

30 years of the European Polar Board

*Statement from the EPB
Chair
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EUROPEAN
POLAR BOARD



EPB at 30: A Unified European Voice for Polar Science through Coordination and Collaboration

The year 2025 marks the 30th anniversary of the European Polar Board (EPB).

We take this milestone as an opportunity to reflect with pride on three decades of coordinating, inspiring via initiatives and discussions, and advancing European polar science. We look forward with renewed ambition to the challenges ahead.

Founded in 1995 within the European Science Foundation, the European Polar Board served as Europe's strategic advisory body on science policy in the Polar Regions. Over time, it evolved into a fully independent organization, becoming autonomous in 2016. Throughout its history, the EPB has acted as a high-level forum and collective voice for cooperation among European national funding agencies, institutes, academies, universities, research organisations, ministries, and polar operators engaged in Arctic and Antarctic research.

Our core mission is to enhance coordination of European Arctic and Antarctic research, optimize the use of polar research infrastructures, foster multilateral collaboration, and provide a unified European voice in global polar science. After a decade at the Dutch Research Council (NWO), EPB relocated its Secretariat, including the European Polar Coordination Office, (EPCO), to Umeå, Sweden, in 2025.

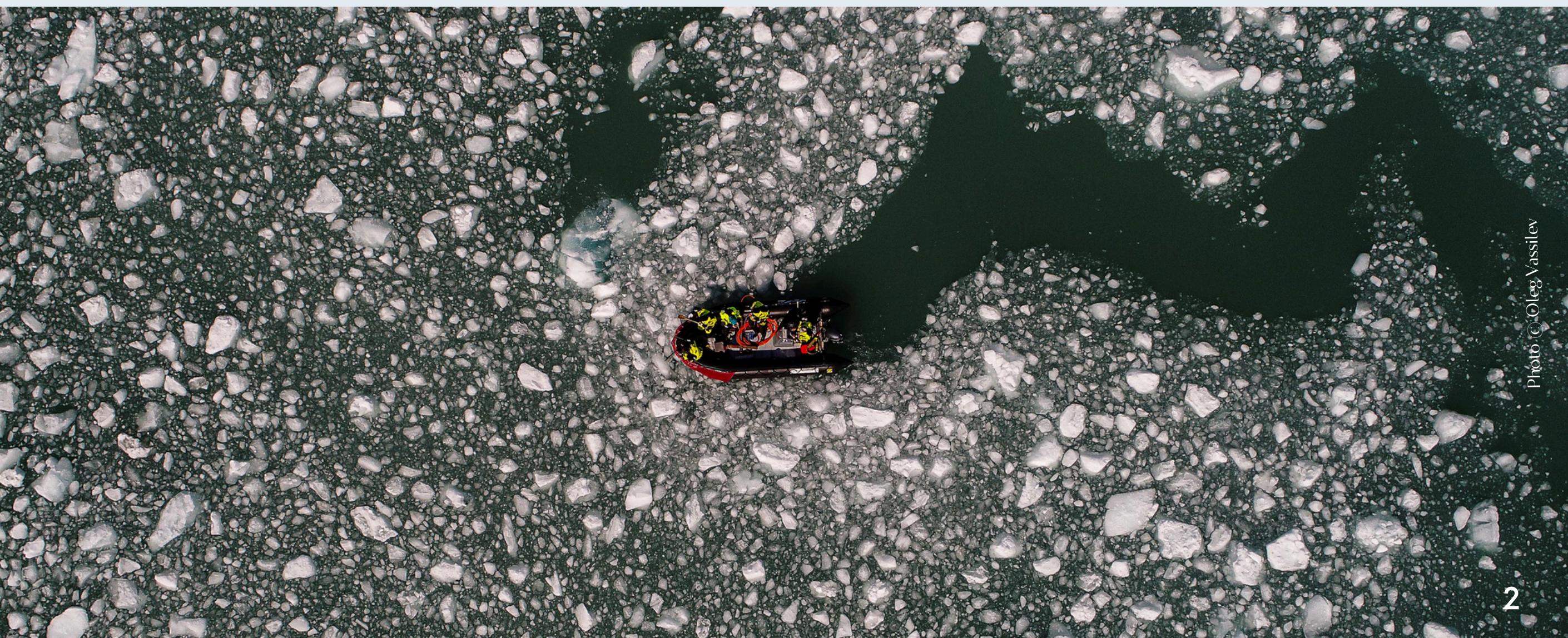
From its new base at Umeå University, the EPB continues to serve as a central hub for communication, coordination, and collaboration across the European polar research community.

