Annual Report 2021/22 Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP)

COMNAP Annual Report 2021/22  
1 July 2021 – 1 April 2022

Highlights and Achievements

Key outcomes of COMNAP Annual General Meeting (AGM) XXXIII (2021)

The AGM was scheduled for 12***–***14 July 2021in Toyama, Japan, hosted by Japan’s National Institute of Polar Research. Due to the continuing global pandemic, the in-person meetings were cancelled and the AGM moved to an online platform across the same dates.

Plenary business, regional break-out and expert group sessions were the main components. A total of 297 people from all 30 Member programmes, five Observer programmes (see Table 1 in Attachment 1) and invited experts participated in one or more sessions across the fourteen online sessions convened. During plenary business, a new COMNAP Chair and four Vice Chairs were elected (see Table 2a in Attachment 1) and the Membership application from TÜBITAK Marmara Research Center, Polar Research Institute, Turkey, was unanimously approved; therefore, becoming the 31st COMNAP Member programme.

Regional sessions were: Peninsula, Ross Sea, East Antarctica, Larsemann Hills Management Group, Dronning Maud Land, and High Plateau. The Antarctic High Plateau is becoming of increased interest to the science community, with that area holding the key to our understanding of how the Antarctic is a driver and responder to change, with access to the world’s oldest ice, and providing a unique and important atmospheric sciences platform with clear and dark skies. National Antarctic programmes are actively supporting and coordinating international efforts to provide globally important, policy relevant cryosphere data from the Antarctic Treaty region. Their facilities, vessels and scientific platforms are fundamental to delivering such data. During all regional sessions, Members and other operators exchanged pre-season information for Antarctic research season 2021/22 noting intentions to return to near pre-pandemic levels of activity, especially acting to support more scientific personnel in the Antarctic than what was possible given risk identified during the 2020/21 season.

Programmes freely exchanged and further developed their expertise during topical Expert Group forums (see Table 2c in Attachment 1): Air Operations/Aviation, Advancing Critical Technologies, Safety, Education, Outreach & Training, Marine Platforms, Environmental Protection, Science Facilitation, and Human Biology & Medicine. Members endorsed the draft COMNAP *Ambitions Framework* that addresses continuing to improve energy efficiency in our Antarctica and inter-Antarctic operations, and looks to identify and quantify improvements in environmental practices. COMNAP renewed its *COVID-19 Outbreak Prevention and Management Guidelines* *for the 2021/22 Antarctic Season*, to assist national Antarctic programmes in the preparation of their own protocols. The challenges were still many, given the continuing global pandemic, however, programmes continued to endorse the community-supported goal to keep Antarctica COVID-19 free. Through the combined efforts of everyone involved, through risk analysis and implementation of the pre-departure isolation and testing protocols, it was possible to identify positive cases in expeditioners before departure to Antarctica. Contingency plans could then be implemented. As a result, by-and-large, there was overall success and extremely low COVID-19 cases in Antarctica within the national Antarctic programme population since the start of the global pandemic (12 March 2020).

COVID-19 Preparedness & Response (see also IP to this ATCM)

As an organisation, COMNAP remained focused on devising a strategy that collectively strengthened national efforts to avoid introducing the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease to Antarctica. Building on the COMNAP *COVID-19 Outbreak Prevention & Management Guidelines for the 2020/21 Antarctic Season* and addressing risk related to the evolving global situation, COMNAP continued to review and publish guidance (non-mandatory) especially for the start of Antarctic season 2021/22. During COMNAP Townhall Meetings, programmes shared preliminary plans to return to near pre-pandemic levels of activity for the 2021/22 Antarctic season. In March 2021, the Joint Expert Group on Human Biology & Medicine (JEGHBM) produced information on *COVID-19 Vaccination: Current Predicted Challenges; Important considerations for National Antarctic Programs Guidance for Members* (V5.1).

Through the leadership of the Secretariat and the COVID-19 *ad hoc* Subcommittee, COMNAP issued COVID-19 guidance, based on current World Health Organisation (WHO) technical advice, on 15 June 2021, 15 July 2021, and 11 January 2022. The January 2022 version (9) has a specific focus on the omicron variant and was in response to a review of the guidelines, given the positive cases identified in Antarctic expeditioners in December 2021. In addition, information was shared on boosters and immunity, and the potential impact of variants on antigen tests.

