

### SCICOM review group on the ASC (SRGASC)

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This document reports SRGASC activity 2014–2015, which concentrated on the science model for the ASC. SRGASC has worked by correspondence and with regular skype meetings as well as using the SCICOM forum. Working documents on progress were presented to Bureau in February and June and to SCICOM in April and September. We here summarize results and make proposals for change.

At the 2014 ASC, participation was lower than in former years and there was no host country for the coming years. The situation has changed. The 2015 ASC in Copenhagen has been a success with 743 participants (444 contributions: 326 orals and 118 posters). Invitations to host future ASCs are in the pipeline. Though the ASC seems attractive enough, it is worthwhile to revise/update its format and evaluate whether it is fulfilling its purpose.

#### 1. Objectives of the ASC

The ASC is key for ICES as it brings together the marine community at large (science, policy, society) to overview ongoing science and innovation, foster trans-disciplinary exchanges and networking.

Two main objectives of the ASC:

- Update on ongoing science: overview of state of the art, present innovation, identify needs.
- Networking: incorporate early career scientists (ECS), liaise with the scientific community at large including with policy makers and society.

The strengths

- Comprehensiveness: a wide range of topics are covered.
- Inclusiveness: participants are students, scientists, directors, policy makers, stakeholders, society.

The weaknesses

- Length of the conference (full week).

- Difficult balance between business and science.
- After the ASC, multiple outcomes are difficult to summarize.

Within the current science model of the ASC, revisions have been considered to:

- ensure attractiveness
- ensure comprehensiveness in topics
- ensure inclusiveness in participation (students, scientists, policy makers, society)
- promote innovation
- facilitate networking
- incorporate young scientists

These concerns have been considered and changes are proposed to ensure that future ASCs fulfil these objectives. Costs of the ASC have also been considered with scenarios to alleviate the costs of hosting the ASC.

## **2. Changes considered**

### **Feed-back from ASC participants**

A questionnaire was developed to get feedback from past ASC participants and evaluate how they considered the ASC. The questionnaire was sent by the secretariat to participants of the 2014 and 2015 ASCs and results have been received. In addition during the 2015 ASC, an interactive poster was hung in one of the foyers. The poster was designed as a dart board and the participants could stick a bullet where they wanted the conference to be. Also, at the 2015 ASC a session was run on “What makes a good conference? Come and design the future of the ASC”. Participants were connected online and responded to a survey by selecting answers to questions prepared in advance. Unfortunately, the session attracted few students and early career scientists.

Participants come for a mixture of reasons, including to make a contribution, network, and get updated on a variety of topics. Most come for particular sessions and less for the entire ASC. A majority approves limiting the sessions to 1-1.5 day. They agree that sessions should be run with flexible formats, allowing for innovative ways for presenting and interacting. Some suggested running short workshops for quick learning on hot topics. Most agreed that the conference duration could be 4 days but with no more than 4 sessions in parallel. A majority is of the opinion that the poster session needs to be improved. The Wednesday SCICOM Open Sessions also need to be improved: many do not attend and only a minority of attendees find the sessions engaging. Increasing the fee above 200 euros can be a problem.

### Running sessions differently

Guidelines for session convenors have been modified to make explicit that it is possible to propose at least three types of sessions: traditional theme sessions, panel discussions, and innovation or foresight discussions. The last two types are suited for involving policy makers and industry. In addition it is suggested that SCICOM takes the lead in convening sessions of non-traditional format, for instance during the Wednesday afternoon (panels or workshops). The maximum duration of 1.5 hour has been set for Panel and Foresight discussions and 1.5 day for traditional Theme sessions.

### SCICOM Open Sessions

Currently Theme session are proposed bottom-up and SCICOM selects from a proposed list. SCICOM also runs so-called Open Sessions on the Monday morning before the start of the conference and on Wednesday afternoon. These sessions are run in general with a format close to panel discussions and relate to the science performed in the expert groups. It is suggested that the Open Sessions of SCICOM be included fully in the science programme of the conference. SCICOM could choose hot topics in relation to ICES Science Plan and run sessions as any other session during the conference, with non-traditional format preferentially but depending on the topic.

### Long lunch breaks

Long lunch breaks (2 hours) were programmed during the 2014 and 2015 ASCs with success. It allowed to separate Science from Business as ad hoc meetings have been programmed in this time slot. The time slot can also be used for shorter and interactive meetings with society, industry or policy makers. Another use can also be for presenting projects or innovative new techniques or tools.

### Opening and closing sessions.

Their duration was reduced in the 2015 ASC program, which pleased many participants. Ways to provide highlights of the week at the closing are still in discussion. Programming SCICOM Open Sessions as other sessions (non-traditional format) could allow to have the opening of the conference on the Monday morning.

### How to increase efficiency of the poster session

The poster session has become a social event in addition to being a session. If this increases interaction, less attention is payed to posters. Feedback from participants demonstrates that many consider the poster session is not fulfilling its purpose. Other ways of organizing posters are still in discussion. It was also suggested to consider that all talks be short talks with a poster attached, except for a few longer talks (session keynotes). That posters be available online during the conference could also be a possibility.

### Access to contributions

CM papers are no longer produced. They have been replaced by extended abstracts, produced on a voluntary basis but not required. Easy online access to abstracts, posters and participants list during the conference and from the ASC web page would be necessary. Plenary keynotes are videotaped and available online from the ASC web page.