Over the years, EPB has contributed significantly to advancing European polar science. Notable examples include:

Building a cohesive coordinated network and voice for European polar science

Over the past three decades, the EPB has built a strong and cohesive network that now includes 31 member organizations from 22 countries in Europe. These members span research institutes, academies, ministries, operators and funders. Through this diverse membership, the EPB has become the central forum for coordination, policy advice, and strategic planning in European polar research. Its influence has helped ensure that Europe's polar science community speaks with a coherent and impactful voice on the global stage. Over the years, the EPB has formalized dialogues, collaborations, and Memoranda of Understanding with major stakeholders in polar research and a sustained dialogue with the European Commission.

A key example of this coordinating role was the fourth International Polar Year (IPY 2007–2008). **At IPY-4, the EPB supported the coordination of European polar research efforts within a global framework, strengthening collaboration across disciplines, countries, and between Arctic and Antarctic research communities.** IPY-4 enhanced the visibility of European polar science and highlighted the need for long-term coordination beyond the IPY period, providing an important foundation for subsequent European initiatives.





The coordinating and representative function of the EPB is reflected in several further initiatives. **EuroPICS (European Partnerships in Ice Core Sciences)**, coordinated the EPB, provided a major European framework for coordinating ice core research in close alignment with the **global IPICS initiative**. By defining scientific priorities and fostering international collaboration, EuroPICS helped establish a strong and lasting European position in ice core science, with its legacy continuing through major EU-funded projects such as Beyond EPICA and IMAGICS.



The **project Aurora Borealis** developed from European discussions on strengthening participation in international ocean drilling, including Europe as the Third Leg of IODP. The EPB played a leading role in shaping the initiative by coordinating scientific input across Europe and fostering collaboration among national programmes and research organisations. Through this leadership, the EPB helped define the scientific rationale and technical concept for a research icebreaker with deep-sea drilling capability, positioning Aurora Borealis as a significant European contribution to polar and ocean drilling research.



The EPB has also contributed to strengthening responsible research practices through the **Synthesis Report on the Environmental Impacts of Research and Logistics in the Polar Regions**, developed by its Action Group on Environmental Impacts of Polar Research and Logistics. The report examines potential environmental impacts of polar research activities, outlines best practices for minimising these impacts, and reviews relevant legal frameworks, offering a distinctive pan-polar perspective across both the Arctic and Antarctic.



The **European Polar Coordination Office (EPCO)** is a lasting legacy of the **EU-PolarNet2 project**. EPCO is integrated into the EPB Secretariat. This decision reflects EPB's established role as a pan-European forum and unified voice for polar science. It also acknowledges EPB's capacity to support EPCO's development and positioning at the European level. EPB's institutional neutrality ensures that EPCO represents the shared interests of the European polar research community, rather than those of any single institution or country.

Within EU-PolarNet 2, the EPB led key tasks related to defining EPCO's vision, mission, and structural setup, building on its long-standing experience in bringing together research institutions, operators, and policy stakeholders. Established in January 2025, EPCO now supports coordination of EU-funded polar research through the EU Polar Cluster and Polar Catalyst platforms and serves as a central contact point for the European polar research community, policymakers, and the European Commission.



Infrastructure mapping, database, and catalogue



Over the past 30 years, the EPB has supported coordination and access to Europe's polar research infrastructure.

An important milestone in this work was the development of the [Polar Infrastructure Catalogue](#) under the EU-PolarNet2 project with contributions from the International Network for Terrestrial Research and Monitoring in the Arctic (INTERACT), the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programmes (COMNAP) and EUROFLEETS. The Polar Infrastructure Catalogue compiled information on 64 Arctic and Antarctic facilities including research stations, field camps, vessels, and aircraft. The catalogue improved visibility and cooperation across Europe's polar research community.

Building on this foundation, the EPB developed [Polardex](#), a digital platform that expands and updates the Catalogue's content through an interactive, map-based interface. Polardex also incorporates DueSouth, a database originally developed by the Southern Ocean Observing System (SOOS) to record and share information about planned and completed field activities in the Southern Ocean and Antarctic. Polardex helps researchers and operators identify available infrastructure, explore collaboration opportunities, and plan joint logistics in the polar regions. Together, these initiatives highlight EPB's ongoing commitment to supporting effective, coordinated, and sustainable polar research.

EPB partnership to EU funded Polar Research projects

The EPB is a partner in several EU-funded polar research projects that advance understanding of the polar regions and strengthen Europe's observing capacity.

These include the EU-PolarNet projects, the largest EU-funded initiatives for coordinating European polar research, as well as large-scale research projects on polar systems and observations, such as Arctic PASSION, SO-CHIC, and OCEAN:ICE. EPB is also a partner in infrastructure-focused projects like Aurora Borealis, INTERACT, EUROFLEETS, and POLARIN, which aim to enhance transnational access to research infrastructure.

