

“KEEP IT LOCAL”: ADVICE NETWORKS IN THE ROSS SEA REGION.

G.D. Steel¹, Tim Williams²

¹*Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand,* ²*Christchurch College of Education, Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand*

The physical isolation of an Antarctic field camp may lead to less reliance on external sources of information, even when such sources are readily available. The objectives of this research were to describe and compare the patterns and nature of advice networks in remote field camps with those in a less-isolated base camp, and to identify characteristics of personnel that acted as key sources of information for group members. Support staff, base camp scientists, and scientists in remote field camps in the Ross sea region were recruited in person while they were in the Antarctic (n = 88; response rate = 100%). In Study 1, respondents were asked to rank for preference three people from whom she or he would seek advice on an environmental behaviour. This question was expanded in Study 2 to include advice-seeking on safety and personal or emotional issues. All networks displayed multiple core-periphery structures and several key players. Centrality analyses indicated that perceived Antarctic or field experience influenced the choice of whom to ask for environmental and safety advice. This influence was less apparent in the personal advice networks. In base camp, perceived expertise was less influential than organizational role on choices. Within the field camps, it was more difficult to tease apart the influences of expertise and organisational status, as those people with the most experience also tended to be the Principal Investigators. Analysis of cases where the formal leader was not the most experienced person suggested that indicated that experience was the primary characteristic of those from whom advice was sought. In field groups, there was a strong propensity to seek information from a member of the local group rather than calling on sources outside the group. Field leaders could be broadly divided into two classes: those that consulted external sources, and those that looked to their group for advice. These findings suggest that geographic isolation may behaviours that reflect psychological isolation, and they hold implications for the manner in which national Antarctic programs may wish to conduct training of support and scientific personnel.