

# TPE NEWSLETTER

2026

## Confronting environmental change at the roof of the world



Dear TPE members,

It has been some time since our last newsletter, but rest assured, TPE has been anything but quiet. We've had a period of focused effort completing major projects and developing new plans that will shape TPE for years to come.

We are delighted to share the first of those developments: a major new international scientific program, **Third Pole Glacier melt and Earth system consequences (TPGE)**. TPGE represents a substantial 10-year commitment to advancing knowledge of the changing Asian Water Tower and its global impacts. The program will contribute directly to the Decade of Action for Cryospheric Sciences (2025-2034). As with all TPE activities, collaboration is central to success, and we look forward to working with national and international colleagues as we embark on this new flagship initiative.

It'd be remiss of us not to mention the Second Tibetan Plateau Scientific Expedition and Research (STEP) initiative. Last year, STEP completed its initial 10 major missions, and work is now underway to synthesize the substantial body of research generated by 3000 field campaigns and nearly 30,000 people. Congratulations to

all those involved! As is often the case in science, these advances have also raised important new questions, which are now driving a series of targeted follow-up activities, including the STEP "emergency tasks" and other dedicated projects. We will share further details on these in future updates.

We are also pleased to welcome a new member to the team. Dr. Graham Simpkins joined in January 2026 as Science Director of the Big Science Center, ITPCAS (which oversees and manages the TPE project office). Some of you might know Graham from his decade working with the Nature Portfolio. We are excited to have him supporting the future direction of TPE, particularly in strengthening community engagement and visibility. We look forward to introducing Graham more formally in the coming months and sharing some of the initiatives he is already helping to shape.

Finally, we would like this newsletter to serve the needs of the TPE community. If you have news to share—an upcoming event, a job opportunity, a funding call or an exciting new publication—please do get in touch at [tpe@itpcas.ac.cn](mailto:tpe@itpcas.ac.cn). Your contributions will help ensure this newsletter remains timely, relevant and valuable to all.

# A new TPE scientific program

**Third Pole Glacier melt and Earth system consequences (TPGE)** is a new, international flagship program of TPE. It applies Earth System science to better understand the features and mechanisms of glacial melt, its consequences across the atmosphere-cryosphere-hydrosphere-biosphere-anthroposphere, and provide evidence-based adaptation strategies to contribute to sustainability.

TPGE consists of four key tasks:

- 1. High elevation glacier and climate changes:** improving understanding of changes occurring at the roof of the world.
- 2. Glacial disasters and early warning:** assessing melt-related hazards and developing early warning systems for disaster risk reduction and adaptation.
- 3. Melt-mediated Earth System interactions and teleconnections:** determining the Earth system consequences of glacier melt in the Third Pole, locally, regionally and globally.
- 4. TPGE legacy:** efforts to improve education, outreach and capacity building.

TPGE aligns with international efforts for the Decade of Action for Cryospheric Sciences (2025–2034).

TPGE was announced at UNESCO, Paris on 19th March 2026 as a Side Event for the launch of the Decade of Action for Cryospheric Sciences. The event, moderated by Dr. Graham Simpkins (Science Director, Big Science Center, ITPCAS), included keynote speeches and a roundtable discussion featuring internationally renowned scientists: Prof. Tobias Bolch (Graz University of Technology), Prof. GAO Jing (ITPCAS), Dr. Miriam Jackson (Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate), Dr. Sonu Khanal (Hydrominds), Prof. Valérie Masson-Delmotte (Laboratoire des Sciences du Climat et de l'Environnement), Prof. WANG Tao (ITPCAS), Prof. YAO Tandong (ITPCAS), and Prof. Michael Zemp (University of Zurich).

TPGE is still in the development phase, and we will share more information once it is available.



# Views on TPGE

Excerpts taken from TPE side event at UNESCO, Paris, for the launch of TPGE.



*"Trust, friendship and mutual respect across cultures enable fruitful, long term collaboration".* **Tobias Bolch** (Graz University of Technology, Austria) on how TPGE can build effective international collaborations.

*"It is imperative to establish a comprehensive, high-resolution isotope monitoring network, integrated with isotope-enabled regional climate models. TPGE can provide such a framework, improving mechanistic understanding of the hydroclimatic shifts reshaping the Asian Water Towers".* **Jing Gao** (Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences) on observation efforts needed by TPGE and the broader hydroclimatic community.



