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Report from the Meeting between the SAO Chair and Working Groups

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Meeting Report

## 1. Welcome and introduction

David Balton, Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials, welcomed the Chairs and Executive Secretaries (ES) from the six Arctic Council (AC) Working Groups (WGs) and asked for approval of the provisional agenda, which had been distributed on December 8. After a couple of additions under “other business,” the agenda was accepted.

## 2. Coordination of WG work plans and scheduling

### Background

The growing amount of cross-cutting work in the AC affects WGs work plans. The group considered how best to collaborate across the WGs during work plan development and how WGs schedule their meetings to address cross-cutting needs. There was discussion of the WGs Operational Guidelines, which were provisionally approved by Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) at the spring 2015 SAO meeting.

### Summary / Conclusion

Even though WG coordination has improved substantially over the last several years, all agreed that the increasing amount of cross-cutting work requires even more coordination earlier in the work plan development process. The WGs agreed to circulate draft work plans for the next chairmanship early with an eye toward meeting to review and “harmonize” the six work plans in October/November of 2016. For the current cross-cutting projects it was suggested that at their next meeting each working group would make a list of their projects identifying important inputs from other working groups and sharing the list with other relevant WGs.

While all agreed in principle that it would be good to schedule WG meetings so as to facilitate participation of individuals who seek to attend meetings of more than one WG (e.g., Permanent Participants and Observers), the WGs explained that they faced many other challenges in identifying meeting dates: all their own heads of delegation (HoD) must be available, there cannot be a conflict with other WG meetings, holidays must be avoided, and the SAO meeting deadlines must be met. The planning calendar as introduced by the Arctic Council Secretariat was mentioned as a useful tool. Some WGs reminded others that it could be helpful to ask their HoD who are local to attend other WG meetings. Most agreed that it would be helpful for their scheduling if the spring and fall SAO meetings were moved one month later (i.e., early April and November) to avoid prep time falling during summer and winter holiday breaks.

With regard to the Operational Guidelines, the SAO Chair invited the WGs to consider the helpfulness of distilling the common elements from the six WG guidelines and repackaging them into one document. It was agreed that the Chairmanship will circulate a document attempting to accomplish that ahead of the March 2016 SAO meeting for the WGs to consider. The document will be written in such a way that allows for space to explain

differences among the WGs. Discussion of the operational guidelines will continue at the SAO Chair and WG Chair breakfast in Fairbanks.

### 3. Engagement with PPs and integration of TLK

#### Background

The group discussed how the WGs engage with Permanent Participants (PPs), if that engagement should be enhanced and if so how, and considered the progress WGs are making to address the directive on traditional and local knowledge (TLK) from the Iqaluit Declaration. The group also discussed how best to implement the two new checklists on PP capacity and TLK.

#### Summary / Conclusion

In general, all the WGs are working and thinking about TLK and the two new checklists seem to be unproblematic and easy to implement. The SAO Chair clarified that the TLK checklist does not mean that all projects in the AC must have a TLK component. There was a suggestion to consider including the two checklists in the operational guidelines, though some noted that the checklists are at this point only provisionally approved. Many WGs noted that PP participation varies greatly depending on available human resources and funding. All noted a recent decrease in RAIPON participation.

The group discussed uses of the terms “indigenous knowledge” and “traditional and local knowledge.” WGs expressed concern about the new bracketed text under consideration within the Task Force on Scientific Cooperation, i.e. “all projects must contain indigenous knowledge.” Many acknowledged that PP delegates participating in meetings are often not the TLK holders themselves and there is an issue in finding the appropriate TLK holders in relation to AC projects. When the Indigenous Peoples Secretariat (IPS) relocates to Tromsø in January 2016, there is hope that the ACS/IPS together can provide even better support to PPs and help facilitate PP participation in WGs.

### 4. Engagement with Observers

#### Background

The group discussed whether Observers are making proactive contributions (e.g. engaging in collaborative research, in-kind contributions) towards AC activities and if Observers are working with the PPs. WGs also discussed the implementation of the new Addendum to the Observer Manual and were invited to share experiences and challenges, if any, in dealing with Observers in their work.

#### Summary / Conclusion

Some questions arose concerning the implementation of rule 37 in the Rules of Procedure, which provides that “Observers shall be invited to the meetings and other activities of the Arctic Council unless SAOs decide otherwise.” Does this rule apply to workshops, WG expert

groups, and practical exercises? The SAO Chair advised that rule 37 should be followed at all levels, unless the SAOs have made an exception. Observers should always be invited to meetings, particularly because they can be a resource. WG Chairs have the option to close a meeting when necessary. If the WGs have a concern about inviting Observers, they should approach the SAO Chair and ask for specific guidance on a case-by-case basis. Some WGs raised concerns that it is not always clear that the Observer delegate attending the meeting is in fact representing the Observer entity s/he claims to represent. The SAO Chair advised that there is a formal point of contact (Observer HoD) and whomever they nominate to take part in a meeting, is accredited to attend. The Arctic Council Secretariat has the most up-to-date list of Observer HoDs and will, as requested, share this list with the WG secretariats.

## Lunch – Topic: Relationship between WGs and TFs

### Background

The group discussed the connections between WGs and Task Force(s) and the role(s) of WGs at TF meetings.

### Summary / Conclusion

Some expressed concerns about the Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation (TFAMC), where there was a difference of opinion on how to involve WGs in the Task Force (TF) meeting. The group discussed the difference between the permanent WGs and the temporary TFs. It was understood that the AC has generally formed TFs when there is a need to negotiate binding agreements or new policy related instruments. All understood that the WGs do not participate in the Task Force meetings as “negotiators”. With regard to the TFAMC, the WGs stressed that they can provide expertise and background on the work of the AC and marine issues. Consistent treatment of the WGs at TF meetings is desired. The WGs stressed that TF products may end up with the WG(s) for implementation and it might make sense to include the relevant WG(s) in the TF work from the beginning.

