

Report from the SOLAS Science and Society Discussion at the SOLAS OSC September 2015

Moving toward the vision of Future Earth: SOLAS science and society

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One of the goals of Future Earth, the newest SOLAS sponsor, is to more tightly couple science and society. This is a rather bold new step for SOLAS scientists, as to date the most intense coupling in our community has been only on the topic of geoengineering. In this discussion session, we tried to outline what Future Earth envisions and how SOLAS scientists can participate over a wider range of topics. Since natural sciences are well represented in the SOLAS community, we hope to obtain more insight on the procedures followed by such disciplines as social science, economics, policy, and law. One aim of the discussion was to identify SOLAS scientists interested in pursuing this integrating effort and some ideas on topics and procedures (e.g. Rudd et al paper). The main outcome of the discussion was to determine if there should be a SOLAS workshop centered on linking SOLAS science and society.

There were approximately 40 people in attendance, most of which considered themselves natural scientists (2-3 identified as social scientists). There seems to be consensus that the SOLAS community of scientists should engage social scientists to perform research together. However, most of the discussion during the meeting centered around how to engage the public or stakeholders. There was a lot of discussion of scales, such as research concerning more regional or global audiences. In addition, the idea of public outreach and increasing public awareness was highlighted. For example, we need to understand why successful remediation or policy-making was successful in the past (e.g. Montreal Protocol). However, it was clear from the discussion that in order to move forward (i.e. with a workshop), we must have some specific topics. A few topics were raised: plastics in the ocean; carbon emission costs (valuing things like ocean acidification vs. carbon sequestration); creating laws or policy that cross the air-sea interface. We concluded that there is clear enthusiasm for this topic and people would attend a workshop, but there will still be a lot of planning required before a workshop can take place. Most people who participated wanted to be informed after the OSC in order to either help come up with concrete ideas, plan the workshop, or attend the workshop. This could be the start of a SOLAS network on this topic.