

SAON RELATIONSHIP TO THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

Discussion Paper for SAOs and PPs¹

(By representatives of Arctic Council states (Canada, Denmark and Greenland, Norway, Sweden, U.S.), Permanent Participants (AIA, GCI, ICC) and the SAON SG co-chairs)

The purpose of this paper is to address concerns raised in the context of developing SAON implementation plans regarding the relationship of the SAON to the Arctic Council. The paper makes a recommendation for SAO and PP consideration.

Background and Context

The Arctic Council (AC) initiated the Sustaining Arctic Observing Network (SAON) process in 2006. In their Salekhard Declaration, the Ministers decided to:

“Urge Member States and other entities to strengthen monitoring and research efforts needed to comprehensively address Arctic change and to promote the establishment of a circumpolar Arctic observing network of monitoring stations with coordinated data handling and information exchange for scientific data, statistics and traditional knowledge as a lasting legacy of the IPY (and the evolving Arctic component of the Global Earth Observing System of Systems, GEOSS)”

In 2009, the AC Ministers continued their support and went further by stating in their Tromsø Declaration that they:

“Support continued international coordination to maximize the legacy of IPY within the following areas: observations, data access and management, access to study areas and infrastructure, education, recruitment and funding, outreach, communication and assessment for societal benefits, and benefits to local and indigenous peoples,

Recognize the valuable contribution of the Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks (SAON) process as an IPY legacy to enhance coordination of multidisciplinary Arctic data acquisition, management, access and dissemination, encourage the continuation of this work with emphasis on improving sustained long term observation, and welcome the participation of indigenous organizations in future work,

¹ The Gwich'in Council International does not agree with the proposed way forward and wishes to have a full discussion among the SAOs and PPs at their March 2011 meeting.

Decide to take the lead in cooperation with IASC and other relevant partners in the continuation of the SAON process, including to consider ways to develop an institutional framework to support circum-Arctic observing, and the preparation and implementation of a workplan for the next two years to initiate work on priority issues including sustained funding and data management,”

The AC and the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) have worked together to fulfill the Tromsø mandate and bring the SAON process to fruition. The SAON Steering Group (SG), created after the Tromsø Ministerial, has presented to the SAOs and PPs a proposed institutional framework including establishing an International SAON Program Board to give overall direction and coordinate SAON activities. More recently, the SAON SG drafted a SAON Implementation Plan that envisions a SAON Council (vice “SAON Program Board”) with broad membership to include non-AC and non-IASC entities, and possibly a smaller SAON Executive Committee to work intersessionally.

Practical Considerations

In the course of developing the framework, the SAON SG determined that the SAON process would benefit from its own operating procedures that could be tailored to its scientific needs. The Arctic Council Rules of Procedure (RoP) were designed primarily to support governmental consensus decision-making rather than scientific collaboration. Having its own operating procedures would also facilitate participation by non-AC countries and others (other than AC observers) who could not be bound by the AC RoP.

Following the Torshavn SAO meeting in October 2010, a small group of Arctic Council states (Canada, Denmark and Greenland, Norway, Sweden, U.S.), Permanent Participants (AIA, GCI, ICC) and the SAON SG co-chairs volunteered to discuss the relationship between the AC and the SAON process, and to develop a recommendation for resolving the issues related to working within the AC RoP. The group ultimately decided to explore the idea of joint sponsorship of the SAON by the AC and IASC. It was thought that doing so would maintain a strong connection between the AC and SAON while giving the SAON a measure of independence that would allow it to bring in states and organizations that are not

Arctic Council states or permanent participants and to create its own operating procedures.

The small group also discussed the offer of the AMAP Secretariat to provide secretariat support to the SAON, and suggested that this issue be forwarded to the AMAP Foundation. The AMAP Foundation has, based on its founding documents and Arctic Council decisions, fully endorsed the AMAP Secretariat's efforts in providing support and capacity for SAON. The AMAP Foundation looks forward to providing further input when more modalities have been worked out for the organization of SAON. There would be no Arctic Council costs associated with this support function.

Parameters for AC-IASC Co-Sponsorship of SAON

The small group came up with the following “parameters” it would recommend for sponsoring the SAON:

- The SAON process should remain connected to the AC through the proposed SAON Council, but should not be created as a subsidiary body of the AC.
- The membership should include PPs who should participate with the same status they have in the AC.

Recommended Way Forward

The small group recommends the following way forward to the SAOs and PPs for their consideration. If the SAOs reach consensus on this approach along with the SAON Implementation Plan, then they should be forwarded to the Ministers for adoption at the Nuuk Ministerial meeting. The Nuuk Ministerial text and the SAO Report to Ministers should be closely aligned with the SAON Implementation Plan to ensure a clear path forward for the SAON relationship to the AC.

- The AC and IASC should co-sponsor the SAON. Such sponsorship could be accomplished through a Ministerial statement from the AC (including its endorsement of the SAON implementation plan) and an appropriate statement from IASC.

- The current SAON secretariat should communicate with proposed SAON national contacts, PPs, the WMO, and AC working group chairs inviting them to nominate experts to join the SAON Council and to identify a time for its first meeting. IASC should do the same with its membership.
- The SAON Council should be co-chaired by one person appointed by the AC SAOs and one person appointed by IASC. The co-chairs should be responsible for reporting from the SAON Council to the sponsors and should report any advice from the sponsors to the SAON Council. The AC co-chair of the SAON Council should take direction from the SAOs.
- The SAON Council should be open for membership by the AC Permanent Participants.
- The SAON Council should begin drafting its operating documents at its first meeting and should present them and any other progress no later than the Spring 2012 SAO meeting. It should report on the status of tasks and SAON implementation in general at the Spring 2013 SAO meeting.
- In addition to any technical support the AC may wish to provide to the SAON, the AC should continue to politically support the SAON through Ministerial statements and other appropriate means.

[Proposed Ministerial Text

The small group discussed the texts for the Nuuk Declaration and the SAO Report to Ministers. It was decided that both should be taken up after the March SAO meeting, but drafted the following Ministerial text for use by the SAOs and PPs if they wish to have a text to work from:

Regard the Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks (SAON) process as a significant vehicle for follow up to major legacy of the International Polar Year 2008-2009 (IPY) and to activities undertaken under the auspices of the Council, and **welcome** the continuing efforts by the SAON Initiating Group and its successor SAON Steering Group to solidify and promote a means of taking this important work forward;

Decide to accept the recommendations of the Senior Arctic Officials to co-sponsor the SAON with the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), and **endorse** the SAON Implementation Plan prepared by the SAON Steering Group;

Encourage the SAON Council, as called for in the SAON Implementation Plan with co-chairs appointed by the Arctic Council and IASC, to draft operational documents by no later than 6 months from the creation of the SAON Council;]