Forum of Arctic Research Operators

FARO Annual Meeting 2026
Saturday, March 28,

Minutes

Internal business

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1. Opening Session: led by Dirk Mengedoht, FARO Chair

I. Welcome and introductions

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. It was noted that this closed session had been scheduled at the beginning of the meeting in order to maximise participation from NPOCs.

II. Approval of meeting minutes from 2025

Minutes were approved.

III. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted

IV. Report from the Chair

During the last year, the Executive Committee met on an almost monthly basis. Within ExCom, discussion continued on the possible establishment of thematic FARO working groups, including whether these should take the form of expert groups. It was noted that while funding opportunities exist, no decision has yet been taken to establish working groups, and this question may be revisited as part of later IPY discussions.

FARO's participation in the IPY-5 Planning Group was considered important, and it was agreed that FARO should continue to be represented, with the option for the Chair to delegate this role.

The Chair also represented FARO in key strategic fora, including the Steering Committee of ICARP IV and the ROADS Advisory Panel under SAON, and noted an expressed interest from EPB to strengthen connections with FARO.

Outreach and visibility activities included presentations on FARO at the COMNAP meeting in Warsaw and at the IPY Roundtable held in conjunction with Arctic Frontiers in Tromsø in February 2026. With regard to membership, Turkey membership will hopefully be approved in the summer, while discussions with India were acknowledged to be at an later stage.

- Discussion of the next strategy should be included on the agenda for the next annual meeting.

2. Administrative business: Dirk Mengedoht, Marie Frost Arndal, FARO secretariat

i. FARO 2025 finance report

Our income in 2025 was €28,461, reflecting annual membership payments. Total expenditures for the year amounted to €25,771. The budgeted salary costs for the FARO Secretariat were largely utilised, with secretariat costs totalling €12,887, in addition to associated overheads. Other expenditures included travel, accommodation, conference participation, and direct operational costs. The balance at the end of the year was €2,690, resulting in a cumulative balance of €61,244 carried over to 2026. The FARO 2025 finance report was presented and approved.

ii. FARO 2026 budget

The proposed FARO budget for 2026 foresees total expenses of €32,034. The main cost elements include €13,364 for the FARO Secretariat (185 hours), €8,000 for travel, accommodation and conference activities, €5,000 for other direct costs, and €6,011 in overheads corresponding to 44% of wages. The total budgeted expenses for 2026 exceed recent annual expenditure levels, reflecting an anticipated increase in activity and engagement, including potential support for new initiatives. The budget was presented and adopted.

iii. Next FARO Annual Meeting

Next annual meeting will be during ASSW 2027 in Japan, Hakodate, Hokkaido, from 12 - 20 April 2027.

iv. Any other business

Nothing to report.

Open Meeting

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3. Welcome to the open session: Dirk Mengedoht, FARO Chair

4. Updates from organizations and projects, including a short update on IPY

/David Hik

The Arctic science funders forum annual meeting was held ahead of the Arctic Circle Assembly, and it was highlighted that Christina Barnard and David Hik have been actively engaged across a range of international fora, with particular emphasis on IPY-related activities. Plans are in place to improve online sharing of information on funding organisations and calls, and to support longer-term planning where possible. A proposal for a third Arctic call under the Belmont Forum was discussed, with scoping activities currently underway. This process will focus on identifying thematic priorities and potential

participating funding agencies, with a call anticipated next year and a timeframe of three to four years leading up to IPY. The importance of considering infrastructure needs in support of Arctic research was highlighted, including a potential role for FARO in providing an overview of key infrastructure relevant to these efforts.

5. **Updates from Countries**

   All presentations are available online at: https://faro-arctic.org/annual-meetings/annual-meeting-2026

Iceland: It was reported that national preparations for IPY have not yet started, as the timeline is still considered distant. ICARP is expected to provide guidance for future engagement, with a particular focus on knowledge related to Icelandic waters. Existing and planned infrastructure, including vessels and icebreakers, was referenced, as detailed in the accompanying slides. Iceland also indicated an offer of free space on research vessels during surveys.

Korea: An update was provided online noting plans for a new Korean icebreaker, with commissioning anticipated around 2029–2030.

