

SAON: Sustained Arctic Observing Network

Background

At its Ministerial Meeting 26 October, 2006 the Arctic Council agreed to:

“Urge all Member countries to maintain and extend long term monitoring of change in all parts of the Arctic, and request AMAP to cooperate with other AC working groups, IASC and other partners in efforts to create a coordinated Arctic observing network, that meets identified societal needs”.

AMAP has followed up this request by informal consultations both within and outside the Arctic Council with a view to soliciting a broad, international cooperation.

There are many organisations, existing observing networks etc. who have a legitimate interest in this initiative.

However, as a first step a meeting was called 24-25 January, 2007 in Tromsø, Norway inviting representatives of some major organisations for consultations on a best possible approach. The intention was to have a group of persons representing broad interests, but aiming at *inclusiveness* of all interested parties in the next steps.

The outcome of this meeting is summarized below.

Introduction:

During IPY, there will be a significant increase in polar observations. The SAON initiative will capitalize on the IPY efforts and be aiming at building a lasting legacy for sustained Arctic observations and data.

The *need* for a well coordinated and sustained Arctic observing network has been identified in several international policy and research fora.

There are several observing networks covering specific themes or regions. However, there is a need for, inter alia:

- Better *coordination* for avoiding overlaps, providing synergies etc.
- ensuring *sustainability* through long-term funding and commitments,
- filling *major gaps* both as to themes/parameters and geographic coverage,
- making the output (data) easily *accessible, open and free*.

SAON Aims:

• *Combining observational efforts by national agencies, research communities, local residents and others with a view to creating Sustained Arctic Observing Networks.*

- ‘Sustained’ in this context means long-term observations

- In most countries, resources and the responsibility for long-term observations are held by national agencies, whereas research communities are making significant contributions, usually on a short or medium-term basis. *By combining those two communities and inviting others to join, we are aiming at a robust network that will last.*

- *Circumarctic focus and coverage.*

There are many observing sites and networks in the Arctic (ongoing or in planning). However, there are often significant gaps in their geographical coverage, all year operations or they are missing sustainable (long-term) funding. In addition, *synergies* at multidisciplinary observatory sites have a cost-saving potential and should be aimed at.

- *Inclusiveness*

SAON will operate on the basis of *inclusiveness*; e.g. it will aim at being open to all disciplines/themes, operators and users.

- *Accessible data*

Arctic data is the end-user product, and SAON should aim at promoting *easy, free, timely and open access* to Arctic data, and meeting international standards.

- *Global connections*

The Arctic is an important region for many global phenomena, hence whenever there is a relevant observatory system; SAON should ensure close collaborations with such a system.

Organisation

There are many observing sites and networks in the Arctic, mostly disciplinary and in variable state. Improving the structure and promoting the funding requirements can in itself make a difference. Improved coordination is another need.

For taking the *initial* steps, as well as addressing a magnitude of challenges, the following organisation is suggested:

- SAON Steering Group

Their main function is to guide the international development of SAON (such as the major international workshop suggested below). Initially, representatives of the Initiating Organisations will serve.

- SAON Annual Meeting

Steering Group, Chairs of Panels (see below), Chairs of Groups of Specialists, operator representatives etc. were mentioned as potential participants; e.g. to create a forum for representatives of all involved.

- SAON Panels

Panels to be established based on *thematical clusters*; e.g. observational networks for broad areas like ‘Ocean and Sea Ice’, ‘Cryosphere/Hydrosphere’, ‘Social Sciences and Human Health’, ‘Atmosphere’, ‘Terrestrial Ecosystems’. SAON to be open to other major clusters interested in joining.

NB:

Panels will build on existing structures and aid them in making their networks more robust (when needed) based on the request and general aims mentioned above.

Local observations and knowledge should be represented on all relevant panels.

Crosscutting issues

With a thematical cluster approach as suggested above, important user needs may not be fully addressed.

As *examples* of crosscutting issues, the Initiating Group listed:

- Biodiversity
- Climate
- Contaminants
- Human Health
- Natural Resources
- Sustainable Communities

A mechanism for meeting these needs will be further discussed.

- SAON Groups of Specialists

Such groups to be established as needs arise, for instance in areas such as: ‘Site Operators’, ‘Data management’, ‘A system design assessment’, ‘Remote sensing and new sensors’ etc.

Initiating Organisations:

Representatives of the following organisations attended the Tromsø meeting: AMAP, AOSB, CLiC, IASC, IASSA, IPY and NSF.

They further agreed to invite: FARO, IPS and ISAC to join the initial Steering Group.

Next step

Many organisations, networks, operators and users etc. have voiced an interest in SAON, and the Initiating Steering Group heartily welcomes all who are interested and willing to contribute.

In order to accommodate early involvement as bringing this initiative forward, it was agreed to organise a major SAON workshop in November, 2007.

Place not yet decided. However, the Initiating Group is soliciting offers based on the following requirements:

- Easy to reach internationally and with no visa problems
- Meeting rooms (plenary seating at least 150 persons, 5-7 group rooms of various sizes)
- Local assistance
- Reasonable prices (accommodation and infrastructure expenses).

Point of contact

Initially, Odd Rogne at AMAP (Odd.Rogne@AMAP.no) will serve as a point of contact, and he will also be assisting the initial SAON Steering Group.

The need for a regular SAON Secretariat was envisaged, preferably attached to a relevant, existing secretariat.