

SAON EXTERNAL REVIEW

Review Report

Executive Summary

August 29, 2016

SAON Review was conducted by the SAON External Review Committee

Helen Joseph (Chair): HCJ Consulting, retired Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Yuji Kodama: Executive Director, Office of Japan Consortium for Arctic Environmental Research, National Institute of Polar Research

Molly McCammon: Executive Director, Alaska Ocean Observing System, U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System

Gunn-Britt Retter: Head of Arctic and Environmental Unit, Saami Council

Mikhail Tretiakov, Head of Hydrology and Water Resources Department, Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute (Russia)

Jan Rene Larsen: SAON Secretariat Support

Justiina Dahl: External Data Analyst, Association of Polar Early Career Scientists

Special thanks to:

Nadezhda Kharlampieva: Associate Professor of Saint-Petersburg State University, Senior Researcher of Hydrology and Water Resources Department, Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute (Russia)

Executive Summary

In accordance with the 2011 Terms of Reference of the Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks (SAON), the SAON Board convened an External Review Committee in 2016 to review the first five years of SAON's accomplishments and make recommendations for future directions. The Review Committee, consisting of five members representing countries around the Arctic as well as diverse expertise, met over a five-month period to conduct the Review. The Committee's findings and recommendations are detailed in this report. Based on these, the Committee concluded that SAON was valued by the Arctic observing community, but had yet to reach its full potential. With refinements to its Vision, Mission and Goals, improvements to its Organizational Structure, a new focus on funding and sustainability, and increased outreach and communication efforts, SAON should be able to make great strides in the next five years to enhance pan-Arctic observing networks to meet the needs of Arctic peoples.

The Review Committee relied on a wealth of advice and guidance received through its information gathering process, which consisted of the 331 responses from two stakeholder surveys and insights from 19 one-on-one interviews with persons that either had been, or continue to be, directly involved with SAON's development. Together with this input and their individual expertise, the Review Committee made a series of findings and recommendations. Some of these are viewed as more critical than others.

The Review Committee identified the following recommendations as the most critical:

Critical Organization Structure Recommendations:

- 1) National SAON Coordination Committees need to be established in all SAON Member Countries. These Committees are critical to the success of SAON and need to be strengthened (or established in some cases) with the development of guidelines, mandates and terms of reference. The SAON Secretariat should be tasked with providing assistance to SAON Member Countries in establishing and supporting these National Committees. The Committees should reflect the inclusive nature of SAON.
- 2) The SAON Board needs ongoing and productive communication with the SAON Committees and within the Board itself, via regular teleconferences and face-to-face meetings. Productive discussions at the SAON Board level would be assisted with the development of specific SAON goals, and annual work plans with milestones and deliverables and review and reporting requirements.
- 3) SAON's role and interactions with its networks and programs need to be clarified and strengthened. The existing Arctic observing networks and activities are looking to SAON for it to help coordinate and facilitate observing activities, but not necessarily for SAON to have a role in actual implementation of observing activities. The SAON Board needs to address questions raised in the Review regarding what it means to be a SAON network and what the networks mean to SAON. This should be a priority for the SAON Board to address and underscores the need for increased dialogue between the SAON Board and the SAON networks.

Critical Recommendations for Fulfilment of SAON Vision, Mission and Goals:

- 4) SAON's Mission, Vision, and Goals must be clear, consistent, more explicitly pronounced in SAON documentation and more easily discoverable on the SAON website. SAON should develop a Strategic Plan that would more fully articulate the Vision, Mission and Goals and serve as a road map for SAON into the future. These all need to be reviewed on a regular basis as the Arctic political, environmental and economic landscape changes.
- 5) SAON must develop more task-oriented Goals that are reflective of the SAON Vision and Mission and are a key component of a newly developed Strategic Plan. Annual work plans for the SAON Committees should specify deliverables, milestones and annual review and reporting so as to demonstrate progress and success.
- 6) To increase its transparency, a Communications Plan should be developed by SAON that identifies its broad range of audiences, proposes strategies to reach out to these stakeholders and includes clear and consistent messaging. As well, the Arctic Observing Summit should be used more effectively as a mechanism to communicate about, and deliver on, SAON.
- 7) SAON should explore new, innovative forms of funding with a focus on additional resources for the SAON Committees. A key component of a proposed new SAON Strategic Plan should be a Funding Strategy that provides resources across national boundaries – either in the form of funding or in-kind personnel support - in support of the Vision, Mission and Goals.

Additional Recommendations to Strengthen SAON:

- 8). The SAON Committees have been a successful addition to the SAON organizational structure and ongoing guidance from the SAON Board and resourcing with funds or dedicated personnel should be made available.
- 9) SAON needs to capitalise on its strengths, including its position and unique nature as an organization with close ties to both the International Arctic Science Committee and the Arctic Council. SAON is well positioned at the international level to facilitate and coordinate Arctic observing activities. SAON complements and leverages the observing efforts of other organizations and initiatives and this strength should be further exploited.