Canada: Canada has entered a new phase of infrastructure development, supported by significant national commitments to improve ports, airports, communication systems, and research infrastructure across the North. Increased resources are being allocated to icebreakers and research vessels. It was noted that Polar Knowledge Canada's network structure did not survive the COVID period, and there is a strong desire to rebuild coordination. Research facilities currently operate in a fragmented manner, presenting challenges for cohesion and service delivery. A new network, OCARI, is being developed to address these issues, bringing together 77 facilities operating in northern Canada. OCARI aims to serve as an access point to ships, vessels, research networks, and northern facilities, while also addressing data management.

China: China outlined the CHINARE model for Arctic cooperation within its broader national vision. This includes continued infrastructure improvements, with five icebreakers currently conducting research, efforts to better synergise activities in line with ICARP priorities, and the development of advanced capabilities such as a manned submersible and robotic sediment sampling. Upgrades to Xuelong were also noted.

Denmark: EastGRIP station was closed two years ago and activities relocated closer to the centre of Greenland, near Summit Station. New stations are being developed at Sermilik by the University of Graz, and the University of Bergen has established a logistical hub in Ilulissat. No IPY-related planning has yet started in Denmark.

Finland: No update was provided, as there was no NPOC present.

France: ongoing plans for the French Polar Institute to join IFREMER (French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea), potentially leading to closer integration of research activities. Ifremer conducts research, innovates, and provides expertise to protect the ocean, sustainably manage its

resources, and share marine data. Joint work with Switzerland and Canada was highlighted, particularly related to an Amundsen expedition leg.

Germany: Funding for a new Polarstern has been confirmed. The new vessel will feature a 40% increase in laboratory space and enhanced equipment. Sea trials are planned for 2029, with entry into service in 2030. Germany is actively engaged in international collaborations under the Arctic Pulse initiative, including cooperation with Amundsen and preparations toward IPY. Activities include Polarstern missions, Beaufort-related projects, and several land expeditions. AWIPEV is already fully booked for 2026 under POLARIN projects. Hajo Eicken is the new AWI Director.

Italy: Italian Arctic operations are mainly based in Ny-Ålesund, with the station's 30-year anniversary to be marked in 2027. For 2026, 44 projects have been submitted. In relation to IPY, Italy is in the process of nominating a national committee and is awaiting nominations from the Antarctic committee. A joint special journal issue is planned for 2027, and a metadata portal covering Arctic data has been established.

Japan: noting the conclusion of the ArCS II programme in 2025 and the start of ArCS III as a five-year national programme. Key goals include fostering the next generation of researchers through fieldwork and training in Greenland and Canada. The new research vessel Mirai II will replace the retired Mirai, with the first Arctic cruise planned for summer 2027. Japan will host ASSW in 2027.

Netherlands: the Dutch governmental polar strategy was renewed this year, alongside an evaluation of the national polar programme and work on a new long-term strategy covering a ten-year period, including the IPY timeframe. Polar Day was held on 21 April to discuss these developments, and a national committee is expected to be established by the end of the year. Funded science selection processes and a new research vessel were also mentioned.

Norway: highlighting the availability of Arctic maps through the Norwegian Polar Institute. A new polar strategy for 2025 has been adopted, and developments at the Svalbard Research Office were presented, including a new website and the Research in Svalbard database. Plans for a Svalbard science conference in Oslo in autumn 2027 were announced. A major new initiative, "Polhavet 2050", was introduced, involving 18 Norwegian institutions, icebreakers, and a ten-year funding commitment from the Norwegian government. The initiative is expected to align with IPY, with collaborative calls attracting international interest. Roundtable discussion in Tromsø 2026 - invited directors of polar institutes, including representatives from ICARP, APECS, FARO, INTERACT, and international funders, reflecting strong and growing global momentum for IPY.

Portugal: conducting two Arctic projects this year. ASSW 2028 will be hosted in Porto. A national polar science strategy has been completed and evaluated by the funding foundation, with publication expected soon. IPY planning has started.

Poland: the current Polish polar strategy for 2017–2027 is nearing its end, with a new strategy in development. A national IPY team, consisting of 10–11 members including scientists and representatives from four ministries, is planned for establishment by autumn 2026 and may be ready to present at the next FARO meeting. The BERA Centre has supported more than 200 users, and a Polish polar database has been established. Poland plans to operate a station in Greenland, marking 90

years since its first Greenland expedition. Plans for a new research vessel are underway with support from the Ministry of Infrastructure, with construction hoped to begin next year and completion envisaged within three years, in time for IPY.