### 3. New features in 2015, 2016, and 2017

At the 2015 ASC some new events and formats were introduced:

- In addition to the events for early career scientists (ECS) introduced last year (bus stop, career chat) a mentoring event (meet senior ICES scientists, administrators) was held during the conference;
- A local student event: the secretariat invited students from “local”, Danish and Swedish (Lund and Malmö) universities to the ASC for a half-day period to learn about the ASC and marine science;
- A project marketplace where selected FP7, H2020 and other projects were given the opportunity to present themselves and to discuss benefits or drawbacks of ICES project participation;
- A reduced opening ceremony (1.5 hours);
- The extended two-hours lunch break introduced in A Coruna was kept providing opportunities for additional and ad hoc meetings;
- A communications networking and exchange event to which communicators from our member institutes were invited (Iceland, Scotland, Belgium, Sweden, and Denmark).

For the 2016 ASC in Riga, Latvia the number of theme sessions will be kept to 18, to be arranged in four parallel sessions because preparations by the host country were based on the traditional model. However, new formats of holding theme sessions and SCICOM open sessions will be encouraged and the new features introduced in 2015 be continued and developed further. One of the theme sessions accepted will be held under a strategic overarching theme (the Arctic).

For the 2017 ASC, the duration of the conference will be reduced to four days to accommodate a total of 12 theme sessions. This change will provide more flexibility for new formats of science presentations and room for other events, such as project marketplace or panel discussions. New formats of recurrent theme sessions under a strategic overarching topic may be continued as well (e.g., Arctic, Aquaculture, human dimension).

### 4. Scenarios for the ASC

Different scenarios were discussed, some of which are a change in the current science model of the ASC.

| Scenario  | Advantage   | Disadvantage  |
|---|---|---|
| Smaller ASC   | Shorter, more focussed<br>Less costly   | Loss of inclusiveness and comprehensiveness<br><br>Less attractive for participants and also for host country               |
| Conference organized jointly with other organizations | Potentially broader topics and multidisciplinary<br><br>Potentially larger conference | Loss of ICES brand<br><br>Hosting dependent on the other organization, hosting less secure<br><br>Reduced costs not evident |
| ASC every 2 years                                     | Costs shared among countries  | Loss of momentum<br><br>Risk of dissolving ICES network   |

If the cost is an issue and need be reduced, it will be necessary to reduce the duration of the ASC and lower the number of sessions. There is consensus to limit to 4 the number of parallel sessions and to limit the duration of sessions to 1-1.5 day. The minimum number of sessions could be 12 and the ASC reduced by one day. More reduction would damage comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of the ASC.

Another scenario is to run the ASC every two years and hold a smaller conference internal to the network every two years. Momentum would be lost and a smaller ASC would not be attractive enough. This scenario is not recommended.

Joining forces with other organizations (such like PICES) is best envisaged for particular sessions, and is then a plus. Nothing prevents currently organizing sessions with sponsors on particular issues, as the revised guide lines invites to do.

Among the diversity of conferences, the ASC is of medium-size and a comprehensive conference in applied marine science. Its interest is in that it provides update on ongoing science and strategic issues, is comprehensive in topics and inclusive from the student to the manager.

## 5. Cost, income and split keys

Total expenses for the Secretariat amount to € 150 000 (average 2010-2015). Total expenses for the host country are uneasy to gather. Guess estimates range from € 150 000 to € 300 000 (2010-2015) depending on countries and receptions and the split of expenses between Institute, Ministry and sponsors vary. An average ASC (2010-2015) attracts 650 participants (450 contributions). Full costs (secretariat + host) range € 300 000- 450 000 representing € 460 - 690 by participant, meaning that ICES would sponsor each participant in the range € 270 – 500 (after subtraction of a € 190 fee).

The 2015 ASC was hosted by ICES in Copenhagen and organized by the Secretariat. An analysis of the costs and incomes (incl. sponsors, fees) and split keys between Secretariat and host was performed by the Secretariat and is compiled in document CM 2015 Del-7.4.1. A change in the split keys for costs and incomes could alleviate by 20% the hosting costs. But the major cost item corresponds to renting a conference centre.

SRGASC analyses suggest that reducing the ASC by one day would not impacting the number of participants nor the comprehensiveness in topics. But more reduction would change the scientific model of the ASC. It is suggested that the split keys of expenses and income are reviewed before modifying that model.

## 6. Proposed way forward

This sketch attempts to make the ASC more efficient and keep the current science model, which satisfies participants. The new conference lasts 4 full days, starting on Monday morning (opening ceremony) and finishing on Thursday night (closing ceremony). Opening and Closing ceremonies are short and snappy. SCICOM and ACOM meet the day before (Sunday) and SCICOM meets the day after (Friday). Four sessions are run in parallel. Sessions are run with different formats depending on topics. Session topics and formats are chosen via a bottom up process based on proposals from the science community. In addition, SCICOM chooses a number of hot topics to replace the Open Sessions and runs these as appropriate. Sessions are run with various formats, including traditional sessions, panel discussions and innovation demonstrations. Some are co-sponsored or organized jointly with other organizations or industry. Long lunch breaks allow for programming ad hoc business meetings (non overlapping with the science program) as well as particular sessions. The mentoring program for ECSs is strengthened. Projects are given the opportunity to present themselves in various ways. Posters are considered differently in the program (still to be defined). The conference is accessible online with access to program, abstracts, posters, participants list, recorded keynotes, and comments on media. The conference average size is 650

participants with 450 contributions. The conference fee is €190. The split keys of expenses and income between ICES and host are changed from the current rules.

It is suggested that SRGASC continues until full changes have been implemented and a new ASC is in place.

## **7. Supporting material**

The ICES Annual Science Conferences: a review of its format including the functionalities and business model. Working Document by Adi Kellerman, November 2014

SRGASC report to Bureau February 2015

SRGASC report to SCICOM April 2015

SRGASC report to Bureau June 2015

SRGASC Guidelines for theme session convenors

SRGASC report to SCICOM September 2015

SCICOM progress report to Council October 2015, section 238

CM 2015 Del-7.4.1 ASC Income and expenses