Annual Report for 2020/21 of
the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP)

Annual Report for 2020/21 of COMNAP

**15 March 2020 – 30 June 2021**

Background Information

Our Membership

Formally established on 15 September 1988, COMNAP brings together the national officials responsible for planning, conducting and managing support to Antarctic research on behalf of their respective governments. COMNAP is an international association whose Members are the 30 National Antarctic Programs from the countries of 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 and Uruguay. The National Antarctic Programs of Canada (from August 2016), Colombia (from April 2021), Malaysia (from August 2017), Portugal (from August 2015), Switzerland (from April 2018), Turkey (from April 2018) and Venezuela (from August 2015) are COMNAP Observers.

Our Purpose

COMNAP's purpose is to develop and promote best practice in managing the support of scientific research in the Antarctic. As an organisation, COMNAP acts to add value to National Antarctic Programs’ efforts by serving as a forum to develop practices that improve effectiveness of activities in an environmentally responsible manner, by facilitating international partnerships, and through information exchange.

COMNAP strives to provide the Antarctic Treaty System with objective, practical, technical and non-political advice drawn from the National Antarctic Programs' expertise and their first-hand Antarctic knowledge, contributing 38 Working Papers, 121 Information Papers to date.

Our Leadership

COMNAP is a Member-driven organisation with an elected Executive Committee (EXCOM) led by Dr Kelly K. Falkner (US Antarctic Program) as Chair, with Vice Chairs Manuel Burgos (Uruguayan Antarctic Institute), John Guldahl (Norwegian Polar Institute), Agnieszka Kruszewska (Institute of Biochemistry and Biophysics Polish Academy of Sciences), Uwe Nixdorf (Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI) Helmholtz Center for Polar and Marine Research, Germany) and Gen Hashida (National Institute of Polar Research, Japan). Michelle Rogan-Finnemore is the Executive Secretary. The University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, hosts the COMNAP Secretariat under a renewed MOU through September 2027.

COMNAP Operations 2020/2021: Proactively addressing challenges

COVID-19 Preparedness

Recognising the severity of the emerging global situation, the COMNAP EXCOM met online under urgency on 9 March 2020. The meeting had only one agenda item and objective, to: “Focus on devising a strategy that collectively strengthens national efforts to avoid introducing the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease to Antarctica; Outline major points of consideration for our collective strategy and action items toward an implementation plan; Ensure we are engaging as EXCOM with the COMNAP Membership in regards to information exchange on COVID-19 and also with others in the Antarctic community (in particular with IAATO), on prevention practices, ability to respond on Antarctic stations, and media/communications plans.”

On 9 March 2020, three days before the WHO declared the COVID-19 pandemic, the EXCOM established the **COVID-19 *ad hoc* Sub-committee** led by Dr Tim Heitland (AWI) with Dr Pradip Malhotra (NCPOR, India) and Dr Fabio Catalano (ENEA, Italy) and in collaboration with Dr Anne Hicks (BASMU, UK, & the Joint Expert Group on Human Biology and Medicine (JEGHBM) Leader). With the Executive Secretary, the Sub-committee developed the “COMNAP SARS‐CoV‐2 / COVID‐19 Recommendations (non‐mandatory) in the context of Antarctic Operations”Working Paper(released 16 March 2020). The key message was “Act Early, Act Strongly as containment and prevention must be the priority to prevent introduction of SARS-CoV-19 in Antarctica.”

The Sub-committeeremains convened and the guidelines, now known as the “COMNAP COVID-19 Outbreak Prevention & Management Guidelines” (version 14 January 2021) continue to be reviewed and evolved based on current research, WHO guidance and the situation globally. Regular and open communications continue with our Members, Observers and other stakeholders.

Planning for medical emergency and response is a risk addressed in National Antarctic Program planning in normal circumstances. The 2020/2021 Antarctic season, however, was unprecedented. The inability to respond to a highly infectious novel virus with significant mortality and morbidity in the extreme and austere environment of Antarctica with limited sophistication of medical care and public health responses was identified early. Therefore, National Antarctic Programs were proactive in their recognition of the importance of a rapid development and implementation of COVID-19 protocols.

COMNAP programs prioritise safety of human life in all planning, operations, and activities. All National Antarctic Programs acted to mitigate the risk presented by the global pandemic. Several programs cancelled their 2020/21 Antarctic seasons. The majority significantly reduced their planned activity while continuing to maintain critical Antarctic infrastructures, exchange personnel, and provide operations, logistics and science support that enabled globally significant Antarctic research to continue. All implemented protocols to keep their team members safe with many altering their usual transportation method or route for transiting personnel to/from Antarctica and up-scaled their medical pre-deployment criteria (see also IP082).

