

Svalbard Science Forum

Svalbard Science Forum, meeting 1/2009

Svalbard Science Centre, Longyearbyen

21/22 April 2009

Participants:

Svalbard Science Forum members:

Karin Refsnes, The Research Council of Norway, (RCN) (chair)

Kim Holmén, Norwegian Polar Institute (NPI)

Gunnar Sand, The University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS)

Jon Erik Nygaard, Kings Bay AS (KB) – over the phone

Roland Neuber, Ny-Ålesund Science Managers Committee (NySMAC) – over the phone

Lisa Baddely, EISCAT & Longyearbyen Science and Education Forum (LySEF) – over the phone

Observers:

Piotr Glowacki, Polish Polar Station, Hornsund

Sergey Priamikov, Arctic & Antarctic Institute (representing Barentsburg Research Stations)

Tor Punsvik, The Governor of Svalbard (SMS)

Secretariat:

Christiane Hübner, Svalbard Science Forum (SSF)

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted after adding a point about the White Paper and Northern Strategies of the Norwegian Government.

2. Adoption of the minutes from last meeting

The minutes from the last meeting were adopted with the reservation that short summaries will be added to the long detailed sections of the minutes.

3. New information from SSF-partners on matters relevant to SSF

NPI: *Information about the Centre for Ice, Climate and Ecosystems (ICE); general high level of activities at NPI.*

Centre for Ice, Climate and Ecosystems (ICE) – the structure of the centre is in place and the recruitment phase has started. The major themes for the centre will be sea ice, ecosystems and glaciology. The Centre will work in close relationship with other institutes and relevant institutes will be contacted in a later phase. Otherwise, NPI has general a high level of activities. The research vessel Lance is already around Svalbard, a large geological expedition is planned and activities in Ny-Ålesund and Longyearbyen will increase.

Barentsburg: *New research infrastructure planned, incl. a small research vessel; update on current activities and the bilateral meeting between Russia and Norway in November 2008.*

The Russian Government has provided a substantial amount of money for research infrastructure in Barentsburg. A first inspection was made in February and it was decided to renovate and improve existing buildings, rather than building new buildings. Trust Arktikugol will provide a research vessel equipped with diverse research equipment, eg for CTD, bottom sampling and use of nets. At the moment eight researchers are working in Barentsburg on snow accumulation and oceanography. A sea ice dispersal workshop is planned (possibly at the end of May). In November 2008, Norway and Russia had a bilateral meeting, where it was decided to follow up several IPY projects. The protocol of the meeting will be attached to these minutes.

UNIS: *Increase in student applications; severe budget problems.*

UNIS experienced a strong increase in student application, both from Norway and international (two applicants per student place). Applications from Poland and Russia are growing fastest over the last two years and 10 % of the students are from Germany. This year, UNIS has severe budget problems, which resulted in several reductions during the next semester, including fewer courses (approximately 20 student years less) and reduced staff (five positions less until end of 2009).

NySMAC: *India joined NySMAC, Paal Berg is the new chair, Roland Neuber is still the vice-chair.*

NySMAC had two meetings since last the SSF-meeting. India joined NySMAC during the November meeting and Paal Berg from the Norwegian Institute for Air Research (NILU) was appointed as new chair. Roland Neuber is still the vice-chair and will be the NySMAC representative for SSF during his vice-chair period.

LySEF: LySEF had a meeting in December, where both the chair (Fred S. Hansen; UNIS) and vice-chair (Cecilie H. v. Quillfeldt; NPI) were appointed. The website for LySEF is now operative: <http://lysef.unis.no/>.