The COVID-19 *ad hoc* Subcommitteeremains convened. The COMNAP *COVID-19 Outbreak Prevention & Management Guidelines* (version 9, January 2022) continue to be reviewed and evolve based on current research, WHO guidance, and the situation globally. Regular and open communications continue with our Members, Observers and other stakeholders, including IAATO.

In early 2022, COMNAP work began on understanding risks related to moving from elimination guidance to mitigation guidance in preparation for the 2022/23 Antarctic season and given the current status of the global pandemic and advice from WHO.

COMNAP Projects

**Antarctic Aviation**   
Work continued on this project. COMNAP’s additional advice to the ATCM in regards to the ATCM review of Resolution 1 (2013) (no longer current), now Resolution 6 (2021), is provided as WP017. The COMNAP Antarctic Aviation Workshop was held in virtual format from 15 February−15 March 2022. There were 95 registrants for the online workshop, which consisted of 15 presentations and a plenary session. The COMNAP Antarctic Aviation Workshop Report is available in IP006. The topic of Air Operations and Safety both remain fundamental foci for COMNAP. As a result of the workshop, new work for the Air Operations Expert Group was identified, however, this specific project will be brought to a close at COMNAP AGM (XXXIV) 2022 (July).

**Earthquake, Tsunami, Volcanic Events Awareness**

In response to national Antarctic programme concern about unusual seismic activity around the Antarctic Peninsula, and the request by the ATCM to COMNAP in Resolution 7 (2021) Earthquake Emergency Management System, this project reviews, updates and expands upon a COMNAP project on tsunami awareness (2012). Preliminary information is available as WP018. A COMNAP project Technical Collaboration Group will advance this work through to COMNAP AGM (XXXV) 2023.

**New Vessel Builds**

This project showcased innovative examples of new icebreaking-capable vessels via a peer-reviewed publication in *Polar Record* (see BP002) and is now complete.

Antarctic Research Fellowships

Two COMNAP Antarctic Research Fellowships 2021 awarded: Paola Barros Delben (Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil) “Health and Safety Risk Management in Isolation, Confinement, and Extreme Contexts” working with the Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisboa, Portugal; and Renan Lima (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande, Rio Grande, Brazil) “Coping with a fast-changing environment: an isotopic insight on the foraging ecology of pack-ice seals from the Antarctic Peninsula” working with the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, USA. See also joint IP005.

For the full list of Projects and Project Managers, see Table 2b in Attachment 1.

COMNAP Products and Tools

**Website & Database**

The new website went live in October 2021. The website links Members through to the COMNAP database (Quickbase application) and requires a username/password to access. The database contains information on facilities, vessels, and programme contacts, which is used by the Membership and by the Secretariat to inform COMNAP products. Some data is shared with the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat. For example, on 6 December 2021, the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat announced that the Secretariat website had new links to COMNAP facility data using a GIS map platform. Some data is publicly available on the website and at

<https://www.comnap.aq/antarctic-facilities-information> and at <https://github.com/PolarGeospatialCenter/comnap-antarctic-facilities/releases> and <https://github.com/PolarGeospatialCenter/comnap-antarctic-vessels>.

**Antarctic Flight Information Manual (e-AFIM)**

[COMNAP AFIM general information](https://www.comnap.aq/air-operations)

e-AFIM is a handbook of aeronautical information published in PDF format as a tool towards safe air operations in Antarctica as per ATCM Resolution 6 (2021). Releases were 15 September, 5 October, 1 December 2021 and 15 March 2022.

**COMNAP Asset Tracking System (CATS)**[COMNAP Asset Tracking System general information](https://www.comnap.aq/projects)

CATS is a voluntary information exchange system developed by the Australian Antarctic Division to display positional information for situation-awareness of vessels. Recently, aircraft have been added to the display. For the 2021/22 season at its peak use, CATS contained positions for 63 assets (41 aircraft, 21 vessels and 1 research balloon). We invite greater participation from operators with vessels and aircraft operating in the Antarctic Treaty Area.

