SAON Board Meeting
12th January 2026 – Teleconference

1. Welcome and Adoption of Agenda

The SAON Board Chair, Mikko Strahlendorff, welcomed participants and reviewed the agenda for the meeting. The agenda and participants listing are available in Appendices 1 and 2.

2. SAON Strategy and Workplan

Mikko Strahlendorff introduced the agenda item, noting that the current strategy and implementation plan were approved in 2018, and the ten-year strategy cycle is approaching its end.
Jan Rene Larsen reviewed the SAON goals, highlighting Goal 3) (*Ensure sustainability of Arctic observing*) and noting that this had traditionally been seen as Board responsibility. The first objective under Goal 3) - *Develop a strategy for long-term financial commitment in Arctic observations* - was identified as particularly important but had seen limited progress over the years.
Mikko Strahlendorff emphasized that previous EU projects like INTAROS and ArcticPASSION had provided relevant information, and that the session would proceed by gathering national perspectives.

a. Germany

Michael Karcher proposed developing a small set of targeted questions to be sent to national funding organizations, ministries, and research institutions. Collecting and comparing the responses would help build a clearer overview of national positions and strategies related to SAON.

b. Italy

Vito Vitale announced that Italy's new Arctic Strategy is being officially launched. The strategy reflects growing national attention to Arctic issues and includes the establishment of a coordinating body to engage stakeholders involved in polar regions. Italy's research and technology programmes continue to provide long-term support for Arctic activities, with efforts underway to expand contributions. Italian Arctic research is primarily focused on Svalbard. He also highlighted the Polar Forum in Rome as an important platform for strengthening Italy's engagement in international collaboration and collective Arctic efforts.

c. Sweden

Ulf Jonsell reported that Sweden is currently formulating a new Arctic strategy, which is expected to be launched ahead of Sweden's upcoming Arctic Council chairmanship. Compared to the previous strategy, the draft places significantly greater emphasis on geopolitical tensions. While this focus is seen as unfortunate, it also creates a window of opportunity to raise attention to Arctic issues and potentially attract additional resources. He highlighted the importance of promoting free and open data, noting that in Sweden this is best advanced through broader national processes on open science and open research data rather than through Arctic-specific data initiatives alone. He suggested that SAON could build on existing research infrastructures by strengthening and highlighting their Arctic components, rather than creating new structures.

d. **Committee on Networks (CON)**
Alice Bradley noted that many of the listed items under Objective 3.1 appear achievable and more akin to writing or synthesis tasks, rather than activities requiring substantial input from national Arctic strategies. She questioned how much progress has already been made and whether there is a plan to complete this work before, or alongside, development of the next implementation phase.

e. **Norway**
Øystein Godøy explained that from the Norwegian perspective, there is a strong national focus on the Arctic, with existing Arctic strategies and, to a limited extent, observing strategies. However, what is missing is a strategy towards joint networking. He believed that it would be valuable to have an introduction document or a strategy document from this group just stating this is the situation across the members of the SAON Board, which can then be used for national discussions.

f. **Kingdom of Denmark (KoD)**
Ole Krarup Leth noted that Kingdom of Denmark has established Arctic strategies addressing climate change, sustainable development, and the development of Greenland. At the national level, two action plans support long-term Arctic observations, particularly in Greenland, through climate and environmental support initiatives that strengthen existing observational and information infrastructures. He emphasized that compiling an overview of national positions across SAON members would be a useful step.

g. **Finland**
Mikko Strahlendorff explained that the national strategy emphasizes maintaining Finland's role within Arctic observing networks and promoting principles of free and open data. However, the strategy provides limited clarity on concrete financial commitments. While political-level strategies articulate supportive principles, securing sustained funding remains more challenging in practice. He supported the idea of undertaking an exercise to better understand national commitments and capacities.

h. **European Commission – Joint Research Center (JRC)**
Srdan Dobricic noted that the EU's current Arctic policy is based on the 2021 Joint Communication on Arctic matters, which sets out the main objectives of EU engagement in the Arctic: addressing climate change, strengthening international cooperation, and supporting sustainable economic development. A revised Arctic strategy is expected later in 2026, including updated considerations related to Arctic observations.

i. **Iceland**
Jórunn Harðardóttir said that Iceland has a relatively new Arctic policy and an associated action plan. The main challenge identified is the lack of dedicated funding behind the action plan. As a result, only some projects receive governmental support, while others rely on institutions or individuals to take them forward, limiting the ability to effectively implement the policy and advance Arctic observing activities.

j. **USA**
Roberto Delgadeo highlighted volatility in US Arctic science funding and strategies. Key points included:
    a. In 2022, the US SAON National Office reported to Congress on the need for a sustained Arctic observing system.

b. Also in 2022, a national Arctic strategy was published focusing on security, climate change, environmental protection, sustainable economic development, and international cooperation, including Arctic Council engagement.
c. A five-year US Arctic research plan, managed by an interagency committee chaired by the National Science Foundation (NSF), emphasizes monitoring, observing, modelling, and prediction.
d. Under the current administration, the national strategy is being revised, and the next five-year research plan is in development.
e. There is cautious optimism, since the US Office of Science and Technology in their 2027 research priorities explicitly mention polar regions, calling for enhanced observation and understanding of Arctic changes.

k. **Canada**
Amanda Cliff emphasized that Arctic observing remains a priority for Canada but is nested within broader priorities. There is currently no dedicated funding, action plan, or program specifically for Arctic observing. She noted that while no immediate decisions or initiatives are underway, the timing of a SAON document would be useful.

