



From ad hoc towards the institutionalisation: An assessment of Malaysia's policy evolution on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean



Ahmad Firdaus Ahmad Shabudin^a, Rashidah Abdul Rahim^{b,*}, Suzyrman Sibly^c, Norizan Md Nor^d

^a National Higher Education Research Institute, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia

^b School of Biological Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia

^c Centre for Global Sustainability Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia

^d School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Programme evaluation

Polar region

Policy

National Antarctic programme

Institutional

ABSTRACT

Malaysia's policy on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean (A&SO) in the last three decades has evolved from being focused on diplomatic engagement to pioneering science in cooperation with the international community and strengthening science diplomacy by becoming a member of the international governance of Antarctic. Through process-oriented evaluation, the aim of this study is to map out the development of Malaysia's policy on the Antarctic region (from 1982 to 2016) and consequently, identify the current capacities and future needs to strengthen its involvement. This study reveals that Malaysia's policy on A&SO has strong integration in foreign affairs, science and technology (S&T), and the environment, and the involvements are parallel with the national development plan. To move forward, Malaysia is currently establishing a suitable governance structure and a long-term management plan to ensure a long-term political commitment, sustain investment of resources and strengthen the dynamic participation of stakeholders. This study advances the scholarly understanding of the political processes and challenges to Malaysia's Antarctic policy development, in its journey towards institutionalisation which will create distinctive and valuable positions for Malaysia to contribute to current debates on the future of the Antarctic region. In the context of ad-hoc decision on certain policy, this case study will contribute relevant information about the development process, issues and challenges on policy through ad-hoc implementation.

1. Introduction

Lately, despite the Antarctic region being remote from equator-latitude countries such as Malaysia, discussions on the region have become increasingly prominent. Discussions have centred around the issues of global climate change, melting ice, rising sea levels, anthropogenic and ecological impact on the environment, and global geopolitics. Malaysia's interest in the Antarctic region began in 1982 with its intervention in Antarctica's international geopolitics. In 1983, Malaysia began a diplomatic initiative towards an Antarctic international regime by initiating a debate on "Question on Antarctica" during the 38th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and then issues on Antarctica and Southern Ocean became a crucial element of Malaysia's foreign policy for more than 20 years (1984–2005) [21].

The establishment of the Malaysian Antarctic Research Programme (MARP) in 1999 has focused Malaysia's policy interest in the Antarctic towards science. Special allocations under research and development

(R&D) programme by the Malaysian government in the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–2005) and the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006–2010) contributed towards the acceleration of Malaysia's policy towards Antarctic science. In 2011, Malaysia's policy interest in the Antarctica and the Southern Ocean shifted towards science diplomacy – Malaysia ratified the Antarctic Treaty 1959 as a non-consultative member (Malaysia became the first ASEAN member state to accede to the treaty).

Since 1982, Malaysia's policy on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean has gone through the eras of three Malaysian prime ministers, namely Dr. Mahathir Mohammad (1982–2003), Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (2003–2008) and Mohd Najib Abdul Razak (2008 - present). The political preferences of each leader have affected the development of Malaysia's ad hoc policies on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, interwoven with its internal and external social and political justifications. Every action taken in foreign policy was closely related to its domestic policy that emphasized on the spirit of peace, freedom and

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: firdausshabudin@live.com (A.F. Ahmad Shabudin), rshidah@usm.my (R. Abdul Rahim), suzyrman@usm.my (S. Sibly), norizan@usm.my (N. Md Nor).

cooperation in international relations [2,40], indicated that Malaysian foreign policies under the different prime ministers reflected continuity and similar principles of interaction in terms of economic, political and security approaches in domestic and foreign spheres. However, Malaysia's involvement in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean is still considered lacking, especially in terms of formal policy instrument and framework to mobilise and guide the stakeholders in addressing the role and importance of the Antarctic region in a holistic manner. The current structure of policy statement does not describe clearly the principles, strategic thrusts and main actions of Malaysia's involvement on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean Ibrahim [23]. stated that the public policy goal may be somewhat loose and ambiguous, because it only provides general direction and does not state the right goals or targets for public policy implementation. In fact, the development of a quasi-legislative ad hoc policy suffers from the fact that in individual cases, ordinarily the number of participants is very limited while the issues are many [6].

