

TFSC I. "2-pager" highlights report 10-11 december 2013

Arctic Council

Task Force on Scientific Cooperation

1st meeting, Stockholm

December 10-11, 2013

Two pager submitted by the co-chairs

Gustaf Lind, with help of the two other Task Force co-chairs, Anton Vasiliev and Evan Bloom led the first meeting of the Task Force on Scientific Cooperation. The meeting was a broad scoping discussion that focused on sharing views on the various responsibilities identified in the Task Force's Terms of Reference and mandate, as given in the Kiruna Declaration. All Arctic States were present at the meeting and also the Aleut International Association (AIA), the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), The Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR), the Arctic Marine Environment Working Group (PAME) and the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG). 10 observers were present at the first day of the meeting.

The co-chairs underlined the importance of the work of the Task Force for their governments as well as for the Arctic Council. The mandate for the Task Force is based on a strong political will to highlight and encourage increased scientific cooperation in the Arctic.

The main priority of the meeting was to discuss the direction of the future work in the task force. The main topics of discussion involved the International Polar Initiative, priorities in Arctic research, sharing of data, simplification of the movement of samples across borders, research logistics and funding of possible projects and research in the Arctic.

The participants agreed that the purpose of the Task Force was not to write a new overarching list of Arctic scientific priorities but to compare existing national priorities in order to see where there are common objectives and possible gaps.

The International Polar Initiative was presented by Russia. The discussion touched upon issues such as how the Initiative interacts with other ongoing processes and the possibility for the Arctic Council to engage in an initiative that also covers the Antarctica.

The discussion on how to improve data sharing focused on the role of Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks (SAON). SAON will be asked to list obstacles for its work that can be presented at the next Task force meeting.

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Borders and different legislations can in some cases obstruct the possibility to move scientific samples and instruments, or otherwise to limit scientific cooperation. Different ways of approaching the issue were raised, including development of an interactive map to highlight different rules and negotiation of a memorandum of understanding that commits the Arctic states to facilitate such activities.

There is existing cooperation between science logistics providers in the Arctic, i.e., icebreakers and research stations, that might be improved. The way logistics providers cooperate in Antarctica could in this case serve as inspiration. The Forum of Arctic Research Operators will be asked to describe its work and challenges to enable a deeper discussion at next Task force meeting.

On the issue of funding, a number of delegations stated that the present economic situation makes it unlikely that new funding for Arctic research can be found in the near future.

The second meeting of the Task Force is tentatively scheduled for the end of April 2014 in Helsinki, Finland. The Russian delegation kindly offered to host the third meeting of the Task Force in late May/early June 2014 in Saint Petersburg, Russia, and the United States is planning to host the meeting thereafter.

In advance of the next meeting, inter sessional work will take place in a number of areas, including compilation of existing information on best practices. The Arctic States were tasked to compile a list of their national top priorities in Arctic research. Russia kindly offered to produce a draft white paper with an outline of a structure and content for a possible outcome (such as an MOU) that would serve as a basis for the discussions at the next meeting.