In his summary, Mikko Strahlendorff proposed three actions:

1. Compilation of an overview of long-term documents (strategies) from nations, including any references to Arctic observations.
2. State of observations: Compile information on ongoing observation activities, particularly those that are sustained (e.g., long-running weather stations). *Follow-up should include identifying funding and person-time for organising such a compilation.* For weather stations, these overviews exist. Jan to check the OSCAR system for stations above 60 deg.
3. Forward-looking funding: Collect information on continuity in Arctic observing

Michael Karcher added by supporting the idea of compiling national information. In addition, he believed that it should be understood how nations see the Arctic observing system (or "system of systems"). He suggested developing targeted questions for ministries and funding agencies to gather their views on structuring a coordinated network, including the role of SAON.

ACTIONs:

1) Executive and Secretariat to design a template for compiling agreed information on national strategies
2) Board members to add information to the template by a date to be agreed.

3. The Committees

a. Committee on Observations and Networks (CON) –

Alice Bradley (CON co-chair) reported on progress on a draft white paper describing observational capacity inventories and their practical use cases, addressing the CON objective *Conduct an inventory of national observational capacities*. A survey[1] had identified a number of categories of use cases for such inventories. For each use case, six axes of specifications were analyzed using a "snowflake diagram". The white paper is planned for submission to the Arctic Observing Summit, and the survey remains open for additional input.

b. Arctic Data Committee (ADC)

Chantelle Verhey (ADC co-chair) reported on ongoing activities:

[1] https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc5wYC0-c1R3DLkBJBjGplHe1Cof0C_vd80ZOy6U7EWQ0qbMg/viewform

- IASC Data Statement: Final adjustments are being reviewed following feedback from IASC. The finalized statement is expected to be presented and released at the Arctic Science Summit Week (ASSW) at the end of March. Input on last-minute edits is welcome.
- Polar to Global Online Interoperability and Data Sharing Workshop/Hackathon (P2G): Bi-monthly sessions are being rescheduled to alternate time slots to better accommodate Southern Hemisphere, European, and North American participants. The next session is January 15th, 9–10 AM Eastern. Interested participants can join via the mailing list.
- Polar Data Forum: The annual in-person meeting of the ADC was held in October 2025. The draft agenda is available.
- Leadership update: Co-chair Vanessa Raymond plans to step down, but the transition will be gradual, with contingency planning underway to maintain leadership continuity.

4. SAON ROADS process (10 min)

- **Advisory Panel**
  A list of three new members wishing to join the Advisory Panel was presented, and they were approved.
- **ArcticPASSION**
  Michael Karcher reported that the project concluded on 31st December 2025, after 4½ years. The team collaborated widely both internally and with external partners, producing several outputs and products. The synthesis report summarizes project activities, reflects on progress since inception, and provides recommendations and visions for a future Arctic Observing Network, which may inform SAON strategy development. The project will remain engaged in upcoming forums, including Arctic Frontiers, Monaco Forum, Rome Forum, and ASSW.

5. Arctic Observing Summit

Alice Bradley explained that registration is open, and that the draft program is mostly finalized on the website. A strategic meeting on the future of AOS will be held on 29 March, the day before the summit; SAON board members are encouraged to participate or provide input via email if unavailable. AOS requires reinvestment and new leadership from supporting organizations (SAON, IASC, and the International Study of Arctic Change (ISAC)) to continue. The current chair is stepping down after this summit.

6. ArORA - Status within SAON

The discussion on ArORA within SAON focused on clarifying its current status and future role. ArORA is presently operating as a Task Team, and the main question raised was about its formal placement within the SAON structure and ensuring that the wording in the implementation plan accurately reflects its role. While the Task Team's primary responsibility is to develop the implementation plan, there was discussion about eventually transitioning toward actual implementation. It was emphasized that ArORA wants to remain a part of SAON. The discussion will be continued.

7. ICARP IV process

Gerlis Fugmann explained that ICARP is making progress. All seven research priority teams have completed their reports, which are now in the final stages of editing and review. These reports, along with the first draft of the final synthesis report, will be published and presented at the Arctic Science Summit Week (ASSW). SAON has been involved as a partner, and feedback on the synthesis report is welcomed before its release.

