

Update for SAO Meeting Yellowknife, NT, Canada, 26-27 March 2014

The International Polar Partnership Initiative (IPPI) – an update

Prepared by David Hik (IASC President)

The most recent meeting of the extended International Polar Initiative (IPI) Steering Group was held on 10 – 11 February 2014 in Paris, hosted by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO.

The meeting was attended by leaders from a wide range of organizations involved in polar research, observing systems and delivery of services, including: IASC, International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA), Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program and Arctic Council, World Meteorological Organization and World Climate Research Program, International Hydrographical Organization (IHO), IOC and other UNESCO programs, GRID/Arendal (on behalf of UNEP), ICSU and Future Earth, European Polar Board (EPB) and European Science Foundation, APECS, Mountain Research Initiative (MRI), University of the Arctic, Canadian Polar Commission, Smithsonian Institution and Museum national d'Histoire naturelle. Several other partners were unable to attend. The meeting was chaired by the President of IASC in his role as co-chair of the IPI Steering Group.

The premise of the original IPI concept paper (www.internationalpolarinitiative.org) is that the polar regions, where rapid physical, biological and social changes are occurring, must be considered within the framework of a fully coupled human-natural system. The extent and rate of change in the polar regions is outpacing any understanding of the consequences of these changes, and thus it is difficult to convey the knowledge necessary for making decisions that will influence future Arctic, Antarctic and mountain activities and conditions.

During early discussions of the IPI concept (2011-2012) a number of emerging challenges in the polar regions were considered, including improving research infrastructure for services and operations; engaging with local residents; facilitating transfer of knowledge that would lead to tangible actions and outcomes; delivering more reliable scientific information for policy-making; better coordinating existing resources and facilities; and developing mechanisms for new investments in areas where required activities are lacking.

One outcome of the Paris meeting was a decision to rename this process the IPPI, or International Polar Partnership Initiative. Several motivations for an IPPI were considered, including a need to develop and sustain a mechanism to support the wide range of polar interests and activities being addressed by international organizations and national research programs. Importantly, the Paris meeting recognized the compatibility of IPPI with the current ongoing planning and assessment process being conducted by various polar communities and organizations such as International Conference on Arctic Research Planning (ICARP) III led by IASC, Horizon Scan led by SCAR, and the Arctic Human Development Report II and Adaptation Actions for a Changing Arctic (AACAA), led by IASSA and Arctic Council, respectively.

The next proposed steps will require potential partner organizations to identify contributions to IPPI. Efforts will also be made to discuss IPPI at national levels and involve funding agencies in shaping the IPPI program at its earliest stage of development. In order to accommodate both bottom-up ideas from research communities and more centralized coordination of service oriented programs, and with a focus on achieving practical results, the IPPI Steering Group will work to support data interoperability among stakeholders; lead a discussion on “achieving more with less”; and consider the possibility of establishing a “micro-secretariat” to support future developments of IPPI.

During 2014, the Steering Group will prepare a Framework Agreement for a multi-agency program of international stakeholders and develop a common Implementation Plan for activities that would begin in 2017-2018.