EISCAT: *update on current activities; possible third antenna planned (earliest 2011); increased activity in Svalbard expected due to 3G mobile phone networks; EISCAT looks for potential new places for instruments in Svalbard, eg. Ny-Ålesund.*

The new director for EISCAT, Esa Turunen will be based in Kiruna, but will visit Longyearbyen regularly. A US communications Iridium spacecraft hit a defunct Russian satellite at an altitude of about 800 km over Siberia on 10th February 2009 creating a debris cloud adding to the estimated 18000 pieces of junk larger than 10 cm in size orbiting the Earth. EISCAT is currently monitoring the space debris cloud and is discussing with the European Space Agency about a new contract. The planned 3rd dish would be favoured to be a combined instrument for ionospheric studies and communication support to the Chinese Moon project. China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC) welcomed collaborative efforts to solve technical problems, but currently no actions or decisions were made. The earliest the 3rd antenna could be installed would be 2011. More operations will be concentrated on Svalbard in the next few years due to the loss of operating frequencies on the mainland due to introduction of 3G mobile phone networks. These are expected gradually with the mainland system suffering potential problems from 2010. EISCAT looks for potential new places for installing instruments and is interested in the old radar mast in Ny-Ålesund. It was pointed out that Ny-Ålesund has special restrictions towards radio transmissions and EISCAT will have to contact The Norwegian Mapping Authorities in order

to avoid conflicts with their measurements. Gunnar Sand joined the manager board of EISCAT. L. Baddeley informed that she will quit at EISCAT and suggests Ingmar Hagström as new representative for EISCAT, however it is still unclear who will represent EISCAT within LySEF. EISCAT also suggests that EISCAT as international organisation should be an observer rather than a full member of SSF.

Kings Bay AS: *Update on the Amundsen-Nobile-Towe, the Information Centre, restoration of the Amundsen Villa and a new 'conduct of honour'; increased interest for unmanned airplanes has to be coordinated; new power plant postponed*

The Amundsen-Nobile-Tower is under construction and instrument installation is planned to be finished at the end of August. The Information Centre is planned to be opened in beginning of June. Otherwise there is already full activity in Ny-Ålesund and rooms and flights for May are fully booked. There is an increasing interest for the use of unmanned airplanes. Kings Bay AS is in contact with NPI and Andøya Rocket Range to discuss coordination of these activities. Kings Bay is producing a 'code of honour' to be distributed to all station in order to increase environmental awareness. The Kings Bay board decided to postpone the implementation of a new power plant, since several new information raise several issues on efficiency of the planned solution. Now Kings Bay in cooperation with NILU and NPI works on implementing actions for improvement of the old power plant and investigating, beside others, also wind energy. The result may be that a smaller additional power plant will be needed. Kings Bay received two grants from the Svalbard Environmental Protection fund to restore the Amundsen Villa and the plan is to reopen it in 2011.

Hornsund: *Less activity to be expected in 2009; update on current activities in Hornsund.*

Polish activity is expected to decrease in 2009. However, researchers are able to use IPY funding also in 2009 and 2010. The winter team for next season will be reduced compared to this winter (8 overwintering staff members). Two trips of the vessel Horyzont II are planned: 26 June – 17 July and 30 July – 30 August. There are three new young scientists at the space centre (IGP PAS) that will study the ionosphere with possible cooperation with EISCAT in the future. A ionometer, several antenna and a LIDAR will be installed in Hornsund this summer. It is planned to install a second internet connection to Hornsund as a back-up, since strong winds and polar bears broke the current dish last winter. New international cooperation agreements between Krakow University and University of Uppsala and between IOPAS and Ukraine.

SMS: *tight budget for 2009; new demand for RiS registration prior to permission application; high pressure on helicopter logistics; new regulations for cabin use needed*

T. Punsvik emphasized that the governors office appreciates the good cooperation with SSF. This year, the budget is very tight with the most severe result that they will be no field inspectors this year. In February, the guide for scientists has been launched on the SMS webpages (as a substitute for the previous checklist on the SSF webpage). A new demand for RiS registration prior to permission application has been made to better ensure that researchers register the projects in RiS. SMS cannot see any reduction in applications in spite of the end of IPY and the economical crisis. There is a high pressure on helicopter logistics, both commercial and scientific and also rescue operations have been doubled (compared to the same period in 2008). The use of cabins by scientists needs new regulations and negotiations are in progress with the Hornsund station concerning the use and administration of cabins around Hornsund.

