

BRIEFING NOTE

Subject:	Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks Working Group Meeting #3 – Helsinki, Finland (October 15th-17th, 2008)
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Preamble and General Summary

On October 15th-17th, 2008, Mr. Joe Murdock participated in a working group event in Helsinki, Finland related to Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks (SAON). Mr. Murdock provided a secretariat function for the Gwich'in Council International (GCI). Mr. Murdock's role was to not offer opinions to other SAON participants on GCI's behalf, but rather observe the proceedings and formulate an internal opinion for GCI's consideration. The event was sponsored by the Finnish Ministry of Environment and held at the Finnish Meteorological Institute. This workshop was the third and final workshop event related to SAON. Two previous workshops took place on November 12th-14th, 2007 (Stockholm) and April 9th-11th, 2008 (Edmonton). To encourage increased participation from Asian and Russian polar scientist and delegates, two smaller scaled workshop discussions were held on July 7th, 2008 (St. Petersburg) and September 23rd, 2008 (Incheon).

The main objective of the workshop attended was to not formulate new opinions but rather gather information from the previous SAON workshop and develop a recommendation document for the Arctic Council before December 15th, 2008. Select participants from Canada and Sweden offered to provide technical and administrative assistance to SAON from the December 15th, 2008 Arctic Council deadline until Spring 2009 (time when the SAON recommendations will be considered at Senior Arctic Officials and/or Ministers Meetings). Mr. Murdock had not participated in previous workshop discussions, nor had complimentary discussions with others outside of the SAON workshop event, so consideration should be made by GCI to the thoughts and opinions expressed in this *Briefing Note* and all recommendations brought forward. There are considerable limitations to the content provided in this *Briefing Note* given the limited involvement of Mr. Murdock.

Through the Arctic Council's Salekhard Declaration of October 26th, 2006, SAON was formed (January 2007) and mandated to develop recommendations related to the following:

*Urge all the Member countries to maintain and extend long term monitoring of change in all parts of the Arctic, and request AMAP to cooperate with other AC Working Groups, IASC and other partners in efforts to create a coordinated Arctic observing network, that meets identified societal needs.*¹

SAON is intended to act as a legacy of the International Polar Year program. The main functions of SAON are as follows:

- i. Combine observational efforts by various bodies (national agencies, research communities, local residents, etc.);
- ii. Offer data that is transparent, easily accessible and free; and,

¹ Page 6 of the Salekhard Declaration, On the occasion of the tenth Anniversary of the Arctic Council, the Fifth AC Ministerial Meeting. the 26th of October. 2006. Salekhard. Russia.

- iii. Allow for inclusiveness and provide a global connection to a sustained arctic observing network.

Thoughts and Opinions

The workshop attempted to explain the mechanisms and innards of the SAON system including, identifying users and defining the scope and main goals to achieve. In short, the workshop was effective in compiling and presenting previous workshop information and opinions. In the opinion of Mr. Murdock, the workshop was not as effective in developing clear conclusions and recommendations for SAON. Participants left the workshop under the advisement that Breakout Session Chairs, the organizers of the SAON Initiating Group, would complete the SAON recommendations immediately following the closure of the workshop event.

An observation taken from the workshop was the absence of a firm understanding of whom the SAON data portal will actually serve and what needs these users have. This point was brought up time and time again by various SAON participants. There may be a need to further define SAON user groups and user needs. Defining these points could be a prerequisite required before the SAON program advances further; however, this may not be possible due to the completion of the International Polar Year (IPY) (March 2009) and the completion of the SAON workshop sessions (no additional SAON workshops are planned).

There appeared to be the absence of a firm understanding on what format SAON should take and how SAON should function and operate. Will SAON act as a “portal of portals” and act as a platform for researchers and society to access data or will it morph into a self functioning body responsible for flag shipping research efforts born during the IPY and continue them into the future? The SAON Initiating Group organizers, in the Author’s opinion, did not clearly answer this question. There was discussion that SAON will behave as a macroscopic network that will bridge the gap of other data systems and would not be a new novel system. In contrast, there was also discussion, mainly by organizers of the SAON Initiating Group, that the formation of a SAON Secretariat should forefront the recommendations to the Arctic Council. A SAON Secretariat would administer, maintain and possibly build on data sets and research stations, especially in cases where research support is insufficient and can not be sustained. Although it may be highly arguable, the suggestion of a SAON Secretariat by the organizers of the SAON Initiating Group may be a case of researchers and bureaucrats self perpetuating their independent interests to expand the SAON program beyond the original intentions of the Arctic Council declaration. The SAON Secretariat was not endorsed by the majority of workshop event participants. Mr. Murdock understands, through the conclusions of the workshop event, that a SAON Secretariat would not be recommended.

SAON, as expressed by the organizers of the SAON Initiating Group, is intended to address both science and societal needs. The creation of a “*Science Plan*” was often emphasized as a building block to SAON. Elements of a plan to identify and satisfy societal needs were not discussed in sufficient detail. Mr. Klemetti Näkkäljärvi, President of the Saami Parliament in Finland opened up the workshop with remarks identifying the need for researchers to consider and account for indigenous knowledge in their programs. Apart from Mr. Näkkäljärvi’s opening remarks there was no other substantive discussion on the role of arctic indigenous people in SAON. Sidebar discussions between Mr. Murdock and Ms. Eva Krummel (Senior Health Research Officer - Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)) reinforced Mr. Murdock’s observation that the SAON system may not identify and provide for an adequate role for arctic indigenous

people. Duane Smith (ICC), though not present at this workshop event, had indicated at the second workshop event (Edmonton) that it is paramount to involve arctic residents in SAON's elements. GCI, should consider contacting other Permanent Participants such as ICC, Saami Council, Arctic Athabaskan Council, the Aleut International Association and the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, to develop a collective message to be delivered to the SAON Initiating Group during the draft circulation of the SAON recommendations and/or during Arctic Council deliberations.

Follow Up and Next Steps

As advised by the SAON Initiating Group, GCI will have an opportunity to review the draft recommendations in November 2008 before it is submitted to the Arctic Council on December 15th, 2008. GCI, as a Permanent Participant on the Arctic Council, will also presumably have an opportunity to review the SAON recommendations, and deliberate within the Arctic Council (in the Spring 2009 Senior Arctic Officials and/or Ministers Meetings).

Recommendations

Recommendations presented in this section are dependent on the contents of the draft SAON recommendations circulated to GCI for comment. Assuming the organizers of the SAON Initiating Group do not tend to and rectify the limitations identified in this *Briefing Note* the following may be considered:

- i. GCI could examine the SAON recommendations to the Arctic Council and ensure that SAON users and SAON user needs are understood and well defined.
- ii. GCI could highlight the absence of defined roles for arctic indigenous people in SAON. There may have been deeper discussion on this matter in previous workshop events, but gathering from comments presented by Mr. Smith and Ms. Krummel of ICC it appears as if this discussion has not been evolved past a window dressing stage (i.e., local communities are an asset for monitoring and data collection and traditional knowledge is valued). Defining the involvement of arctic indigenous people in SAON may be better done through an Arctic Council Permanent Participant joint statement issued to the SAON Initiating Group during the circulation of the draft recommendations to the Arctic Council.
- iii. In lieu of an Arctic Council Permanent Participant joint statement GCI may decide to comment on the SAON recommendations independently. Depending on the recommendations presented, this could be a concise statement explaining the fact that a clear defined role for arctic indigenous people has not been included in the recommendations. This could be a statement requesting that the final draft of the recommendations should indicate what considerations are given to arctic indigenous peoples.