

Guest Editorial

SCAR Makes Progress

Scanning the horizon for new opportunities helps organisations stay relevant to the evolving issues of the day. Stuck in traditions, they may be unable to do that without the aid of external review. Recognising the danger of imminent fossilisation, SCAR's young Turks called for such a review, duly carried out in 2000. Twenty recommendations ensued, among them: analyse Antarctica's role in global change, help to build the capacity of Antarctic scientists, increase dissemination of knowledge about the Antarctic, be more proactive in providing scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty System, and improve communication with other organisations having Antarctic interests. Other recommendations aimed to improve SCAR's internal structure and administration, not least by employing an Executive Director to ensure progress and to seek additional sources of funds.

By 2004, when I became SCAR's first Executive Director, SCAR had been restructured to form three Standing Scientific Groups charged with developing exciting scientific programmes in biological, physical and Earth sciences. There were short-lived Action Groups to address hot topics demanding short-term solutions, Expert Groups to address topics demanding longer deliberation, and five major Scientific Research Programmes (SRPs) focussing on key scientific issues with significant societal relevance or on blue skies research. The five dealt with the modern climate system, Antarctic climate history, evolution and biodiversity, sub-glacial lakes, and solar-terrestrial interactions. Their plans were subject to external peer-review to ensure investment in top quality research.

This painful but necessary re-organisation has re-energised SCAR's community and begun to reap significant dividends, for example in the environment field with the publication of "Antarctic Climate Change and the Environment", and in marine biology with the success of the multi-nation Census of Antarctic Marine Life.

Implementing a biennial Open Science Conference that has attracted large numbers of participants has provided a new forum for networking, developing ideas and planning projects, especially cross-disciplinary ones.

The \$50 000 Prince of Asturias Award enabled SCAR to start a competitive Fellowship Programme for early career researchers to widen their horizons. SCAR also became, with the International Arctic Science Committee, a co-sponsor of the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists to help 'new' polar scientists develop their careers.

Strategic planning, a major and continuing role in the International Polar Year, and the provision of more advice than ever to the annual meetings of the Antarctic Treaty Parties, have required SCAR to become more efficient to be more effective, and to work more closely with international partners. Though still a body of the International Council for Science (ICSU), SCAR has now gained independent legal status and is a Charity under UK law. As one sign of success, SCAR has gained four new national members and two new ICSU union members since 2000.

A further external review, in 2009, complimented SCAR on doing everything it had been charged with by the previous review. But we cannot be complacent.

Antarctic science in many fields is now at the forefront of global science and highly relevant to policy development and decision-making for governments. Yet there are problems on the horizon. The "naysayers" for global change will continue to attempt to undermine the conclusions of our science, whilst the present financial problems may have significant impacts on funding what is inevitably expensive research and may become more so if the oil price rises again. All SCAR scientists will need to make their voices heard even more in national fora, whilst SCAR itself must redouble its efforts on the international stage to make its own voice heard. Good ideas, successful collaborations, effective data management and wide dissemination of results must underpin all of SCAR's future strategies.

COLIN SUMMERHAYES
Executive Director (retired) SCAR