

Operational Community

Opening: To open this discussion the co-Chair presented a few statements from various sources that might serve as launching points for the discussion:

1. US AON report - Long-term, coordinated, international resources and efforts will be required
2. Ocean-Sea Ice report from Stockholm – “international top-down integration at the level of operational and funding agencies.... is needed”
3. Again from Ocean-Sea Ice group – “an international body will be required to coordinate the various national programs and ensure intercompatibility, open access, and widespread distribution of data”
4. Terrestrial group from Stockholm – “the concept of flagship observatories could be proposed as a joint international responsibility”
5. Norway and Sweden stressed the need for better coordination at the national level
6. Iceland stressed the value of integration of observing systems, and of a common data portal

Summary of Group Discussion: The group agreed that the existence of a coordinated and sustained set of observing networks would be very worthwhile. To make this happen, there needs to be a clear and consistent vision so that the coordinated set of networks can build on opportunities when they occur. There should be products available from the coordinated activities that are greater than the sum of the parts, for example pan-Arctic products that build on but are different from national-level products. There needs to be a set of core activities rather than a long list of things that could be done. A first draft of the “core set” should be presented to the funding agencies as soon as practicable.

The observing efforts should not be separate from research, but rather take advantage of relevant research, and involve the research community as much as possible in undertaking the observing activities. A linkage between research and monitoring has to exist so that the sustained networks keep pace with new knowledge and changing needs.

There was general agreement that improving communication and increasing coordination were essential objectives. Coordination could be accomplished through a central coordinating body, through use of distributed or nested coordination, or some combination. There was a strong view that existing bodies and structures should be fully used, and that no new coordinating groups should be formed unless there is no alternative.

The group discussed options for how coordination might be accomplished. High-level governmental Memoranda of Understanding were seen as difficult to do, but perhaps worthwhile. Use of existing international bodies was considered by

many to be a feasible approach. The Arctic Council was discussed as a possible “parent body” for the coordinated observing activities because it is composed of countries that have committed themselves to monitoring and assessment and to environmental and sustainability issues. But the Arctic Council should improve its linkage to the research community. The International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) was noted as having an existing connection to the Arctic Council for science issues. Other bodies such as WMO, IOC and UNEP also were mentioned as possible “parents” for coordinated observing activities. Another approach discussed was to formalize and sustain the “steering committees” formed to lead many of the IPY observing projects. As a parallel to the existing International Group of Funding Agencies (IGFA), an International Group of Polar Funding Agencies might be established to provide a type of coordination.

The group was very clear that whatever approach is taken to coordination, all countries and agencies must have the opportunity to participate.

In addition to one a “parent body or bodies”, there was recognition that a Secretariat function would be required to maintain communication and stimulate action. It was again stressed that existing groups should be engaged if at all possible, rather than creating something new. But it was recognized that there could be a “capacity problem” in having one group trying to work with so many issues and observing networks. The expected functions of a Secretariat need to be defined so that countries will be more comfortable about supporting it. Both a centralized and a distributed model for the Secretariat should be considered.

There was discussion of the need for a forum or other arrangement among government agencies on an international basis to review current activities and plans, and seek means of more coordinated approaches to funding, spatial and temporal distribution of effort, support of observing platforms, and other related issues.

The group noted that the Arctic is not an isolated place, but simply one region of the world, and there are a number of existing international organizations dealing with oceans, lands, etc. Putting Arctic observing on the agendas of regular meetings of these existing organizations, i.e. WMO, IOC, ICES, was seen as a useful way of holding discussions among the agencies. The creation of an “engagement strategy” for the agencies was suggested as a near-term action.

The group discussed the concept of a “data portal” as a key activity that would enable communication and eventually coordination. There was a comment that coordinating the data availability might be the only useful thing that could be done. There was discussion of the need for data standards so that data from diverse sources could be easily integrated. There were views that the Secretariat might be the proper body to undertake the data portal function, with

each nation designating some sort of lead agency to feed information to the portal.

Co-Chair's Summary: This breakout group consisted of a diverse set of experts representing all three of the target audiences – research community, government agencies, local residents. The group provided many thoughtful suggestions for how government agencies should organize to implement sustained observations of the Arctic. The need for both the observations and the coordination was not challenged by any attendee. The group was clear that actions were important, not more bureaucracy. The group discussed specific actions that could be taken, but there was no attempt to generate a set of consensus recommendations. Yet, the group voiced high expectation that a set of draft recommendations should be prepared in advance of the planned SAON workshop in Helsinki and circulated to the broader SAON set of participants for review.

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