RCN: *continued IPY funding until (at least) 2010; Policy document on polar research delayed; RiS database part two in progress.*

Polar research is still high on the agenda at RCN, this seems also to be the case in the Norwegian government. IPY funding continue until 2010 (80 Mio NOK/year). RCN works on keeping this funding level also in the future. Means could be SIOS, SAON, etc. The budget suggestion for 2010 is submitted, incl. 20 Mio NOK earmarked for research in Svalbard. This needs to be accepted by the main board of RCN. The work on the policy document on polar research is delayed, but is planned to be adopted in autumn 2009. NPI has send an application for the Research in Svalbard (RiS) database part 2 (600.000 NOK/year for 2009 and 2010). Part 2 of the RiS database will be an important support for SSF and SIOS. NPI uses approximately the same amount of funding for the development of the RiS database. At the moment a call of proposals for Norwegian-Russian research projects is announced (3 Mio NOK for 2009). The IPY secretariat is in good progress of planning the IPY conference in Oslo on 8-12 June 2010. 2000-4000 scientists are expected.

4. Work report from the SSF secretariat

C. Hübner reported the activities of the SSF secretariat during the period October 2008 – April 2009.

Database: the new request by the Governor and the new booking form from Kings Bay AS is resulting in an increased registration of projects in the database. It was agreed that it is important to have a close look at the use of the search engine of the database.

NPI has developed an application to visualise the content of the project database on Google Earth.

Website: in 2008 55 unique visitors/day were registered on average.

Workshops, Arctic Field Grant: see separate points in the agenda.

Otherwise, business as usual. One important task was the development of the research description for the Information Centre in Ny-Ålesund. This was done in cooperation with the information department at NPI.

5. Adoption of the annual report 2008

The annual report was adopted by the SSF board with minor changes.

6. Workshop ‘Kongsfjorden System’ – concluding document

The document is finished and distributed. It is published in the Brief Report Series of NPI and it was emphasised that the SSF board is satisfied with the document.

This document can be used as argument for funding. The 20 Mio NOK earmarked for Svalbard research, suggested by RCN may be used for flagships and thus inspire research councils of other nations to follow the lead. In such a way, international funds could be created. It was suggested to produce a map of all locations mentioned in the report and publish it on the SSF-website as appendix to the report.

7. Workshop ‘Atmosphere flagship in Ny-Ålesund’ – report from workshop, status document

As short summary of the workshop was given. The concluding document is currently written and expected to be finished in autumn 2009. It was generally agreed that such workshops are a good instrument to stimulate cooperation initiatives. However, the flagship programmes need to be implemented to make the documents useful. SSF urges every member and observer to go back to their institutions and find national funding to start the projects.

8. Workshop ‘Terrestrial systems workshop in Ny-Ålesund’ - status

The next workshop is planned for 6-8 May 2009. 26 participants are invited.

9. Workshop ‘Cooperation in Svalbard’ – status, planning

This workshop is planned for 18-20 August 2009 on the vessel Horyzont II. It will include two levels: management (Mechanisms for increased cooperation between the research bases in Svalbard) and science (Identification of research fields with potential for fruitful cooperation and synergy effect). The two focus topics for the science part will be upper atmosphere geophysics and glaciology. During the workshop, all research bases in Svalbard will be visited in order to get a better understanding about the available facilities.

M. Kaczmarek and P. Glowacki will continue work on the programme and participation list. Other members of the planning group and SSF will be contacted for specific help.

10. Internal evaluation of SSF for period 2005-2008

This evaluation was planned as input to the White Paper for Svalbard, which now already is published. K. Refsnes suggested to not work further with it and keep the document as it is in the archive. G. Sand pointed out that it is important that the board members feel comfortable with the development of SSF and that a revised strategy must be agreed upon by the board before it is passed on to the Interdepartmental Polar Committee. He will distribute the document to all UNIS employees and will come back with input from UNIS.

