Revisiting CEP strategic priorities and the CEP Five-Year Work Plan

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Working Paper submitted by Norway

Summary

Norway, on behalf of the CEP Chair, proposes that the CEP revisits its Five-Year Work Plan to take stock of its performance, and to consider relevant updates and adjustments to the plan. This is timely in light of the amount of time that has passed since the original Five-Year Work Plan was adopted, and in light of new knowledge and understanding of the Antarctic environment and challenges facing Antarctica in the future. We propose a preliminary exchange of views and thoughts during CEP XXIV, further intersessional discussions (e.g. through an informal workshop/symposium) in advance of CEP XXV, and dedicated discussions at CEP XXV, as the mode of operation for review process.

The development of the 5-year work plan

Following the entry into force of the Protocol in 1998, the CEP initially concentrated on putting into place procedures and practices to enable it to fulfil its mandate effectively and efficiently. By 2004 the CEP had, to a large degree, consolidated its procedures and approach to its work. At CEP VII (Cape Town, South Africa) it was noted that the Committee now found itself at a new stage with possibilities for taking a more strategic approach to meet the environmental challenges in the Antarctic. Since the Protocol was agreed in 1991 and even since the CEP first met in 1998, the Antarctic environment had experienced significant change and had been subject to additional pressures, all of which pointed towards the need for a more prioritized approach to issues that required more urgent attention.

In 2005, at CEP VIII (Stockholm, Sweden) Members again noted the need to adopt a more strategic and systematic approach to the Committee’s work, in order to be able to meet existing and new challenges and to fulfil their obligations to the ATCM. The Committee agreed to prepare for a substantive discussion of the strategic issues facing the Committee at CEP IX. The United Kingdom, as host of the next meeting, informed Members that they would be able to arrange a pre-CEP workshop to assist further discussion.

Consequently, in June 2006, immediately prior to CEP IX (Edinburgh, UK), the Committee held an informal Workshop on Antarctica’s Future Environmental Challenge. The workshop provided useful and productive mechanisms for exchanging ideas and generating initiatives for the Committee’s further consideration. A central issue at the workshop was the Committee’s ability to address high- priority and emerging environmental issues. At CEP IX, following the workshop, the Committee established an ICG to take forward the development of a five-year work plan based on the outcomes of the workshop and using a risk-based approach (considering the severity of actual or perceived threats to the Antarctic environment and its biota).

At CEP X (New Delhi, India), the Committee agreed to endorse the Five-Year Work Plan put forward by the ICG on a provisional basis and noted that it would be important for the plan to be routinely reviewed and updated to ensure that it remained current. At CEP XI (Kiev, Ukraine), the Committee adopted a modified and adjusted version of this Five-Year Work Plan and agreed to use this to frame its continued work efforts.

At CEP XII (Baltimore, USA) a number of issues discussed were directly related to the prioritized issues in the work plan, and the Committee noted the progress it had made in agreeing and beginning to implement its Five-year Work Plan and agreed to draw to the ATCM’s attention the usefulness of its prioritised work plan as an effective means of managing its workload.

At CEP XIII (Punta del Este, Uruguay) the Committee once again noted the utility of the Five-Year Work Plan in prioritising its workload. The Committee agreed that the plan should be reviewed and updated at the end of each meeting and, as well as being appended to the Report of CEP XIII, should be published on the CEP website, and be submitted to future CEP meetings as a Working Paper.

At CEP XV (Hobart, Australia) the Committee agreed to consider the work plan at the end of each agenda item. Since this time, the CEP has routinely adjusted its Work Plan based on discussions and agreements during a meeting, this being a fruitful way to remind Members about tasks that had been agreed to during that meeting. However, the Committee has only occasionally, and then only generally, discussed the need to adjust the Work Plan on a substantive strategic and overarching level. The Five-Year Work Plan has only been submitted as a Working Paper three times (CEP XVI, CEP XVII and CEP XVIII). In Sofia, in revisiting and updating its Five-Year Work Plan, the Committee added one new issue and also decided to remove a number of issues for which no specific tasks had been identified, noting that these could be readily added to the Work Plan in the future. By this time the CEP Five-Year Work Plan had, to a large degree, possibly taken on a role as a place holder for near future tasks, rather than providing a pathway toward more long-term aims.

The timeliness of revisiting priorities

The Edinburgh workshop framed its discussion around the environmental challenges likely to face Antarctica over the next 15 years and beyond as a basis for devising policies, recommendations, and strategies to meet them. Fifteen years have now passed since the adoption of the Five-Year Work Plan. In those 15 years, the plan has guided the CEP well and been instrumental in the further maturing of the work of the Committee. While the CEP has achieved great advances on a number of issues, it nevertheless seems timely to consider revisiting the Five-Year Work Plan. The aim of this review could be to consider priorities and strategies in light of changes that have occurred over the time that has passed since the CEP last took a comprehensive overview of the challenges ahead and prioritized its long-term work accordingly.

Many of the challenges faced in managing the Antarctic environment are likely to have remained the same as they were 15 years ago, such as climate change and non-native species. Nevertheless, there are new aspects and nuances to the challenges (rate of change, areas of risk, etc.) that could perhaps impact prioritization of efforts. Furthermore, new challenges are emerging, such as use of and impacts caused by new technologies, plastic pollution, etc. Consequently, there may be good cause to pause and consider whether these changes should and could impact the way the Committee prioritizes its work.

SC-CAMLR holds regular (every ~5 years) symposiums to take stock of their strategic work. The intention for these symposiums is to facilitate open and informal discussion about SC-CAMLR’s performance, and identify longer-term priorities and strategies for the Scientific Committee for the next five years. The outcomes of the symposium are used as basis for further discussions and for future plans. These symposiums have worked successfully for SC-CAMLR and may provide some guidance to how CEP can approach the process of revisiting its 5-year work plan.

Framing the discussion

A revisit of the Five-Year Workplan should, first and foremost, focus on the strategic priorities of the Committee, but it could also provide an opportunity to discuss and consider practical aspects relating to the format and implementation of the Five-Year Work Plan. The following questions may be relevant for an initial exchange of views and thoughts:

* Taking stock: How has the CEP over the past 15 years preformed in approaching the priority issues?
* Are the environmental challenges that frame the current CEP strategic priorities (as reflected in the CEP Five-Year Work Plan) still valid for the next 15-year period? Are there new and emerging challenges that should be considered in this context?
* Are the listed strategies (action points) identified to tackle these environmental challenges still relevant, or are there other more relevant actions and goals to consider?
* Is the manner in which we set out the pathways for tackling the priority issues sufficiently clear?

Proposal

The Committee agrees to jointly revisit and consider the environmental challenges facing Antarctica in the next 15-year period and onward, with the aim to review and revise, if and as appropriate, the list of CEP strategic priority issues and priority actions (as reflected in the CEP Five-Year Work Plan). In doing so:

1. Have an initial exchange of thoughts on the current strategic priorities of the CEP (as reflected in the Five-Year Work Plan (cf. CEP XXIV SP2)) at CEP XXIV, using inter alia the list of questions above as guidance.
2. Use the outcome of the discussion at CEP XXIV as guidance to frame intersessional discussions on future priorities, e.g., through an informal workshop/symposium in advance of CEP XXV.
3. At CEP XXV in Helsinki, consider the outcomes of intersessional discussions and exchanges. Conclude whether there is cause to adjust the CEP priorities and actions, and consequently, a need to revise and update the Five-Year Work Plan.