Review of the scientific information contained in the EIES

Review of the scientific information contained in the Electronic Information Exchange System

Working Paper presented by Spain

***Summary***

After analysing paper SP 10 presented at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting XLIII, Spain suggests reviewing the scientific information the Parties submit to the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES) of the Antarctic Treaty. To this end, the document suggests setting up an Intersessional Contact Group (ICG) to start the review and terms of reference to perform their work.

***Introduction***

Information exchange is a commitment undertaken by the Parties under Article III (1) (a) and Article VII (5) of the Antarctic Treaty, as well as under Article 17 of the Environmental Protocol and its annexes. By means of Decision 4 (2012), the ATCM XXXV stated that the Parties would use the Electronic Information Exchange System to exchange information in accordance with the Treaty and the Madrid Protocol. The annex attached to Decision 4 (2012) and providing details on the information to be exchanged has been updated 5 times, the most recent version being adopted at the ATCM XLIII held in Paris through Decision 7 (2021) following a proposal WP 038 by the United States of America.

The ongoing updates of the Annex to Decision 4 (2012) respond to the requirement of the Decision itself stating that the Parties should work with the Treaty Secretariat to refine and enrich the EIES, and point to the importance the Parties attach to the exchange of information; hence the EIES can and should be improved on a regular basis.

***Information analysis and proposal***

The analysis of Secretariat Paper SP 10 (2021) presented at the ATCM XLIII underscores that the data volume corresponding to the scientific information exchanged by the Parties gradually decreased between 2015 and 2020. It is clear from the report that the Parties are exchanging less and less scientific information:

* While 62.1% (18 Parties) had completed at least one scientific information field in 2015-16, only 37.9% (11 Parties) did so in 2019-2020.
* Only nine (9) Parties complied with the yearly submission of scientific information during the 2015-16/2019-20 period, whereas six (6) Parties did not exchange any information at all in the same period and two (2) others did so on only one occasion.
* In particular, only 3 Parties (10.3% of the total) provided information on their science forward plans in 2019-2020. In 2015-16, 13 Parties (44.8%) had reported on this sub-item.
* The percentage gap among Parties delivering information on forward plans and those doing so on Activities in Previous Year has been widening year after year.

Decision 7 (2021) requires that, for forward plans (item 2.1.1 of its Annex), information be provided on “details of strategic or multi-year science plans”. Based on the analysis of our own experience, we found that not all the Parties have this type of plan. Moreover, the Science Activities in Previous Year section (item 2.1.2) requests the “list of research projects undertaken in previous year under science discipline”. It could be interesting to include an additional field, such as “key words”, which the Secretariat could use as a source to generate summarised reports or thematic maps, useful for the Parties. Currently, only 2 out of the 5 fields existing under this category contain classifiable information: “geographical location” and “project discipline”. The inclusion of a section concerning science projects foreseen to be developed in the following campaign could also be envisaged in the “*pre-season information*” exchange requirement (item 1 of the Annex to Decision 7, 2021).

The fields provided by the EIES to define the scientific information that needs to be exchanged are vague and the Parties seem to find it difficult to load this information. Being this information varied and sometimes inconsistent, this could explain the low level of compliance observed. Furthermore, in its current format, the usefulness of said information for the rest of the Parties is sub-optimal.

Finally, although International Scientific Cooperation is an established concept in Articles II and III of the Antarctic Treaty, there is no requirement in Decision 7 (2021) that offers the possibility to report specifically on science activities with international cooperation.

Spain suggests setting up an Intersessional Contact Group (ICG) to discuss and exchange ideas that would facilitate and favour the scientific information exchange among the Parties, whose results might contribute to developing useful tools for the Parties.

The following Terms of Reference are proposed for the ICG’s work:

1. Discuss the advisability of reporting on the existence of international scientific cooperation among the Parties.
2. Examine the fields contained in item 2.1.2. (*Science Activities in Previous Year*) of the Annex to Decision 7 (2021) to determine whether it is necessary to include other classifiable fields that would allow to generate summarised reports and thematic maps.
3. Analyse the advisability of including a section in item 1 (Pre-season Information) of said Annex on science projects foreseen to be developed in the following year’s campaign.
4. Report on the results and proposals of the ICG at the ATCM XLV with the intention of updating Decision 7 (2021).

The following actions are also proposed:

* Observers and experts participating in the ATCM should be invited to provide insight, in particular, in the case of the SCAR, to identify the interoperability among the different databases.
* The Executive Secretary should open the ICG in the forum of the ATCM and provide the Secretariat's support, notably on the possibility of implementing search tools and required parameters.