

The NZ Antarctic Society supports seeks implementation plan, supports mid-term review for NZ's science programme in Antarctica

SCIENCE

6 August 2021

On 19 July our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) launched a new draft document setting a course for our research in the Antarctic and the Southern Ocean for the next 10 years. They are asking the public “What do you think of the directions and priorities outlined?”

This link gives you [some background](#) and [the draft for comment](#)

The draft for comment sets the high-level directions, four priorities, and the guiding principles, for Aotearoa New Zealand's Antarctic and Southern Ocean programme of research over the next ten years. It builds on [The New Zealand Antarctic and Southern Ocean Science Directions and Priorities 2010-2020 document \(external link\)](#).

Initial consultation on that document in mid-2019 attracted 31 submissions, including one from the [NZ Antarctic Society \(external link\)](#).

The deadline for public consultation on this latest draft is 16 August. Email to AntarcticScience@mfat.govt.nz

The NZ Antarctic Society has submitted its response (below), and encourages other organisations and individuals to submit their views.

Our submission notes two key aspects that need to be addressed:

1. **A commitment to an implementation plan** to ensure a direct link between research priorities and delivery of the best possible outcomes for science.
2. **A stronger commitment to a comprehensive mid-term review** no later than five years

We support the high-level directions, priorities and guiding principles, with some clarification and corrections.

Read the NZAS submission in full below:

SUBMISSION

Aotearoa New Zealand Antarctic and Southern Ocean Research Directions and Priorities Draft for public consultation- Response from the NZ Antarctic Society Science Subcommittee

5 August 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft for public consultation of *Aotearoa New Zealand Antarctic and Southern Ocean Research Directions and Priorities*.

By way of background the New Zealand Antarctic Society (NZAS) was founded in 1933, with the stated purpose of bringing together people interested in the Antarctic region to share their knowledge with others, to foster interest in the region, and to seek and support the protection of the Antarctic environment – for more, see www.antarcticsociety.org.nz. It currently has over 300 members and publishes a biennial magazine.

We have two key points we consider need to be addressed for ensuring that the 2021-2030 Directions and Priorities document will make an effective and lasting contribution to enhancing NZ's Antarctic and Southern Ocean research (Section A). We also note that this draft is a significant improvement on the last, and consequently most of our comments are suggestions for correction and clarification (Section B).

Section A Implementation and Review

Implementation Plan

We recommend that following the approval of this strategy an Implementation Plan be produced to ensure a direct link between research priorities and delivery through the key stages of funding, the work itself, and its review, specifying measures of success. This could be in the form of a Guidance document as has been done for other Government policies. The Guidance document might also take account of operational constraints from Covid 19 pandemic, and the Scott Base Redevelopment.

Review

We welcome the intention to review mid-term outcomes from the Directions and Priorities document, having [made the case previously \(external link\)](#). However, in this draft the vitally important concluding section on page 15 comprises a subtitle and just 3 lines, enough to record the need but not to give enough direction and scope for a robust review process for the research programme envisaged in the draft.

However, the timing of the review is ambiguous “at a minimum, after five years...”. We suggest wording like “after no more than five years” since there has not been a whole-of-programme review of New Zealand Antarctic science since the Smith report of 2005. Indeed, the Smith report recommended that reviews be conducted on a 5-yearly basis, as in other areas of science in New Zealand and abroad.

Section B. Suggestions for correction and clarification

1. **A Table of Contents.** We strongly advocate for a table of contents that signals the structure of the document and ensures consistency in the style of the headings. We note that there are a number of inconsistencies in heading styles in the current document.
2. **Page 4 in the section ‘New Zealanders and Antarctic and Southern Ocean Research’.** The bullets relating to promoting impactful collaborative scientific research have focussed too narrowly on just “our patch”, the Ross Sea MPA. Instead we suggested “be a leader in Ecosystem dynamics and responses to Change, with a focus on the Ross Sea Marine Protected Area”.
3. **Page 4 first bullet point in the section ‘Funding’.** We note that reference to the Royal Society Te Apārangi has been omitted from this draft. The sentence in the previous draft reads: “Vote Business Science and Innovation, which supports research through investments by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and The Royal Society Te Apārangi...”. We believe it is important to retain reference to the Royal Society Te Apārangi because it is that agency, not MBIE, that administers the Marsden fund – an important source of Antarctic research funds. Also, the current wording of this bullet point indicates that it is MBIE that awards the Marsden grants. That is not correct.

We suggest that the words “..Endeavour and Marsden funds.” be replaced by “and Endeavour fund.”, and replace the next sentence with the following text “ It also supports the Royal Society Te Aparangi to fund the “blue skies” Marsden, Rutherford and Catalyst grants, and NIWA for researcher access to a specialist research vessel.”

4. **Page 5, the final sentence of the Funding section** states “Some Crown Research Institutes also contribute funding, equipment and specialised facilities...”. This should be replaced by wording like “Universities and Crown Research Institutes also contribute...”. We note that the Falconer and Barrett (2021) report that CRIs contribute ~\$1.5M, less than Universities who contribute ~\$2.3M.
5. **Page 7 Under ‘Policy Drivers’** it will be useful to state that in the second paragraph that these are linked in the Directions and Priorities section (pp 9-15. This could be done by using the following text for making the connection clearer eg. “The following policy drivers are not exclusive, but are linked to the four priorities in the following section (pp 9-15), as they are important in shaping New Zealand’s research directions.”
6. **Page 8 Spelling out in full for** the first use of the acronym for World Climate Research Programme (**WCRP**), should also be done for **SCAR** (Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research).

7. **Page 9 top, it is not clear how Research Directions and Priorities were developed.** We suggest that there be a statement reporting the process developed together with stakeholders and the New Zealand science community through a series of workshops and consultations.
8. **Page 13 under 'Ecosystem dynamics and response to change'** the second to last research goal bullet should state: "understand how Antarctic soil, substrates, inland waters, permafrost and associated microbial communities will respond.....
9. **Page 14 under 'Protecting Antarctic and Southern Ocean environments'** the second research goal should state: "improve understanding of terrestrial, including aquatic, and marine environments and biota at risk....".

Final statement

In general, NZAS supports the directions and priorities outlined in the 2021-2030 document. However we wish to see:

1. A stronger commitment to a comprehensive mid-term review no later than five years
2. A commitment to an implementation plan to ensure a direct link between research priorities and delivery of the best possible outcomes for science.

We would also appreciate the opportunity to make an oral presentation in support of our key points.

The Society welcomed the opportunity to comment and we look forward to continuing our relationship with the Ministry as the Directions and Priorities document is implemented.

Prepared by the [NZ Antarctic Society Science Subcommittee](#)