

Diana King

Diana King is the Deputy Program Manager for Securing Antarctica's Environmental Future (SAEF), a research program dedicated to conserving the Antarctic. She has a passion for equity, diversity and inclusion and works to improve EDI within Antarctic science.



vation and I then continued on with a PhD in Antarctic ecology, looking at how biodiversity is changing in East Antarctica.

What are you working on currently?

I have worked in Antarctic research for 14 years and I am currently the Deputy Program Manager for Securing Antarctica's Environmental Future (SAEF), an Australian Research Council Special Research Initiative in Excellence in Antarctic Science. We are a collaborative partnership that will deliver research to forecast environmental change across the Antarctic region, to deploy effective environmental

stewardship strategies in the face of this change, and to secure Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science.

SAEF integrates theory, observations, modelling and data into structured decision-making to enable the delivery of informed, future-ready environmental policy. The team includes more than 100 researchers and practitioners from 30 organisations across the disciplinary spectrum, including geology, atmospheric science, marine and terrestrial ecology, mathematical modelling, optimisation, conservation biology, conservation practice, evidence-based policy and law.

Tell us about your background. How did you first become interested in Antarctic biodiversity and conservation?

Growing up, I was always passionate about biology and conservation. I have always had a love of learning and am very technically minded. My undergraduate degree was in Environmental Science, majoring in Life Sciences, and this was a great broad introduction to all aspects of environmental science and biodiversity.

I am disabled, and use a wheelchair, meaning that I am not able to participate in fieldwork in the traditional way. So when it came time to do a one-year post-graduate research project as part of my degree, I had to find something that utilised existing unanalysed data rather than going into the field. My supervisor, Distinguished Professor Sharon Robinson, was able to create a research project for me, utilising existing Antarctic data that had been collected but not yet analysed. This sparked my passion for Antarctic biodiversity and conser-



I also have a passion for equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI/DEI), and am an active member of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research EDI Action Group as well as the Australian Antarctic DEI Action Group. We are working towards increasing equity, diversity and inclusion within Antarctic science at all levels, from SAEF to national (Australian) and international Antarctic programs.

What does a typical day look like for you?

As a program manager, my typical day is quite unlike that of the academics I work with. Although I do have an academic background, I am now a professional staff member, and do all of the behind-the-scenes work which keeps the program running smoothly. I work in a team with other program managers, admin staff and data and logistics specialists to keep the SAEF program on track and to ensure that our researchers are getting what they need in order to accomplish their research goals.

I have spent quite a bit of time helping to manage Antarctic field logistics, with months of paperwork and red tape to navigate, which can often be overwhelming for time-poor academics. I do also get the opportunity to utilise my Antarctic research background and skills to help inform some of the research currently taking place within SAEF, looking at biodiversity assessment using remote sensing techniques. I also spend time meeting with national and international partners for our EDI/DEI work, editing and reviewing policies and procedures for Antarctic research from program to national and international levels.

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What do you most enjoy about your work?

I most enjoy being able to facilitate Antarctic research in so many varying fields of study, and piecing together how all the individual projects, both big and small, connect to inform our understanding of Antarctica and its influence on Earth's climate and ecosystems. Antarctica has such a critical, and often forgotten, influence upon global politics and the environment, and I really enjoy being able to play a small part in the work towards the conservation and management of this important, unique continent.

What do you find most challenging?

The most challenging aspect of my job is probably working remotely as a cohesive team. Our program administrative team are spread across 4 states within Australia, working to support 105 researchers from 30 organisations across 10 countries. Doing the majority of our work via online meetings can be challenging. Luckily, as our program began in 2021, the proliferation of Zoom and other online collaboration tools, as well as the culture shift normalising remote working, has made this a little easier.

What are you hoping to work on in the future?

I aim to further my current work in research management and equity, diversity and inclusion. I really enjoy working in these areas and hope to make a difference to international policy and procedures to improve working conditions for all who participate in Antarctic research. Antarctic equity, diversity and inclusion was a big news item in 2022 for some national programs, and I want to help work towards solutions to the problems faced in Antarctic field expeditions and more broadly in the Antarctic research sector.

What advice would you give to aspiring scientists in this area?

Antarctic research is unique, incredibly interesting and vital to our understanding of global climate and the impact of human activity on the natural world. Antarctic science is incredibly diverse, covering fields of research across the geosciences, life sciences, physical sciences and humanities and social sciences. It's a fantastic field to work in and there is a high level of international cooperation within Antarctic research.

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As with every field of research, however, academia is not the only career path for people passionate about Antarctic science. This research path will allow you to develop highly transferable skills which can be utilised more widely than just within the academic sector. The SAEF program includes fantastic researchers across many organisations outside of the university sector, including museums, government departments, non-profit organisations, the international Antarctic tourism organisation and five national polar programs.

Who are your scientific heroes?

I am always inspired by the great women who historically have helped to pave the way for more women working in STEMM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine) fields. The work done by these pioneering women breaking down barriers has been crucial for our work towards equity in STEMM fields today. Some examples include Ada Lovelace, the world's first computer programmer; Grace Hopper, the inventor of the code compiler to translate English terms into computer code; and Katherine Johnson, one of the first African-American women to work as a scientist at NASA as a “human computer” checking the trajectory calculations for space flights. I am also incredibly inspired by the work of Jane Goodall, who's dedication to animal welfare and education, along with David Attenborough's work in science communication and education, have been a huge influence on my love of conservation research and proactive work to safeguard the environment.