Spain: operates two Antarctic stations on a seasonal basis, with equipment running year-round. Spain has three research vessels capable of polar operations, including a new Polar Class 7 vessel. In the Arctic, Spain does not maintain land infrastructure but conducts science via research cruises, with eight cruises completed between 2023 and 2025 and five planned over the next two years. A recent cruise to Dickson Fjord under the AQUARIS project studied the effects of the tsunami.

Sweden: update on Sweden's participation in the Oden UNCLOS programme with Canada and its Early Career Researcher initiatives. A decision on a new Polar Class 2 icebreaker, exceeding the capabilities of Oden, is still pending. The research vessel Skagerak, owned by Gothenburg, can operate along East Greenland and Svalbard. A new marine station at Kristineberg will support ECR training and preparedness ahead of Arctic expeditions.

Switzerland: collaboration with the TARA Polar Station initiative "Arktis 2026–2030". Swiss involvement includes work on the west coast of Greenland and participation in the CASCADES expedition on Amundsen. The Forel sailboat, using French infrastructure, was presented as open to further international collaboration.

United States: USCGC Healy is currently in dry dock, while the research vessel Sikuliaq has been operating in Antarctica. Under the Ice Pact Memorandum of Understanding, plans are in place for the construction of 11 new icebreakers for the United States.

6. Updates from organizations and projects, including a short update on IPY (60 min).

- AFoPS – Thamban Meloth

An overview and progress update was provided on the Asian Forum for Polar Sciences, a non-governmental organisation established in 2004 to promote cooperation in polar science among Asian countries. Chairmanship currently held by India's National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, and a long-term secretariat now hosted by PRIC in China. Recent activities included the Annual General Meeting held in Goa and a Special Meeting in Boulder in 2025.

Key AFoPS activities were outlined, with a strong focus on preparations for IPY-5. Based on feedback from the IPY-5 questionnaire, an AFoPS IPY-5 roadmap forum was held at the 2025 AGM, resulting in proposals for an AFoPS working group and the establishment of an AFoPS Summer School planned for July 2026. Ongoing fellowship, training and education initiatives were highlighted, including the KOPRI Fellowship Programme and overwintering training opportunities. Inter-organisational cooperation remains a central pillar of AFoPS activities, including submissions to the Antarctic Treaty system, memorandum of understanding with IASC and SCAR, and several bilateral and multilateral agreements among member institutions.

- COMNAP – Antonio Quesada:

COMNAP is actively exploring the use of artificial intelligence to increase the utilisation and effectiveness of support services for researchers, including enhanced vessel navigation in ice. Guidelines under development in this area could be shared with FARO, and feedback would be welcomed. Additional guidance is also being prepared on the use of remotely piloted aircraft systems, as well as preparedness related to highly pathogenic infections affecting animals and associated risks for humans. COMNAP is further engaged in work on identifying and transitioning towards more sustainable fuels for aircraft and vessels, and is open to input and collaboration on this topic. Preventing harassment in the field and at stations remains an important focus, with existing materials available online and interest in exchanging best practices and resources. A dedicated readiness group is working on organisational preparedness for major disruptions, including pandemics, highly pathogenic infections, and potential satellite shutdowns. Risk management related to natural hazards is also being addressed. In relation to IPY, COMNAP has established a working group and emphasised the importance of ensuring that the scientific community clearly understands access pathways and logistical support, and of identifying how support can be strengthened and improved. Idea to foster greater exchange of experience between Arctic and Antarctic operations, recognising that many technical and operational challenges are shared across both polar regions and that mutual learning could be highly beneficial.

- PAG – Sung-Ho Kang

An update was provided on the Pacific Arctic Group, outlining its role as an international scientific coordination network under IASC that supports multinational collaboration in the Pacific Arctic.

Overview of planned PAG research cruises in 2026 involving vessels from Japan, the United States, China, Canada, and Korea. The Distributed Biological Observatory was highlighted as PAG's core multinational observing network, providing long-term, standardised ecosystem observations since 2010 and serving as a key change-detection array linking physical and biological processes. PAG is now expanding this approach through the development of a Pan-Arctic DBO network, combining ship-based sampling, moorings and remote sensing to strengthen data integration, cooperation and observing capacity across the Arctic. Looking ahead, PAG is positioning itself as an operational backbone that can contribute to future IPY activities and broader Arctic observing systems.