11. Arktisstipend – report for 2009

Last autumn, the name was changed to Arctic Field Grant and all information was translated to English. Deadline for the Arctic Field Grant 2008 was November 2008 and the evaluation meeting took place in January 2009. 72 applications were received (42 from students and 30 from researchers) with a total sum of approx. 4 Mio NOK (after correction: 3.7 Mio NOK). 70 projects were funded and in total 2.96 Mio NOK were allocated. This was possible because RCN had some extra funding from the Ministry. In the White Paper it is proposed to open the Arctic Field Grant to international applicants.

12. Status ARCFAC

The programme has reached the minimum of man-days required, but there is still funds left for 400 man-days. The reason is that the projects were on average longer than expected and thus, man-days were cheaper due to less travel costs. There will be a new call for proposals in August 2009.

13. Status SIOS

SIOS is approved and on the ESFRI road map (9 December 2008). A national (19 December 2008) and an international meeting (4/5 February 2009) were held. During the Arctic Science Summit Week, three presentations about SIOS were given and the first extended steering group meeting was held. 18 international and 18 Norwegian institutes have shown interest to join the consortium. The first consortium meeting will be held on 17/18 June 2009 and prior to the meeting a first draft of the application will be prepared. Five expert groups assess the infrastructure and gaps in their fields and will report latest 1 September 2009. The deadline for the application is 1 December 2009. The Norwegian government has given full support to SIOS in several documents (beside others the White Paper).

14. Future science operations in eastern Svalbard, multi-annual station establishing & information about the status of the protection plans for eastern Svalbard

T. Punsvik gave an introduction about the challenges in relation to future science operations in eastern Svalbard from the point of view by the governors office. The continuous high level

of science activities has to be balanced with the environmental protection rules in Svalbard. This is especially a challenge in the eastern areas, since these are suggested reference areas for science and at the same time areas with high environmental protection standards. It was emphasised the importance of good coordination, especially when working in the eastern areas.

The Governor seeks a solid and predictable platform for decision making for permits of science activities. UNIS (Gunnar Sand) stressed that policy making on such issues should be based on knowledge and scientific data, not on general assumptions.

It was suggested to discuss science activities in eastern Svalbard during a workshop. This work shop could be planned by Tor Punsvik, a representative from Directorate for Nature Management (DN) and Cecilie v. Quillfeldt (NPI).

15. RiS on Google Earth

The application was presented. NPI will provide medium resolution air pictures for the Kongsfjorden area that will be implemented by Google Earth.

16. White Paper & the Northern Strategy of Norway

White Paper: The White Paper for Svalbard has just been published and was commented by NPI, UNIS, SMS and RCN. All were quite satisfied with the White Paper. It was unclear if the White Paper will be translated to English, possibly only the summary will be translated. It was uttered a wish for a complete translation – K. Refsnes will investigate this.

Northern Strategy of Norway: This strategy is part of the policy of the present cabinet. There is a large strategic focus on the Northern areas. The strategy paper includes a strengthening of the ICE-Centre (Ice, Climate and Environment) and a new Environment and Climate Centre, which will be much bigger than ICE, including many institutions and a focus on Northern Norway. It will probably be situated in a new building adjacent to the Polar Environmental Centre in Tromsø. Polar research has also a prominent place in the document. The new ice-going vessel is mentioned as well as a research programme on acidification of the sea.

17. Other business

It was suggested that RCN should use SSF more actively for announcing of specific call for proposals.

18. Date & place for next meeting

The next meeting will take place on board of Horyzont II on 21 August 2009 in Longyearbyen (10:00-13:00, lunch included). In addition a phone meeting will be held on 20 October (10:00-13:00).

Minutes written by C. Hübner