

Arctic Council
Task Force on Scientific Cooperation in the Arctic
Task Force Report to the Senior Arctic Officials

At Kiruna, the Arctic Council Ministers decided that they hereby

agreed that cooperation in scientific research across the circumpolar Arctic is of great importance to the work of the Arctic Council, and establish a Task Force to work towards an arrangement on improved scientific research cooperation among the eight Arctic States.

Summary

As a result, under the co-chairmanship of representatives from Sweden, the Russian Federation and the United States, the Scientific Cooperation Task Force met five times, with participation from all Arctic States, Permanent Participants, and accredited observers. Delegations confirmed the importance of scientific research in the Arctic and the role of traditional knowledge and, given the elevated cost of performing research in the Arctic, the importance of efficiency and collaboration to further research in areas of common interest. Delegations identified many national research priorities that are shared among the Arctic States and international science planning bodies, and then focused on the need to remove obstacles to collaboration and to support efficiency in collaborative Arctic research. The Task Force identified several key areas where shared efforts could improve scientific cooperation including sharing of data and metadata, facilitating the movement of people, samples and equipment across borders for the purposes of conducting research, facilitating logistics and access to research areas, and facilitating access to research facilities. The Task Force concluded that a high-level agreement was the best mechanism to advance the objectives set by the Ministers in Kiruna, and the text of a draft Memorandum of Understanding was initially discussed. In the course of these discussions, it became clear that, for some countries, addressing issues such as the movement of people and equipment across borders and access to research areas may require significant involvement from a wide range of government agencies and stakeholders that do not have a science mandate. It was agreed that resolution on these issues may benefit from the force of a legally binding agreement.

The Task Force recommends to SAOs, for inclusion in the Iqaluit Declaration, that the Task Force work towards a legally binding Agreement on scientific cooperation with a view to completing its work during the US Chairmanship.

Results 2013-2015

1. Meeting in Stockholm, December 10-11, 2013. Discussion included priorities in Arctic research, and the need for improvements in data sharing; simplification of cross-border movement of people, samples and equipment; research logistics (coordination among research stations, icebreakers); and increased funding for Arctic research. Consideration was given to how the Arctic Council could engage with broader initiatives including the International Polar Partnership Initiative (which includes Antarctica). The participants agreed that the purpose of the Task Force was not to write a new over-arching list of Arctic scientific priorities but to compare existing national priorities in order to identify common objectives and possible gaps. Agreement was reached that preparations for the next meeting would include gathering information on coordination of research logistics in the Antarctic, data sharing within the Sustaining Arctic Observing Network (SAON), and logistic challenges faced by the Forum of Arctic Research Operators (FARO). Finally, delegates agreed to compile lists of national research priorities for the Arctic.

2. Meeting in Helsinki, April 8-9, 2014. Presentations from SAON, FARO, University of the Arctic, International Network for Terrestrial Research and Monitoring in the Arctic (INTERACT), and the International Polar Partnership Initiative emphasized the importance of improving data sharing and simplifying the logistics and regulations involved with research clearances and cross-border movements of researchers and their equipment. Arctic States presented their lists of national research priorities, which were then compiled into a list of many shared priorities. These priorities are also shared by international science planning bodies. Draft instruments from Russia and the US were discussed, and agreement was reached to combine elements of the two for discussion at the next meeting. Delegations concurred that at its next meeting, the task force would begin negotiation of a memorandum of understanding or other instrument, ultimately for presentation to Ministers.

3. Meeting in Reykjavik, May 27-28, 2014. The International Arctic Science Committee made a presentation emphasizing how cross-border logistics has been made easier during the International Polar Year of 2007/2008, as a possible model for more permanent improvements. Norway presented draft text that incorporated input from Russia, US and other delegations. From that starting point, text of a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding was developed that delegations agreed contained many valuable elements that would form the basis for further discussions. Because several delegations felt that it would be preferable to present a legally binding agreement to Ministers, all delegations agreed to identify domestic jurisdictional implications. Canada and US accepted to work on the text inter-sessionally.

4. Meeting in Tromsø, September 30-October 2, 2014. Delegations agreed to recommend to the SAOs that the Ministers be asked to support a continued mandate for the Task Force to produce a legally binding agreement during the U.S. chairmanship. Using the draft MOU as a starting point, delegations discussed the scope of the agreement, underlying issues related to customs and border regulations

and the role of non-parties in relation to the agreement, and elements that could be included. The delegations of Norway, Russia, and US undertook to prepare a draft agreement to be circulated for review and revision by Arctic State and Permanent Participant delegations in advance of a meeting tentatively scheduled for February 25-26 in Oslo, Norway. It was recognized that as the next meeting would involve negotiation of a legally binding agreement, that the meeting would only go forward if all Arctic State delegations were ready to proceed at that point.

5. Meeting in Oslo, February 25-26, 2015. The Task Force met at the Research Council of Norway to discuss the text of a legally binding agreement. It was understood that this work would not be considered formal negotiations on a legally binding agreement, but would focus on clarifying objectives, terms of reference and basic elements of the possible agreement. The participants were able to review the draft text in a very cooperative atmosphere.