COMNAP Operations 2020/2021: Highlights and Achievements

Annual General Meeting (AGM) XXXII (2020)

The AGM was scheduled for 3***–***6 August 2020 in Hobart, Australia, hosted by the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD). Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the in-person meetings were cancelled and the AGM moved to an online platform across the same dates. This marked the first time in our 32-year history that the AGM was not held in-person. The online platform proved very successful, 151 people from all 30 Member programs participated.

Plenary business and regional break-out sessions were the main components. Members, Observers and other operators exchanged pre‐season 2020/21 information and discussed risk management, particularly in the context of operations in the global COVID‐19 pandemic. Regional sessions were: Peninsula, Ross Sea, East Antarctica, Larsemann Hills Management Group, Dronning Maud Land, and the inaugural High Plateau. Phase II of the COMNAP project “Efficiency taskforce: Peninsula” was placed on hold due to the scaled-back nature of the Antarctic summer season.

Symposium

The 19th COMNAP Symposium “Antarctic Station Modernisation: Future-proofing infrastructure to support research and to reduce environmental impact” was held via the [COMNAP YouTube Channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjzR1uM_ZP62eEy6QLCbHxw) from 7 August 2020. Proceedings are published (see BP010).

**Antarctic Aviation Project**
This project continues (<https://www.comnap.aq/projects/Antarctic-aviation>) under a revised timeframe. The Antarctic Aviation Workshop is cancelled as an in-person meeting (15–16 July 2021, Toyama, Japan). The intention is to now focus on key issues related to the ATCM review of Resolution 1 (2013) (see WP8), minimum survival equipment on aircraft, and the technology review in advance of an in-person workshop (see IP059) to be held in late April/early May 2022 (likely combined with the COMNAP SAR Workshop V).

COMNAP Award 2020/21

Awarded by the COMNAP Chair for outstanding contribution to the goals and principles of COMNAP, the co-recipients are Valery Lukin, former MNAP of AARI/RAE, and Heinz Miller, former MNAP AWI.

10th COMNAP Antarctic Research Fellowship

COMNAP Antarctic Research Fellow 2020, is Cinthya Elizabeth Bello Chirinos, (National Agrarian University La Molina, Peru, & the Division of Antarctic Affairs under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peru) “Surface velocity and facies classification of Znosko glacier, King George Island, Antarctica, using SAR satellite data time series”. The fellowship will be used to undertake collaborative research with the Institute of Oceanography Federal University of Rio Grande, Brazil. This year, a second Antarctic Research Fellowship was made possible under an arrangement between IAATO and COMNAP. The Fellow is Miguel González Pleiter (University of Alcala, Spain) “Understanding the consequences of microplastics introduction in the Antarctic environment: the Plastisphere Resistome”. With support provided by the Uruguayan Antarctic Institute, Miguel will work as a team member on the University of the Republic Uruguay’s AntarPLAST program.

COMNAP Products and Tools

**COMNAP Database**

The Quickbase database includes information from all Members on facilities, vessels, program contacts and details which is used to inform COMNAP products including e-AFIM, ATOM and the “Station Catalogue”. Data is shared with the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat.
Publicly available data at <https://www.comnap.aq/antarctic-information/> and also 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/home/the-comnap-antarctic-flight-information-manual-afim/)

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 1 (2013). Releases were 15 September, 1 December 2020 and 15 March 2021.

**COMNAP Asset Tracking System (CATS)**[COMNAP Asset Tracking System general information](https://www.comnap.aq/home/comnap-asset-tracking-system-cats/)

CATS is a voluntary system for exchange of ship and aircraft position data developed by the AAD. For the 2020/2021 season at its peak use, it contained positions for 36 assets (20 aircraft and 16 vessels). The CATS is not fully utilised. We invite greater reporting from all vessels and aircraft working in the Antarctic Treaty Area.

**Antarctic Telecommunications Operators Manual (ATOM)**

ATOM is the handbook of contact details to which ATCM Recommendation X-3 refers. COMNAP Members, Observers and SAR authorities have access via the COMNAP website and via the CATS.

**Search and Rescue (SAR)**As per ATCM Resolution 4 (2013), COMNAP provides a SAR webpage of all RCC contacts. Planning for the next triennial COMNAP Antarctic SAR Workshop (V/2022) is underway. The focus will be on aviation.