The lack of a long-term polar strategic policy would affect Malaysian Antarctic researchers negatively, since they would be unsure and insecure regarding the research support, coordination, and continuity of the future science policy on polar research. Thus, there is a need to understand past perspectives and policy processes in order to circumvent the problem of blind spots in the development of national policy by ad hoc approaches and to identify the possibilities of confronting the present involvement of the country in the Antarctic. Based on the process-oriented evaluation of Malaysia's ad hoc policy on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean agenda, this study aims to determine the processes of Malaysia's policy development on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean through (a) emphasising the role of an upper-middle income nation in influencing an international regime of Antarctic governance, (b) examining how an international polar science agenda can help facilitate the development of a national science policy towards developed nation, to pursue the development of knowledge based economy, and to accelerate the internalisation of national science programme, and (c) highlighting the Malaysian initiatives to ensure the environmental sustainability of polar regions to pursue a superior environmental policy. In addition, this article outlines the needs and capacities of the nascent polar agenda in a rapidly developing tropical country of Malaysia, and the requisite steps towards institutionalisation.

This study hopes to provide decision makers with important information on how this ad hoc policy works in practice and how it affects international relations, specifically on economic, environmental, and social factors. The results of this study may prompt a repositioning of policies and programmes, shape the allocation or reallocation of public funding, and inform the policy makers on the future development of national agenda on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. This study provides a clear platform to understand Malaysia's processes and strategies in influencing an international regime of polar governance, through the advancement of polar research activities in strengthening Malaysia's science development and in pursuing a superior environmental policy. This study may also be taken into consideration in the decision-making process of Malaysia's involvements in the Polar Regions. It may also serve as a reference for policy makers in establishing a new mechanism for Malaysia's polar policy instrument as well as to design strategies for Malaysia's governance in its future involvement in the Polar Regions, particularly in the Antarctic.

2. Background

Continuous evaluation is essential to ensure the compatibility of Malaysia's existing policies on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean with the current situation and environment and consequently, generate information about the appropriateness and effectiveness of policy interventions. The evaluation is a systematic process for stakeholders to learn from past experiences. One of the tools commonly used for this

purpose is the Logical Framework analysis tool, which can be used to improve planning and resource allocation, ensuring accountability and evaluation of implemented policy. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [36] highlighted that the evaluated information can be used to assess and “enlighten” processes of learning about policy practices and performance, stimulate discussions among actors (e.g., about appropriate evaluation criteria), signal quality and reinforce reputations (e.g., in public research), and allow policy makers to account for public spending choice.

Anderson [1] explained that evaluation is functional because it constitutes policy estimation, evaluation or assessment of its contents, implementation, goal achievements, and other outcomes. Therefore, policy evaluation is a very important activity to ensure resources, governance, and roles assigned to each project or programme will guarantee a policy success. Moreover, the effectiveness of a policy cannot be determined precisely because of the dynamic or constantly changing environment and limitations during policy implementation. This is because policy implementation involves interests and activities of various agencies and stakeholders. Hence, the evaluation on Malaysia's policy development on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean is important to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints in fortifying the continuity of its future involvement.

Process-oriented approach of evaluation is better in evaluating the policy-making process in Malaysia's Antarctica agenda that may lead to the improvement of that process. Furthermore, it also helps stakeholders to understand why policy makers arrive at a specific policy decision Girginov and Hills [18], highlighted that the process-oriented work involves continuous information gathering over a period of programme work. Information on “process” provides neither a “snapshot” view of development intervention, nor a measure of progress against a fixed set of indicators. Rather, it is concerned with the dynamics of development processes. This means that the processes involve different perceptions of relationships, transactions, decision making, or conflicts and their resolutions.

Information gained from process evaluations will be useful to understand the programme impact and outcome were achieved and for the programme replication. Whereas outcome evaluation (without analyzing how they were achieved) fails to account for the human capital involved in getting to good outcomes and the true costs of the programme [28,29], highlights the process evaluation aims at opening the ‘black box’ of policy implementation and it goals to contribute to the improvement of policy design in order to obtain the better result, and it is not an alternative to impact (outcome) evaluation but a necessary complement. In fact, James Bell Associates [26] develops the sample logic model that illustrates the conceptual relationship between the process and outcome components of an evaluation by delineating the hypothetical linkages between specific programme activities, outputs, and outcomes. James Bell Associates added that if outcome data indicate that changes did occur, the process evaluation can then be used to explore how these changes happened or whether they are the result of the programme itself or of contextual factors outside the programme.

The approach for this study using systematic process evaluation instead of outcome or impact evaluation because the study is focused on Malaysia's policy evolution based on the Malaysia's involvement phenomenal on the Antarctic. In terms of application, process-oriented evaluation helps to improve and ensure better performance of Malaysia's policies on the Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. It can also help develop an understanding of the perspectives, experiences and expectation to determine whether the policy was delivered in the manner it was intended. Besides, this approach provides fragmentation, isolation, and systematic examination in explaining the phenomenon or components of a given ad hoc policy. In short, it is conducted to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of each component and the actions involved. Therefore, Malaysia requires a process-oriented evaluation, especially in its policy development of the Antarctica and

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