- EPB – Maria Grigoratou

EPB's vision of a unified yet diverse European polar research voice was reiterated, alongside its role in strengthening the policy–science interface and demonstrating the societal relevance of polar science. It was noted that 2025 marks EPB's 30-year anniversary and that EPB membership continues to evolve in 2026, including the Norwegian Polar Institute becoming a full member, represented by its Director, with an alternate representative also appointed.

Upcoming developments supported by the SYNCHRONY project were briefly highlighted, as well as the establishment of EPCO in January 2025 as a legacy outcome of the EU-PolarNet projects.

- POLARIN – Nicole Biebow

Horizon Europe–funded polar research infrastructure network coordinated by the Alfred Wegener Institute and involving 54 partners and 64 research infrastructures across the Arctic and Antarctic.

Progress to date includes two completed access calls with a total of 36 projects granted access. The POLARIN Data Hub was introduced as a developing framework to improve access, reuse and dissemination of polar data, with virtual access to multiple research infrastructures becoming available. Training activities were highlighted as a central component of the project, including support for early-career researchers, data stewardship, and safety training under polar conditions, with online materials and webinars scheduled and expanding through 2026. The update concluded by highlighting upcoming access opportunities, including the third POLARIN transnational access call opening in September 2026. Remote Access (RA) allows researchers to use an infrastructure without visiting it in person, with local staff carrying out the work according to the user's research plan, and Remote access is being actively promoted for the future calls.

- INTERACT – Elmer Topp-Jørgensen.

INTERACT is a circum-Arctic network supporting coordinated research and long-term monitoring, currently comprising 78 active research stations, with participation from 21 Russian stations temporarily on pause. The network promotes international collaboration through mobility, shared tools, and outreach and education, with a strong focus on enabling safe, efficient and sustainable Arctic science. The governance structure of INTERACT as a non-profit association and work as a coordinating body and as a project partner in European and international initiatives. Looking ahead to IPY, INTERACT outlined envisaged activities including support for access to Arctic research infrastructures, the potential operation of an IPY Arctic Access Programme, and the development of overviews of existing infrastructure and Arctic permit systems. Providing guidance and training materials to support responsible, safe and efficient fieldwork was highlighted as a core contribution. INTERACT is open to collaboration and its potential role in supporting FARO objectives and IPY-related activities.

7. Thematic discussions (60 min)

The Chair introduced the thematic discussion session, which was intended to frame the subsequent group work and focus on how FARO can contribute meaningfully to IPY.

It was emphasised that improved availability and accessibility of documentation is a key contribution FARO could make, in particular by ensuring that relevant information is clearly organised online and easy to find for the research community.

Possible FARO initiatives related to IPY were outlined, including the development of a dedicated IPY page bringing together relevant information sources. This could include links to existing infrastructure information developed in cooperation with SAON, an overview of Arctic permitting systems developed with INTERACT, and access to fieldwork planning and safety documentation. In addition, the potential for an IPY-focused platform to support the sharing of logistical resources was discussed, for example through collaboration with existing systems such as Isaaffik and the ASP, including noticeboard-style functions to highlight available capacity on vessels, aircraft, cargo transits and similar assets.

Finally, it was proposed that FARO could play a convening role by contributing to discussion fora involving infrastructure operators, scientists, decision-makers and funders, with the aim of helping ensure that infrastructure planning and availability are well aligned with scientific priorities and needs. Contribute to discussion forum between infrastructure, science and decision makers and funders to ensure infrastructure is aligned with science priorities and needs (e.g. with IASC, ASFF, SAON).

Discuss in breakout groups – report back from groups:

The discussion emphasised the need to strengthen the visibility of FARO and clarify how the wider community can better use FARO and its services. It was noted that many researchers and stakeholders are not aware of what FARO does or how it relates to the many existing Arctic networks, highlighting a need for clearer communication and outreach.