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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: COMNAP officers, projects, expert groups and meetings***

**Table 1: COMNAP Executive Committee (EXCOM)**The COMNAP Chair and Vice Chairs are the elected officers of COMNAP. The elected officers plus the Executive Secretary, compose the COMNAP EXCOM:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Position** | **Officer** | **Term expires close of** |
| **Chair** | Kelly K. Falkner (USAP) kfalkner@nsf.gov  | AGM 2021 |
| **Vice Chairs** | Manuel Burgos (IAU) mburgos@iau.gub.uy  | AGM 2023 |
| John Guldahl (NPI) john.guldahl@npolar.no | AGM 2021 |
| Agnieszka Kruszewska (PAS IBB) agnieszkak@ibb.waw.pl  | AGM 2021 |
| Uwe Nixdorf (AWI) uwe.nixdorf@awi.de | AGM 2021 |
| Gen Hashida (NIPR) gen@nipr.ac.jp  | AGM 2023 |
| **Executive Secretary** | Michelle Rogan-Finnemore michelle.finnemore@comnap.aq  |  |

**Table 2: COMNAP Projects**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Project** | **Project Manager** | **EXCOM Officer (oversight)** |
| 19th Symposium “Antarctic Station Modernisation: Future-proofing Infrastructure to Support Research and to Reduce Environmental Impact” | Charlton Clark (Convener) & Andrea Colombo | Agnieszka Kruszewska |
| Antarctic Aviation | Paul Sheppard | John Guldahl |
| COMNAP Asset Tracking System (CATS) | Robb Clifton | John Guldahl |
| Database  | Andrea Colombo | Michelle Rogan-Finnemore |
| Efficiency Task Force: Peninsula (Phase 2) | Antonio Quesada | Agnieszka Kruszewska |
| Fire Suppression / Fire Safety | Simon Trotter & Mike Gencarelli | Agnieszka Kruszewska |
| New Vessel Builds | Michelle Rogan-Finnemore | Manuel Burgos |

**Table 3: COMNAP Expert Groups**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Expert Group (topic)** | **Expert Group Leader** | **EXCOM Officer (oversight)** |
| Air Operations(includes the RPA-WG) | Paul Sheppard | John Guldahl  |
| Advancing Critical Technologies | Pavel Kapler | Uwe Nixdorf |
| Environmental Protection | Ceisha Poirot | Gen Hashida |
| Education, Outreach & Training | Dragomir Mateev | Agnieszka Kruszewska |
| Joint Expert Group on Human Biology & Medicine (JEGHBM) | Anne Hicks  | Kelly Falkner |
| Marine Platforms | Miguel Ojeda  | Manuel Burgos |
| Safety | Simon Trotter  | Agnieszka Kruszewska |
| Science Facilitation | Robb Clifton | Kelly Falkner |

**Meetings – all online**

***From 15 March 2020 through 1 April 2021***

* COMNAP EXCOM Extraordinary Meetings: Addressing challenges presented by COVID-19,
1: 9 March 2020
2: 3 April 2020
3: 3 June 2020
4: 9 July 2020
5: 18 November 2020
6: 22 December 2020
7: 28 January 2021
8: 17 March 2021.
* COMNAP EXCOM Annual Meeting, 7 & 21 October 2020.
* COMNAP Secretariat/IAATO Secretariat information exchange discussions 12 March 2020, 28 April 2020, 19 June 2020, 1 September 2020, and 23 October 2020.
* COMNAP Meetings Round 1 “Townhall Meetings”, 7, 8 and 15 April 2020 (various times).
* COMNAP COVID-19 Medical advice/updates, 8 June 2020, 8 July 2020, 22 September 2020 and 21 February 2021.
* COMNAP Meetings Round 2 “Advanced Planning Forums”, 9–12 June 2020 (various times).
* COMNAP and “Other Operators” 30 June 2020.
* COMNAP Secretariat and Chair / SCAR Secretariat and President discussions, 1 July 2020.
* COMNAP Annual General Meeting (AGM) XXXII (2020) including Regional Break-out Groups, 3–6 August 2020.
* Joint SCAR / COMNAP Panel Discussion: Impact of COVID-19 on Antarctic Research, 5 August 2020.
* The 19th COMNAP Symposium “Antarctic Station Modernisation: Future-proofing Infrastructure to Support Research and to Reduce Environmental Impact”, 7 August 2020.

***Upcoming (from 1 April 2021 through 30 June 2022)***

* COMNAP Meetings Round 1 “Townhall Meetings”, 7, 8, 13 and 14 April 2021 (online/various times).
* COMNAP EXCOM Extraordinary Meeting 9 (online): Addressing challenges presented by COVID-19, 12 May 2021.
* COMNAP Annual General Meeting (AGM) XXXIII (2021) (online) including Expert Groups/Topical Discussion Forums (2, 3, 9 and 10 June 2021), Regional Break-out Groups (12, 13 and 14 July 2021) and the plenary business session 14 July 2021.
* COMNAP EXCOM Annual Meeting (online, dates to be confirmed).
* COMNAP Antarctic Aviation Workshop (SAR Workshop V), late April/early May 2022 (possibly in-person venue and dates to be confirmed).