

SCAR AAA business meeting

Tuesday 26 August 2014
SkyCity Convention Centre, Auckland, New Zealand

Present: John Storey, Michael Ashley, Michael Burton, Peter Tuthill, Nic Bingham, Geoff Sims, Luc Dame, Xuefei Gong, Hu Yi, Charling Tao, Eric Fossat, Lifan Wang, Djamel Mekarnia, Vladimir Papitashvili, Jeremy Mould, Zhaohui Shang, Takuji Nakamura, Takashi Yamanouchi.

Chair: John Storey

18:15pm start

1. Welcome and introduction.

The chair welcomed those present.

As with all SCAR Scientific Research Programs, SCAR AAA is subject to an internal review every two years, with an external review performed after four. The first review was at the Portland meeting, with a positive outcome. Two external reviewers have submitted reports for the current review, and both are positive. These reports have been available to members of the SCAR AAA Steering Committee. AAA will be asking for continued funding for a further four years. One goal of this meeting is to discuss responses to the comments from the reviewers. These responses will then be presented to the meeting of SCAR Delegates next week.

2. Annual Report 2014.

The 2014 annual report of AAA has been circulated by email. It was also submitted to SCAR and used as input to the review. Some minor areas of concern were raised by reviewers, and will be discussed in the next agenda item.

3. External review of SCAR/AAA.

- Some discussion of linking our database to the Astronomical Virtual Observatory. This will be considered Wednesday 27 August 2014 with a sub-group of astronomers. However, the general feeling was that this would add little value to our database
- Build more capacity in countries with less developed Antarctic astronomy programs. People shouldn't feel they need to have a national Antarctic program to collaborate. Need to engage mainstream astronomers. Vladimir commented that he is trying to encourage US astronomers to participate more in SCAR.
- Education outreach – need to brand our activities as SCAR/AAA.
- Clearer vision and informative advice needed on what kind of observations are best made from Antarctica, and where exactly they should be made.

- Need to encourage international collaboration towards new accomplishments, not repeating existing results.

4. Horizon Scan outcomes

The Horizon Scan process was funded by SCAR and the Tinker Foundation to produce a set of important questions to inform high-level policy decisions. Questions selected were those likely to still be important in 20 year's time. Approximately 80 people met in Queenstown NZ earlier in the year for a 3 day meeting to discuss, modify, and select the final questions.

There were 2.5 astronomy questions in the final list of 80 (out of almost 1000 submitted). The fraction of astronomy questions is about the same as the ratio of Antarctic astronomers to Antarctic scientists.

Space science has an additional 3 questions. These, plus the astronomy 2.5 questions, are unusual in that to answer them requires use of Antarctica as a platform, as opposed to studying Antarctica itself.

5. National Research Council outcomes.

In 2011-12 two reports were produced: "Future of Antarctic Science" – what is important to study from Antarctica, and a study of logistics. These reports can be found at the USAP website, or ask Vladimir.

6. Proposal for an International High Plateau Observatory.

Working Group D (major new facilities) – is this the right forum?

The IHPO is not necessarily at one site. A key question is engaging mainstream astronomers. Can we have more international collaboration at Dome A? Some discussion of the structure of the AAA Working Groups followed.

Action: Working Group D to formulate a strategic plan for the development of IHPO (acronym subject to change).

7. Formulating a 5-year plan and a decadal plan for AAA.

8. Outreach materials – glossy brochure?

9. Plans for a 2015 AAA meeting.

There was general enthusiasm for holding the meeting over the weekend of 8 – 9 August 2015 in Hawaii (possibly the big island), to take advantage of the large number of astronomers who will be in Honolulu for the IAU GA, 3 – 14 August 2015. There are at least a couple of Antarctic astronomers based in Hawaii who might be prevailed upon to help organise it. Could we also have a booth at the IAU in Honolulu?

10. Succession planning for AAA Steering Committee

We should aim to replace about half the steering committee now, with younger people and women being particularly encouraged to volunteer. The remainder of the steering committee should be turned over in two years time.

11. The meeting closed at 19:55.

Thanks to Michael Ashley for taking the minutes of this meeting.