With regard to IPY, it was recognised that discussions and levels of preparedness differ significantly between countries, with varying priorities and stages of planning. European countries in particular were noted to require coordination at multiple levels, including national, regional and global scales. It was agreed that having accessible and coherent information on existing activities, plans and resources is essential to support effective IPY coordination.

Participants stressed that many relevant resources already exist, including manuals, guidelines, and platforms such as Arctic gateways and Isaaffik, but that these are not always visible or easy to access. National-level information, such as annual ship routes, areas of operation and changes in logistics patterns, was identified as particularly valuable, especially for early-career researchers planning fieldwork. Improved visibility of these resources was identified as a key activity for FARO. It was also noted that larger funding opportunities may emerge in the context of IPY, and some participants suggested that FARO could potentially support implementation by helping translate funding into practical access to infrastructure.

There was broad support for the idea of a FARO-led information page and for exploring a logistics-sharing platform, while recognising that scaling and long-term operation would require dedicated support. It was agreed that existing platforms and outcomes from ICARP, including Arctic Observing System initiatives, should be used as a basis rather than creating parallel structures. As an action, FARO was encouraged to focus on identifying and connecting existing efforts to generate practical, low-hanging results.

The service function of FARO was highlighted as an area needing clearer articulation. It was suggested that FARO should actively invite the scientific community to engage by asking how FARO can contribute to IPY. Many scientists are not aware of FARO's potential contributions, particularly in areas such as safety guidance, logistics coordination and data resources. An action was identified to develop a clear catalogue of FARO contributions, potentially in cooperation with COMNAP, and to ensure this is channelled effectively to the science community.

Safety was identified as a concrete area for action, with agreement that existing Antarctic and Arctic safety materials could be reviewed and consolidated into more accessible guidance. Access to infrastructure, including berths on vessels and stations, was also discussed. It was noted that while operators must ultimately offer access, FARO could play a facilitating role by enabling information sharing within the community, including opportunities for cost-free sharing where feasible.

Finally, it was agreed that FARO should take an active role in identifying the right organisations and actors to bring together in order to advance these efforts. Rather than duplicating existing work, FARO should focus on coordination and integration. The importance of engagement around permit systems, including considerations related to Indigenous peoples, field conduct guidelines and responsible engagement, was highlighted as an area where FARO could help convene the appropriate actors and support further joint work.

8. Thematic discussions

- Polar Connect/Pan-Arctic Cable System project/ Ulf Jonsell

The Polar Connect initiative as the next step in establishing an Arctic fibre-optic cable system that combines critical digital connectivity with long-term ocean and environmental sensing. The project aims to create a new, resilient EU–Indo-Pacific internet corridor while enabling continuous scientific observation in the central Arctic Ocean, which was highlighted as the highest priority area by the research community. A new ice-strengthened research vessel and cable-laying capacity were identified as essential, potentially with additional protective layers on the cable to withstand ice conditions, and deployments are expected to focus on deep-sea and international waters. Distributed Acoustic Sensing was discussed as a key capability, including detecting whale vocalisations and movement effects in the water column, monitoring seismic activity, and measuring temperature and ocean dynamics, with emphasis on the need for stable, well-calibrated sensors with minimal drift. Smart sensors and SMART cable concepts will be thoroughly tested before deployment, and real data calibration was noted as critical for scientific credibility. Data generated by the system should be made publicly available as early as possible to maximise scientific value and international collaboration.

- Satellite infrastructure for communication in the Arctic/ Benoît Pirenne

The presentation outlined key communication needs, including local community connectivity, links to the global network, support for isolated mobile teams, autonomous observing systems, and staffed base stations. Geostationary satellites were noted as generally unsuitable for Arctic regions due to high latency, power demands, and limited coverage beyond approximately 75° latitude. Low Earth Orbit solutions were discussed in detail, including Iridium for reliable low-power voice and small-data applications, and OneWeb and Starlink for broadband connectivity with lower latency and higher bandwidth. The discussion emphasized that no single solution fits all scenarios, and that effective Arctic communication requires a use-case-driven mix of systems, balancing bandwidth, power availability, cost, reliability, and environmental constraints.

9. Wrap up: Dirk Mengedoht

Dirk Mengedoht wrapped up the meeting by thanking the speakers and participants for a productive and engaging MEETING, noting the strong value of the discussions and presentations. There was agreement to continue with the same format next year, building on the positive experience from this annual meeting.