy advice.

The ED and CIO are working on an update to the 2006 Communications Strategy to successfully raise the profile of SCAR and SCAR's activities in this changing context.

Uptake and engagement

The CIO regularly monitors SCAR's social media channels and records data about SCAR communications activities to enable measurement of progress. Data collected includes numbers of followers and subscribers across SCAR's various social media platforms, engagement rates and types of content posted.

In 2019, SCAR has moved from Mailman to MailChimp. This has enabled a greater insight into the performance of mailouts and enabled targeted communication with the community. Open rates and click rates for the monthly SCAR newsletter are consistently higher than industry average. MailChimp is furthermore GDPR compliant. The CIO is looking into whether it is possible to add google analytics to the website to better assess website performance.

- Mailchimp subscribers:
 - 3,770 members
 - 145 subscribers gained since 2019
- Average newsletter open rate: 28.9%
 - *Industry benchmark: 18%*
- Average newsletter click rate: 6.4%
 - *Industry benchmark: 2.1%*
- Twitter followers:
 - 6,284 followers
 - 2,446 followers gained since 2019
- Facebook group membership:
 - 5,713 members
 - 1,360 members gained since 2019
- Facebook page:
 - 1,605 followers
 - 1,001 followers gained since 2019.

Over the longer term, the Secretariat intends to improve SCAR's communications with non-specialist audiences, for example by developing new outreach materials and working to improve user experience on the website.