**Antarctic Telecommunications Operators Manual (ATOM)**

ATOM is the collection of contact details to which ATCM Recommendation X-3 refers. Access is via the COMNAP Quickbase database and the CATS. Update of the ATOM is now in real-time, meaning, when a national Antarctic programme updates their information in the COMNAP Quickbase database, the field is automatically updated in the online ATOM.

**Search and Rescue (SAR)**As per ATCM Resolution 4 (2013), COMNAP provides a SAR webpage of all Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) contacts. The next triennial SAR Workshop (V) will take place in 2023.

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[www.comnap.aq](http://www.comnap.aq/)

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YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjzR1uM_ZP62eEy6QLCbHxw>

Attachment 1 Statistics

Formally established in September 1988 to develop and promote best practice in managing the support of scientific research in the Antarctic; 2022 is the 34th year of COMNAP. Our headquarters, the COMNAP Secretariat, is hosted by the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand (MOU to Sept 2027).

Table 1: Our Membership

Established originally by 22 national Antarctic programmes; COMNAP AGM 2021 approved the Membership application from TÜBITAK Marmara Research Center, Polar Research Institute, Turkey. Making them the 31st Member programme, joining the national Antarctic programme Members from:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Argentina | Australia | Belgium | Brazil | Bulgaria |
| Chile | China | Czech Republic | Ecuador | Finland |
| France | Germany | India | Italy | Japan |
| Netherlands | New Zealand | Norway | Peru | Poland |
| Republic of Belarus | Republic of Korea | Russian Federation | South Africa | Spain |
| Sweden | Ukraine | United Kingdom | United States | Uruguay |

In addition, six Observer programmes’ are part of our association, from the countries of:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Canada | Colombia | Malaysia | Portugal | Switzerland | Venezuela |

Table 2: Our Leadership

a. The Executive Committee (EXCOM) is six elected officers plus the appointed Executive Secretary:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| EXCOM Officers | **Topic Portfolios** | **Terms** |
| Chair, Antonio Quesada (CPE) | Science Facilitation, Medical | 2021–2024 |
| Vice Chairs: |  |  |
| Charlton Clark (AAD) | Marine Platforms | 2021–2024 |
| Gen Hashida (NIPR) | Environmental Protection, Marine Platforms | 2020–2023 |
| Pavel Kapler (CARP) | Advancing Critical Technologies, Safety | 2021–2024 |
| Dragomir Mateev (BAI) | Education, Outreach & Training, Safety | 2021–2024 |
| Patricia Ortuzar (DNA) | Environmental Protection | 2021–2024 |
| Executive Secretary, Michelle Rogan-Finnemore | Air Operations | to 2027 |

b. COMNAP Projects:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Project Leaders** | **Project** |
| Paul Sheppard (USAP) &  John Guldahl (NPI) | Antarctic Aviation |
| Robb Clifton (AAD) | COMNAP Asset Tracking System (CATS) |
| Michelle Rogan-Finnemore &  Tim Heitland (AWI) | COVID-19 Outbreak Prevention & Management Response; includes the COVID-19 *ad hoc* Subcommittee |
| Andrea Colombo | Database |
| Andrea Colombo | Earthquake, Tsunami & Volcanic Events Awareness |
| Agnieszka Kruszewska (PAS) | Efficiency Task Force: Peninsula (Phase 2) |

c. COMNAP Expert Groups

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| --- | --- |
| **Expert Group Leaders** | **Expert Group Topic** |
| Paul Sheppard (USAP) | Air Operations; includes the Remotely Piloted Aircraft Working Group |
| Özgün Oktar (TÜBITAK) & Mike Rose (BAS) | Advancing Critical Technologies |
| Ceisha Poirot (ANZ) | Environmental Protection |
| Andrea Peña Aguirre (INACH) | Education, Outreach & Training |
| Anne Hicks (BAS) &  Giichiro Ohno (NIPR) | Joint Expert Group on Human Biology & Medicine |
| Miguel Ojeda (CPE) | Marine Platforms |
| Simon Trotter (ANZ) | Safety; includes Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity, & Harassment Prevention |
| Robb Clifton (AAD) | Science Facilitation |