8. International Polar Year

Gerlis Fugmann reported that for IPY, there are currently two major calls underway. One is for establishing national committees, encouraging engagement within each country for the IPY process. The other is for hosting the International Office for IPY, with a deadline in early February. In 2026, a call will open for projects contributing to IPY.

9. Upcoming events

(Was not covered)

10. Any Other Business

(Was not covered)

11. The next Board meetings will be held 2nd March 2026.

Appendix 1

Draft agenda

1. Welcome and adoption of agenda (Mikko Strahlendorff)
   [*Please note that the session will be recorded. The recording will not be shared, but only used for the preparation of minutes.*
   Meeting notes from the teleconference 8th September are available here. Meeting notes from the teleconference 29th October are available here]
2. SAON Strategy and Workplan
   [The current SAON Strategy runs for the period 2018-2028. The Strategy is implemented by the SAON Board and the SAON Committees as described in the SAON Implementation document. The Strategy has three goals, and Goal no. 3 is to *Ensure sustainability of Arctic observing*. While Goal no. 1 and 2. are meant for the SAON Committees, then Goal no. 3 is meant for the SAON Board. The first objective under Goal 3 is to *Develop a strategy for long-term financial commitment in Arctic observations*.
   At this meeting, Board members will be asked about their activities to implement Goal 3 and the first objective. The dialogue will be in a tour-de-table setting especially among the national Board members, and Board members are asked to read the Strategy and Implementation document and be prepared to engage in this discussion].
3. The Committees
   - Arctic Data Committee (ADC) (Chantelle Verhey) (3 min)
     - Updating the IASC Data Statement (2013). Link to new draft.
     - Members of the ADC meet every second month with Antarctic colleagues through the *Polar to Global Online Interoperability and Data Sharing Workshop/Hackathon* (P2G) series.
       The next telemeeting is 15th January. If Board members or someone else would like to participate, then please subscribe to the mailing list here.
     - The annual meeting of the ADC was held during the Polar Data Forum 20-24 October 2025 (draft agenda).
   - Committee on Observations and Networks (CON) (Alice Bradley, Heikki Lihavainen, Joao Canario) (3 min)
     - SAON CON Objective 1): Conduct an inventory of national observational capacities. Use case white paper
4. SAON ROADS process (10 min)
   - Advisory Panel (Sandy Starkweather or Jan Rene Larsen). New members for approval
     - Dirk Mengedoht, AWI, FARO
     - Malene Simon Hegelund, GINR Climate Center

        - Rowenna Gryba, ICC
        - Current composition
    - ArcticPASSION (Michael Karcher)
    - RNA CoObs (Alice Bradley or Sandy Starkweather)
5. Arctic Observing Summit (AOS, Program) and Arctic Science Summit Week (ASSW, web page) (Alice Bradly, 3 min). 25 March - 1 April, 2026 Aarhus, Denmark: These time slots have been booked (local time, CET):

- 25th March: 16-17: SAON Board meeting
- 28th March, all day: Sea Ice Expert Panel
- 29th March: 14-15: Strategic meeting on the future of the Arctic Observing Summit (AOS)
- 29th March: 15-16: ROADS (Open Partnership meeting)
- 30 March - 1 April: Arctic Observing Summit

0. ArORA - Status within SAON. Current SAON structure (Craig M. Lee).
0. ICARP IV process (Gerlis Fugmann) (3 min)
0. International Polar Year (2032-33, IPY) (Gerlis Fugmann) (3 min)
0. Upcoming events:
    - 11th China–Nordic Arctic Cooperation Symposium (CNARC), Tromsø, Norway: Human Footprints in the Arctic, February 1-2, 2026
    - Arctic Frontiers 2-5 February 2026. Includes a session titled *Maintaining and Developing Arctic Observing Capabilities* (Jan Rene Larsen) (3 min)
0. Any Other Business
    - CoastPredict Programme

12. The next Board meetings will be held 2nd March 2026.

Documents for the meetings of the Board are found here.

Appendix 2

List of Participants

David Arthurs, Canada
Christine Barnard, Canada
Alice Bradley, USA, CON Co-chair
Amanda Cliff, Canada
Roberto Delgado, USA
Lauren Divine, AIA
Srdan Dobricic, JRC - European Commission
Gerlis Fugmann, IASC Secretariat
Øystein Godøy, Norway
Jórunn Harðardóttir, Iceland
Ulf Jonsell, Sweden
Michael Karcher, Germany
Nadezhda Kharlampeva, Russia
Cornelya Klutsch, INPA
Eva Kruemmel, ICC
Kári Fannar Lárusson, CAFF
Hanna K Lappalainen, Finland
Ole Krarup Leth, Kingdom of Denmark
Xiaoting Li, China,
Larisa Lorinczi, European Commission
Anna Nikolopoulos, Norway
Axel Schlindwein, APECS
Mikko Strahlendorff, Finland, Chair
Vito Vitale, Italy
Chantelle Verhey, Canada, ADC Co-chair

The list of Board members is found here.