



Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP) Annual General Meeting (AGM) XXIV COMMUNIQUE

COMNAP AGM XXIV was held in Portland, Oregon, USA, from 16 – 19 July 2012.

The AGM is the forum under which the members (National Antarctic Programs) meet together each year in order to advance international cooperation in support of scientific investigation in Antarctica. It provides members with an opportunity to participate in a non-political meeting where they can learn from each other, can discuss arrangements for upcoming Antarctic seasons and can gain an understanding on the varied ways that different National Antarctic Programs operate in Antarctica in support of scientific research. The AGM was attended by representatives from all 28 COMNAP Member organisations, all from countries that are Consultative Parties to the Antarctic Treaty 1959. In addition, invited observers from the National Antarctic Programs of the Czech Republic and the Republic of Belarus, SCAR and IAATO also attended the AGM. In total, over 125 representatives attended all or some portion of the meeting.

It is symbolic that the COMNAP AGM meets each year during the height of the austral winter period. This is the time that many members of the National Antarctic Programs are wintering-over in the Antarctic, in order to carry out a range of research projects, projects that can only be successful with the depth and breadth of expertise that only the National Antarctic Programs have.

COMNAP continues to focus on effectively managing support to scientific research in the Antarctic. It does this by

- Serving as a forum to develop practices that improve effectiveness of activities in an environmentally responsible manner;
- Facilitating and promoting international partnerships;
- Providing opportunities and systems for information exchange; and
- Providing the Antarctic Treaty System with objective and practical, technical and non-political advice drawn from the National Antarctic Programs' pool of expertise.

The following outcomes were among the highlights of the AGM.

The full launch of the new COMNAP website was welcomed as was the announcement that the Ship Position Reporting System (SPRS) and the Accident Incident and Near Miss Reporting System (AINMRS) tools were both now fully operational electronically via the new website. Both are recognised as important tools in regards to search and rescue in the Antarctic Treaty Area and assist in promoting safety of Antarctic-based personnel.

Significant progress was made on a number of COMNAP projects, including the project to reformat the Antarctic Flight Information Manual (AFIM), translation of the Non-native Species Checklists for Supply Chain Managers into Dutch, Korean and soon into French, to join the English and Spanish-language versions that are already readily available. The checklists are used by National Antarctic Programs as one simple tool to assist in the reduction of non-native species introductions into Antarctica - one of the biggest potential threats to Antarctic ecosystems at this time. Agreement on preparation of a tsunami risk

communications plan based on the COMNAP research report on *Risk to Coastal Antarctic Infrastructure from Tsunami* was welcomed as was progress on the development of the Antarctic glossary.

COMNAP operates via a number of expert groups on topics such as safety, environment, outreach, training, science, energy management, air and shipping operations just to name a few. Many of these COMNAP Expert Groups reported on their activities for the past year. In particular the joint Medical Expert Group will hold a workshop on Antarctic telemedicine. The Environmental Expert Group will work on a range of topics of importance to COMNAP members and to assist the Antarctic Treaty's Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) during their discussions next year at CEP XVI, there was also an offer to host a workshop to review the COMNAP waste management guidelines that were developed at the COMNAP Waste Management in Antarctica Workshop (2006). The Science Expert Group agreed to convene several COMNAP workshops to discuss large-scale, upcoming science programs such as the Southern Ocean Observing System (SOOS) and the International Polar Initiative (IPI). Such large initiatives require cooperation that only the COMNAP National Antarctic Programs can organise, manage and provide. The workshops are therefore critical to understanding what capability exists and therefore to determine what science can successfully and sustainably be delivered.

The AGM was complemented by the 14th COMNAP Symposium, which this year was entitled "Sustainable Solutions to Antarctic Challenges: Supporting Polar Research into the 21st Century". The Symposium was open to the public and was very well attended. The keynote speakers included Professor Steven Chown who discussed his recently published *Science* paper on Antarctic conservation challenges. The Symposium included a range of presentations and posters from National Antarctic Programs which demonstrated the innovative ways such programs provide effective support for their Antarctic science.

A second public event was the presentation by Dr. Jan-Gunnar Winther entitled "Retracing Roald Amundsen - Centenary Expedition the South Pole", which documented his journey with three others on skis from the coast of Antarctica to the geographic south pole. A journey which was hailed as "The Centenary Expedition to the South Pole" and which retraced Roald Amundsen's route which was the first to reach the south pole on 14 December 2011.

Finally, the AGM was complemented by a half day workshop on "Innovations in Antarctic Communications" which was an opportunity for commercial representatives to meet with National Antarctic Programs to discuss collective and region-wide communications needs and potential solutions that are likely to be required by National Antarctic Programs for the next decade or so. National Antarctic Programs recognise the need to work together to consider these issues in order to provide value and effective support to science.

Jose Olmedo from Ecuador was elected as COMNAP Vice Chair for a 3-year term with completion at the end of COMNAP AGM XXVII (2015). He joins COMNAP EXCOM officers: Heinrich Miller (Chair), Juanjo Danobeitia, Yuansheng Li, Mariano Memolli and Brian Stone (continuing Vice Chairs) and Michelle Rogan-Finnemore (continuing appointed Executive Secretary) to complete the 7-member COMNAP Executive Committee. COMNAP AGM XXV will be held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, during the week beginning Sunday 7, July 2013.

COMNAP will celebrate its 25th anniversary as an organisation next year. To mark the occasion a COMNAP anniversary book is in preparation. The book will highlight COMNAP's achievements as an organisation and will document its consistent contributions to the Antarctic Treaty System in its role as one of only three Observer organisations to that system.