**Table 3: Meetings**

***From 1 July 2021 through 1 April 2022***

* COMNAP EXCOM Meetings (online): 18 August 2021, 22/23 September 2021, 9 December 2021, 4 January 2022, and 2 March 2022.
* COMNAP Annual General Meeting (AGM) XXXIII (2021) (online) including Regional Break-out Groups: 12–14 July 2021.
* COMNAP Secretariat/IAATO Secretariat information exchange discussions (online): 1 October 2021, 3 November 2021, and 20 January 2022.
* COMNAP COVID-19 Medical Updates (online): 10 June 2021, and 16 February 2022.
* COMNAP Secretariat and Chair / SCAR Secretariat and President discussions (online):14 October 2021.
* Antarctic “gateways” situation update: 4 November 2021.
* COMNAP Antarctic Aviation Workshop, presentations via COMNAP YouTube Channel Aviation Playlist from 15 February through 15 March 2022; plenary workshop session (online): 15 March 2022.

***Upcoming***

* COMNAP AGM XXXIV (2022) (online) from 25–27 July 2022.
* The 20th COMNAP Symposium “Innovation & Collaboration” will be held as an online, year-long, milestone event marking the 20th Symposium. The Symposium launch will be in August 2022 with eight open webinars held throughout the year.
* The COMNAP SAR Workshop V will be held in 2023. Planning will commence in consultation with all national Antarctic programmes, other operators and with the RCCs with dates to be confirmed.

**Table 4: COMNAP representatives/participants in other fora**

* **Antonio Quesada**, Chair, invited participant in “The Cold is Getting Hot Scientific Symposium”, 24­−25 February 2022; Invited presenter “One Ocean”, French Government Summit, 9 February 2022; Invited presenter “International Cooperation Meeting”, 15 December 2021; Invited presenter “Forum Commemorating the Anniversary of the signing of the Antarctic Treaty”, 1 December 2021; Invited keynote speaker Turkish Antarctic Expedition, 30 November 2021; Invited keynote presenter “International cooperation within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty", Third Chilean Conference on Antarctic Law”, 9−11 November 2021; Chair panel session “Adaption and Mitigation of Climate Change” at ‘30 Years Since the Madrid Protocol: Antarctica, Present & Future’, Spain, 4 October 2021.
* **Gen Hashida**, Vice Chair, participated in the Southern Ocean Observing System (SOOS) 10th anniversary online event, 1 September 2021.
* **Dragomir Mateev**, Vice Chair, invited member & COMNAP representative of the SCAR Sub-committee for Capacity-Building and Communication.
* **Patricia Ortúzar**, Vice Chair, participated in and tabled COMNAP information at the Reunión de Administradores de Programas Antárticos Latinoamericanos (RAPAL) Meeting XXXII, 28–30 September 2021.
* **Michelle Rogan-Finnemore**, Executive Secretary, invited member & COMNAP representative of the SCAR Sub-committee for Finance & Partnerships.
* **Andrea Colombo**, Engagement, Information and Project Manager, COMNAP delegate to the 40th meeting of the CCAMLR Commission, 18–29 October 2021; Invited speaker (introduction) to APECS Antarctica Day Webinar 1-Work and Life at Antarctic Research Stations, 1 December 2021.
* **John Guldahl**, DMNAP Norwegian Polar Institute, COMNAP representative to the SCAR RINGS Action Group Workshop, 27–30 June 2022.
* **Agnieszka Kruszewska**, MNAP Poland National Antarctic Programme, COMNAP representative on the SCAR Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Action Group.
* **Uwe Nixdorf,** MNAP Germany’s Alfred Wegener Institute Helmholtz Center for Polar and Marine Research, invited presenter“The importance of logistical and scientific collaboration in Antarctica”, that included information about COMNAP, Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly, 1 December 2021.
* **Miguel A. Ojeda**, DMNAP Spain National Antarctic Programme & Marine Platform Expert Group Leader, COMNAP delegate to the 22nd International Ice Charting Working Group meeting, 19–24 September 2021.
* **Ceisha Poirot**, Environmental Protection Expert Group Leader, invited COMNAP panel member in the “How to Achieve a Clean Ocean in the Southern Ocean Region” webinar, 17 November 2021.