

6. SAEON Information Management Steering Committee (SIMSC; Key collaborators, all SAEON nodes)

The SAEON Information Management Steering Committee (SIMSC) was recently formed to drive the Information Pillar of the SAEON design. Its focus is to develop SAEON's internal information management systems, but working in synergy with external systems and especially with the SAEON data portal (SDP). One major objective of SIMSC will be to publish scientific, information and education products from the knowledge contained within datasets available to SAEON. The end result will include products such as databases, web sites, standalone applications, system interfaces and interoperable services (to name a few), as well as articles for popular publications and papers for scientific journals. The scope of the products will be cross-disciplinary and inter-nodal in order to gain a holistic view of environmental change in South Africa. These products are likely to grow from initiatives originating at a Node, which are initially aimed at addressing issues important to that Node but are recognised as having a wider applicability.

The rationale for SIMSC derives from the strategic statements of SAEON:

- The vision of SAEON is: "A comprehensive, sustained, coordinated and responsive South African environmental observation network that delivers long-term reliable data for scientific research and informs decision-making; for a knowledgeable society and improved quality of life".
- The mantra of SAEON is: "Observation, Information, Education".
- The mission of SAEON is: "To detect, predict and react to environmental change in South Africa".
- SAEON's currency is: "Long-term data on environmental change".

The above statements imply that an integrated information management system is a key element of SAEON. Originally this was implemented as an extension of the SA-ISIS project, especially built to fulfil the objectives of SAEON, and which would allow SAEON Nodes to be able to exchange data. In the initial years of SAEON's development a Technical Steering Committee, made up of stakeholder representatives, acted as the oversight mechanism on all matters related to science and information management. This committee was eventually disbanded in 2009 in order to create space for more specialist focus groups.

Rapid growth in all its departments has been a feature of the first eight years of SAEON's existence. Although never envisaged originally, SAEON employed a Systems Engineer (Wim Hugo) to continue the development of the information backbone. This backbone has been subsequently developed into a major national asset with the flexibility to be re-used for various purposes. A major component of this system is the SAEON data portal (SDP). Wim has taken development on the SDP to a stage where a planned live release is imminent.

Focus has now switched from the development of the main data portal to the development of data, scientific and information products. Since the responsibility for data management is a key function of SAEON's Nodes, the Nodes will play a major role in this initiative. To support the vision of SAEON, the need for a concerted effort on data management across the Nodes was recognised early on. This has led to several ad hoc meetings and joint inter-nodal projects over the years. Thus SIMSC was formed in order to constitute a cohesive body for all aspects of information management across SAEON.



Fig. 6.1: Members of the SAEON Information Management Steering Committee (SIMSC) pictured at the inaugural meeting, from left to right: Gavin Fleming, Fiona Cuff, Victoria Goodall, Wayne Goschen (Chair) and Wim Hugo.