*"Involve local communities and policymakers more. Take them in the field and on glaciers. Show them what we're talking about; seeing glacier loss or the impacts of a GLOF is much more impactful than looking at figures on a screen".* **Miriam Jackson** (Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate, Norway) on how TPGE can engage decision makers and local communities.

*"We need more data, and there's no way around it. TPGE can really help in producing a harmonized data base for High Mountain Asia, bringing different technologies together to be a global, scientific leader".* **Sonu Khanal** (Hydrominds, The Netherlands) on how TPGE can contribute to reducing societal risk in the Third Pole.



*"Training teachers allows knowledge to be brought to the classroom and into the curriculum, producing a glacier-aware generation that is empowered to act... In the Third Pole you are working with the beauty of extraordinary landscapes and scientific field work, both offering unique opportunities to feed into popular culture and reach a very broad audience".* **Valérie Masson-Delmotte** (LSCE, France) on education and outreach opportunities for TPGE.

*"Glacier impacts extend beyond local scales, and TPGE has a key role in uncovering these teleconnections by integrating valuable data and expertise".* **Tao Wang** (Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences) on modeling efforts needed by TPGE and the broader glacier impact community.



*"We must extend in-situ monitoring with smart stakes that permanently measure ablation and accumulation" and "find ways to get access to private or defense remote sensing data, as done with declassified spy missions, to extend time series".* **Michael Zemp** (University of Zurich, Switzerland) on observation efforts needed by TPGE and the broader glacier observation community.

# News and Announcements

## Graham Simpkins joins the Big Science Center



The Big Science Center is excited to announce the arrival of **Dr. Graham Simpkins** as its inaugural Science Director, starting from January 2026.

A climate scientist by training, Graham received his PhD from the University of New South Wales, Australia, and worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California, Irvine, USA. He then transitioned to work in scientific publishing, holding roles at *Nature Communications*, *Nature Climate Change* and *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment*, the latter as founding Chief Editor.

As noted by Prof Shilong Piao, CAS member: "*Graham will be a critical resource to elevate the visibility and impact of ITPCAS, particularly through its international cooperation initiatives.*"

Graham shares his thoughts on the new role: "*I've long been aware of the great research ITPCAS (and related programs) do. It's, therefore, an honor and a privilege to help shape the future of Third Pole research, including through training the next generation of researchers.*"

## Prof. Tandong Yao presented the IGS Seligman Crystal Award



Prof. Tandong Yao was awarded the **International Glaciological Society (IGS) Seligman Crystal** – the highest honor in international glaciology—during the **Climate and Cryosphere Science Conference** in Wellington, New Zealand, **9–12 February 2026**.

IGS President Shin Sugiyama highly commended Prof. Yao's exceptional contributions to scientific expeditions and environmental change research on Third Pole's glaciers. He highlighted pioneering work including ultra-high altitude ice core records, glacier change mechanisms, and the imbalance and impacts of the Asian Water Tower, all of which have advanced understanding of high mountain cryosphere systems under climate change.

Prof. Yao emphasized: "*This honor is not only a personal recognition, but international acknowledgment of China's contributions to cryosphere science. The Asian Water Tower has global impact, and I am committed to deepening international cooperation to tackle rapid, ongoing environmental changes.*"

TPE was also represented by Baosheng An, Ninglian Wang, Shiyin Liu, Keqin Duan, Jing Gao, Weicai Wang, Meilin Zhu at the Climate and Cryosphere Science Conference.

## Events of interest

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Cold altitudes conference: knowledge, imagination, and experiences of mountain ice.  
🕒 11-12 May,  
📍 Fribourg, Germany.

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Fourth High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development",  
🕒 2018-2028. 25-28 May 2026,  
📍 Dushanbe, Republic of Tajikistan.

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World Biodiversity Form 2026.  
🕒 14-19 June 2026.  
📍 Davos, Switzerland.

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International Conference on Climate and Disaster Resilient Himalayas.  
🕒 23-25 June 2026.  
📍 Himachal Pradesh, India.

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International Symposium on Artificial Intelligence in Glaciology.  
🕒 23-27 June 2026.  
📍 Hanover, NH, USA.

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3rd International Conference: "Mountains: Biodiversity, Landscapes, and Cultures".  
🕒 5-6 November 2026.  
📍 Baku, Azerbaijan.

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