EPB's contributions in the projects centre on science dissemination and the connection between research and policy via webinars, policy events, and briefings to share project results with both peers and decision-makers. **Drawing on its experience across both poles, EPB brings a unique perspective that supports projects addressing the Arctic, the Antarctic, or both.**



Photo © Renuka Badhe

Influencing policy and funding frameworks

Throughout its 30 years, the European Polar Board has played a key role in representing the interests of the European polar research community at the policy level. The EPB and its Members have consistently engaged with EU institutions and national governments to highlight the importance of sustained investment in polar science and infrastructure. This commitment continues today.

A notable example of this engagement in European research programming was the [PolarCLIMATE Programme](#), launched in September 2008 by the EUROPOLAR ERA-NET Consortium in association with the European Science Foundation and EPB. Supported by 20 ministries and national funding agencies from 18 European countries, and with cooperation from the US National Science Foundation, the call committed an estimated €10 million under three major science themes covering transnational Arctic and Antarctic research and access to polar research infrastructure. It aimed to support high-quality, transnational research at a European level and exemplified collaborative funding efforts designed to integrate polar climate science across national programmes.

The EPB has also led actions in showcasing polar research as a strategic investment for Europe. The [Strategic Position Paper European Research in the Polar Regions: Relevance, strategic context and setting future directions in the European Research Area](#), published by the EPB in 2010 identified critical challenges related to integrating polar research into the mainstream of the European Research Area and strengthening links with future European Commission Framework Programmes (including Framework Programme 8) and national polar funding agencies. It also highlighted the need for greater coordination of activities and stronger international partnerships to address global scientific questions of societal relevance, particularly those related to the socio-economic consequences of a dynamic Earth system.



More recently, in 2025, [the EPB published an open call and addressed letters to European decision-makers, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, and Member States, urging long-term support for polar research within the next EU funding frameworks \(MFF 2028-2034, FP10\)](#). Endorsed by more than 900 signatories from across the European and international research community, the call underscored the broad recognition that polar research is essential for understanding and responding to global environmental change. Together, these actions reflect the EPB's mission to connect science and policy, helping to ensure that Europe's polar research remains coordinated, well-resourced, and impactful.

Institutional resilience and adaptation

Throughout its history, the EPB has demonstrated resilience and adaptability in response to evolving scientific, logistical, and societal challenges. EPB has responded to emergent issues from accelerating climate change to infrastructure constraints and shifting policy priorities with foresight and continues to evolve as a flexible and forward-looking organization capable of addressing future needs of polar research. The relocation of the EPB Secretariat from the Netherlands to Sweden represents a natural step in the organization's evolution. It builds upon the significant achievements made under the hosting of the Dutch Research Council (NWO) and opens new avenues for strengthening EPB's role in coordinating European polar research.



Looking Ahead

As EPB enters its fourth decade, the organisation recommits itself to:

- Place research on climate change and polar environments, and their links to planetary systems and societies, at the centre of Europe's engagement in the polar regions.
- Advance transdisciplinary, actionable polar science that contributes to biodiversity protection, climate adaptation, sustainable development, and societal resilience.
- Deepen partnerships with policymakers, Indigenous rightholders, local stakeholders, international polar organisations, and industry to co-create knowledge and solutions.
- Provide a trusted forum that brings together institutions, universities, academies, operators, governance bodies, and national funders to support coordination and shared priorities in European polar research.
- Act as the authoritative voice for European polar research, bridging science, policy, and society.
- Support the implementation of EU-PolarNet recommendations, fostering dialogue among European institutions, national programmes, and stakeholders on research needs and cooperation opportunities.
- Embed communication, cooperation, and collaboration at the core of EPB's approach, ensuring that European polar research remains visible, well-connected, and responsive to emerging challenges.
- Promote outreach and science-policy exchange, ensuring that polar research outcomes are effectively shared with decision-makers, stakeholders, and society and translated into usable knowledge.
- Ensure that European polar infrastructures, data systems, and logistic networks remain robust, interoperable, and responsive to future research demands.
- Support the European Polar Coordination Office (EPCO) and its coordination mechanisms, including the EU Polar Cluster and Polar Catalyst, as long-term assets for EU-funded polar research.
- Further develop PolarDEX as a platform supporting research planning in the polar regions.
- Reinforce Europe's presence and coordination within major international frameworks, including the International Polar Year 2032–2033 (IPY-5) and the UN Decade of Action for Cryospheric Sciences (2025–2034).

In 30 years, EPB has grown from a niche advisory board into a dynamic and essential pillar of European polar science. We celebrate not only the achievements of the past, but the communities, ideas, and commitments that will drive polar research forward. Together, European science in the polar regions is stronger, more integrated, and more impactful because of EPB.

Here's to the next 30 years of discovery, cooperation, collaboration, and influence.



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Prof. Peter Sköld
Chair of the European Polar Board
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