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Person Responsible: Chandrika Nath

SCAR Delegates Meeting 2021

Online

Executive Director's report

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Summary

The SCAR Executive Director's role cuts across all areas of SCAR's work. The Executive Director (ED) oversees the work of the Secretariat but also plays a wider role in providing strategic advice and support to the SCAR Executive Committee (ExCom) and support to SCAR group leaders.

During 2018 and 2019, a key focus was the management of the Secretariat and supporting the ExCom. The ED also worked extensively on development of SCAR's internal and external communications, on delivery of scientific advice to the ATCM and other key policy fora, and on plans for the SCAR Open Science Conference in Hobart. The ED also represented SCAR and raised awareness of its work at a range of science and policy fora. During 2020, the pandemic and associated disruption to working practices in the UK and elsewhere meant that the ED's focus was on ensuring continuity of SCAR's business, including managing the process of transitioning the Secretariat to home working and managing the transition of the SCAR 2020 OSC in Hobart to SCAR2020 Online.

A future priority for the ED will be to support the new SCAR President and Executive Committee with SCAR's forward agenda, to ensure continuity of SCAR's activities through the ongoing pandemic and facilitate the Secretariat's transition back to normal working arrangements as UK lockdown lifts.

Introduction

The SCAR Executive Director's role cuts across all areas of SCAR's work. The Executive Director (ED) oversees the work of the Secretariat but also plays a wider role in providing strategic advice and support to the SCAR Executive Committee (ExCom) and support to SCAR group leaders. The ED also works with the Chief Officer of SCATS (Standing Committee on the Antarctic Treaty System) and ExCom to coordinate SCAR's input to the Antarctic Treaty system as well as overseeing its input to major international fora (e.g. UNFCCC). The ED reports to the SCAR President and ExCom and is an ex-officio member of ExCom. As such, the ED plays a key role in overseeing, connecting and coordinating the diverse elements of the SCAR community and plays a key role in enabling SCAR to achieve its core remit of delivering first class science and scientific advice.

Highlights of progress made in management of the Secretariat, followed by brief summaries of the ED's work with ExCom and on scientific advice. Other areas of work are covered in the Secretariat report (paper 20) and the Executive Committee report (paper 21) and so are not duplicated here.

Management of the Secretariat

The current Executive Director took up the role after a period without an Executive Director. Staff wellbeing and HR issues were identified as key priorities to address. Significant effort has been focused on working with the Executive Committee to review internal processes within the Secretariat and on taking steps to improve the health and wellbeing of staff, to manage workload and to check compliance with best practice. Expansion of the Secretariat to include a Communications and Information Officer has played a key role in improving effectiveness and extent of internal and external communications, as well as enabling a manageable workload for all staff.

Internal audit

As part of the above review in April 2019, the ED commissioned a 'light touch' audit of the work of the Secretariat. Focusing primarily on HR and Finance, the aim was to identify any compliance issues or vulnerabilities, as well as to identify gaps in knowledge, skill or understanding within the Secretariat and to highlight strengths and weaknesses in the way the team is working. The audit consisted of 1-1 interviews with all Secretariat staff, further interviews with ExCom and examination of relevant paperwork.

The overall feedback of the audit was very positive:

There is a sense of team spirit, trust and job satisfaction, with staff more able to talk openly and to identify how they would like to develop the role of the Secretariat in future. The introduction of a new Executive Director has had a significant impact on the way in which staff are managed and the relationships between the Secretariat and the Executive Committee.

The overall feedback is that the organisation is working well and is compliant with the critical legislation and working to the ethical standards expected of this type of organisation. There are areas for improvement as would be expected after a period without an Executive Director and with two relatively new staff in post. However, the organisation is clearly much more stable than it has been and the excellent work now in train should be formally acknowledged and used as a platform for further development.

The audit made a range of recommendations across various aspects of the Secretariat's management of HR and finance covering areas such as:

- Provision of 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.

Since the audit a number of measures have been introduced in response to the audit, including

- Introduction of an annual teambuilding exercise,
- Modernization of the appraisal system (ongoing),
- Engaging support from professional HR services,
- Building resilience to change by increasing the effectiveness of internal communications, internal documentation and forward planning processes,
- Reviewing and updating of standard staff contract for new staff,
- Reviewing and updating of staff handbook (ongoing).

Although substantial progress has been made since the audit in bringing SCAR HR processes in line with best practice, the disruption and uncertainty introduced by the pandemic has slowed progress. Key future priorities include addressing staff continuing professional development and training needs. Provision of occupational health support and a focus on staff health and wellbeing is also a priority, as is continued support of activities to support team cohesiveness, such as teambuilding and joint training activities.

Support to the SCAR Executive Committee

Since 2018, the ED has actively participated in the work of the SCAR Executive Committee through bimonthly meetings as well as the biennial Executive Committee meeting in Plovdiv, Bulgaria in July 2019. Since the start of the first lockdown in the UK in March 2020, regular interactions between the SCAR ExCom, SCAR Executive Director and other Secretariat staff to discuss working arrangements and monitor wellbeing have ensured that the Secretariat staff have been supported through the pandemic and its associated disruption and uncertainty. Following the cancellation of the SCAR Delegates meeting in Hobart in August 2020, the ED supported the SCAR ExCom in identifying options for conducting SCAR's business in absence of a physical meeting, including seeking advice from solicitors and from the UK Charities Commission. The ED has worked with the ExCom and the Secretariat to identify options to deliver SCAR 2021 Online Delegates meeting and led the process of finding an external provider to manage the technical aspects of the meeting. The ED has supported preparations for the election of new Directors, including helping to draw up an information pack for interested candidates, and planning the logistics of the election and voting process. A future priority for the ED will be to support the new SCAR President and Executive Committee with SCAR's forward agenda, including the drafting of the next SCAR strategic plan and consideration of the recommendations of the SCAR structural review.

Scientific advice

The ED has played an active role in supporting SCAR's provision of scientific advice to the ATCM and other bodies. In 2019, the ED formed part of the SCAR Delegation to the CEP/ATCM in Prague and was also part of the steering committee for the SCAR/CEP workshop on protected areas which took place prior to the ATCM. The ED along with the Executive Officer is also working to form closer links with key organisations involved in the UNFCCC Climate Change Conference process and the COP, to ensure that SCAR's work feeds into these processes. The ED has formed

part of the management board for the Antarctic Environments Portal since 2018 and oversaw the successful transition of the Portal to SCAR in early 2020. The ED has subsequently taken on the role of Portal Manager, chairing the Portal Management Board and overseeing Secretariat support to the Portal. A key future priority will be support the new SC-ATS CO to facilitate SCAR's engagement with the ATCM/CEP and CCAMLR meetings in 2021 and 2022.