## 5. Relationships with external bodies

### Background

The group discussed how to implement the recent SAO guidance to notify SAOs when a relationship with an external body has been formed and considered input to the U.S. Chairmanship on possible guidelines on this topic. The related issue of representing the WG at public or other events was also discussed.

### Summary / Conclusion

The WGs explained that they always report any external relationships to SAOs in their post-meeting “two-pagers” and/or in their progress reports for the SAO meetings. In the WGs’ point of view the existing external relationships are mainly on technical topics related to the exchange of data or scientific cooperation between experts. The WGs are all aware of the difference between technical relationships and formal, policy-level relationships. When they

have concerns, the WGs agreed to consult with the SAOs before entering into new relationships and will continue to inform SAOs via the progress reports. The WGs asked for guidance on handling invitations to speak at events or give presentations about their work. The SAO Chair noted two related concerns: (1) executive secretaries should not be speaking on policy and (2) WGs should not be speaking on behalf of the AC as a whole. The SAO Chair and the ACS Director discuss every speaking engagement that comes in and together they figure out who the most appropriate person is to attend/speak. All the WGs use a similar process for accepting speaking invitations. Typically the WG Chair speaks on more policy-related issues and the ES provides informational/factual presentations, as appropriate. Some of the WG Chairs emphasized that ES engaging in public fora is important for WG communications and outreach, and that such efforts also benefit the AC as a whole. They emphasized that it would be important to maintain some flexibility regarding representing the WGs at public or other events in the future.

The SAO Chair advised that the WGs continue to do their good work on outreach, be sensitive to concerns about who is speaking on behalf of WGs and the AC as a whole, and stay on the technical side of the line when giving presentations.

## 6. March 2016 SAO meeting agenda

### **Background**

The October SAO Plenary meeting was structured in part around four cross-cutting themes, i.e. climate change, environment and biodiversity, communities, and oceans. The SAO Chair asked the WGs to share their views on how the last SAO meeting had functioned in this regard, whether the March 2016 SAO Plenary should also be structure in part around cross-cutting themes and, if so, which ones. More broadly, the SAO Chair asked the WG chairs and ES for ideas about the agenda for the SAO Executive and Plenary meetings in March.

### **Summary / Conclusion**

There was agreement that some portion of the SAO meeting agenda should be dedicated to cross-cutting issues. Several topics were suggested: health; prevention; implementation such as how to make agreements effective and financing of AC projects; ecosystem services (TEEB); and climate change, including global feedback loops, adaptation, and influence of other agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals. The Arctic Council's role in a changing global context was also suggested as an interesting idea. There were differing views on inviting experts to speak on the cross-cutting themes at the SAO meeting. In addition to including cross-cutting agenda items all WGs expressed a desire to have 10 minutes on the agenda to showcase one or two of their key initiatives and/or success stories for the SAOs.

There was some discussion of a long term strategic plan. The suggestion was made to consider this for the executive meeting with WG Chairs possibly invited to participate. Financing of AC projects was raised as a concern with a particular question about how to support multiple sources of financing.

The SAO Chair noted that it will not be possible to take on board all the ideas raised during the discussion in drafting the agendas for the SAO Executive and Plenary meetings. The SAO Chair will also gather input from SAOs and consider all these ideas carefully when developing the agendas.

## 7. Towards the 2017 Ministerial

### Background

Although the details for the logistics of the 2017 Ministerial are not yet known, the SAO Chair invited the WGs to share their expectations, proposals and ideas for how to create a successful and dynamic Ministerial meeting. It was also considered how WGs can develop policy recommendations that are focused on actions to be taken by Arctic States and for which implementation can be readily measured.

### Summary / Conclusion

The SAO Chair shared his expectation that there would be seats for the WGs in the room at the Ministerial meeting. The group discussed the general role of WGs at the Ministerial and the treatment of WG deliverables leading up to the Ministerial. There was a desire to have some meaningful interaction with Ministers, as well as the broader public in a way that showcases the WGs. There is a common objective to shape the Ministerial meeting to be more dynamic. The group brainstormed the following ideas: having an event in Washington, DC 2-3 weeks ahead of the Ministerial; and convening a more directly linked event a day ahead of the Ministerial that may possibly include some combination of Ministers, SAOs, WGs and the public. The U.S. Chairmanship will consider all these ideas as well as uncontrollable constraints such as the scheduling of Ministers, security, and available venue space.

On the topic of policy recommendations, the SAO Chair encouraged the WGs to keep the number of suggested policy recommendations flowing from their scientific/technical work at a manageable level, to remember that the audience for policy recommendations is the Arctic States, and to include language that would allow the recommendations to be implemented in a measureable way (e.g., specify a target or timetable).

## 8. Other business

a) Study of the Arctic Council – Some of the WGs expressed concerns with the Multilateral Audit and the follow-up study by the Fridtjof Nansen Institute, the latter of which Norway is financing. Opinions were exchanged on the role of WGs and Executive Secretaries in providing background information to the new study.

b) The Arctic Council 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary – a question was raised on what role the WGs would have in the celebrations of the anniversary during 2016. The SAO Chair shared that the U.S. Chairmanship has decided to build the U.S. celebration into the 2017 Ministerial meeting.

All agreed to consider reconvening this same group again in December 2016.