



XXXIX ANTARCTIC TREATY
CONSULTATIVE MEETING
SANTIAGO - CHILE 2016
25 YEARS PROTOCOL ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Agenda Item: ATCM 4
Presented by: IAATO
Original: English
Submitted: 26/04/2016

Report of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators 2015-16

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Under Article III (2) of the Antarctic Treaty

Introduction

The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) is pleased to report its activities to ATCM XXXIX, under Article III (2) of the Antarctic Treaty.

IAATO continues to focus activities in support of its mission statement to advocate and promote the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private sector travel to Antarctica by ensuring:

- Effective day-to-day management of member activities in Antarctica;
- Educational outreach, including scientific collaboration; and
- Development and promotion of Antarctic tourism best practices.

A detailed description of IAATO, its mission statement, primary activities and recent developments can be found in the *2016-17 Fact Sheet*, and on the IAATO website: www.iaato.org.

IAATO Membership and Visitor Levels during 2015-16

IAATO comprises 116 Members, Associates and Affiliates, representing businesses from 66% of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Party countries. IAATO member operators carry nationals from nearly all Treaty Parties annually to Antarctica. Since 2010, IAATO has represented all passenger vessels operating in Antarctic waters under the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS). However during the 2015-16 season, one non-IAATO 'cruise only' vessel, ASUKA II, flagged to Japan cruised the Peninsula late January 2016

During the 2015-16 Antarctic tourism season the total number of visitors travelling with IAATO member companies was 38,478, representing an increase of just under 5% compared to the previous season. IAATO numbers have not reached the peak of the 2007–8 season (46,265), although the trend has been a slowly increase in recent years.

Details on tourism statistics including activities and nationalities can be found in ATCM XXXIX IP112 *IAATO Overview of Antarctic Tourism: 2015-16 Season and Preliminary Estimates for 2016-17*. The Membership Directory and additional statistics on IAATO member activities can be found at www.iaato.org.

Recent Work and Activities

A number of initiatives were undertaken during the year:

- The Dockside Observer program for IAATO yachts is now an established component of the association's Enhanced Observer Scheme, which involves making field observations of member operations to promote best practice. During the 2015-16 season IAATO revised and updated its Yacht Outreach Campaign, aimed at commercial and private non-IAATO yacht operators intending to visit Antarctica. Details can be found at www.iaato.org/yachts.
- 663 field staff passed the IAATO online Field Staff Assessment and Certification Programme for the 2015–16 season. Certification is a mandatory for many IAATO operators and 920 field staff have

passed since 2012–13. The Assessment continues to evolve, testing staff’s knowledge of IAATO’s Field Operations Manual that is updated annually and incorporates relevant outcomes from ATCM and CEP

- In September 2015, IAATO, in conjunction with its sister organization in the Arctic, the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO), held its inaugural Field Staff Conference in Toronto, Canada and welcomed the participation of a number of Treaty Party representatives at the conference.
- Educating members, their field staff and clients about Antarctic science and conservation issues is an important component of IAATO’s work. During the 2015/16 season IAATO has augmented its key documents including guidelines, standard operating procedures and briefings with the introduction of three animation films designed to support the mandatory briefing. These are available in ten different languages.
- IAATO receives many enquiries on an annual basis from individuals, yachts and private groups who are at various stages of planning expeditions to Antarctica. IAATO explains the Antarctic Treaty System and permitting process to all of these and passes any relevant information onto a Competent Authority that may be involved.
- Improving hydrographic information on a trial and opportunistic basis by a number of IAATO vessel operators continues. Initiatives include Crowd Sourcing trials in conjunction with Hydrographic Offices and AECO. Additionally the crowd sourcing scheme that enables IAATO and AECO operators to share accumulated historic depth sounding data from the Polar Regions continues to grow within the industry.
- In preparation for the expected entry into force of the Polar Code on 1 January 2017, IAATO held a Vessel Operators Meeting in conjunction with Lloyds Register, ‘Towards Polar Code Ready’, in London, June, 2015. Additionally, IAATO is now contributing to the development of tools for implementing the Code’s requirements, such as a database of ice and temperature information to support operator’s risk assessments
- In April 2016, IAATO attended an Arctic Search and Rescue Workshop and table top exercise in Iceland in April 2016 coordinated by IAATO’s northern counterpart, AECO and the Icelandic Coast Guard. Combining knowledge from both poles enables an exchange of experience, strengthening safety and relationships across the polar tourism industry

IAATO Meeting and Participation at Other Meetings during 2015-16

IAATO’s 2016 Annual Meeting will take place May 2-5, 2016 in Newport, Rhode Island, USA. This report was written in advance of IAATO 2016 meeting to meet the Information Paper deadline but, in addition to the above-mentioned initiatives, the meeting will include discussions on:

- A restructuring of the membership into two streamlined categories: “Operators” those who organise and are legally responsible for the expedition and “Associates” those who sell, or provide supporting services to “Operators” and a review of the financing of the Association;
- Revision and updating of a number of IAATO guidelines including wildlife watching, small boat operation in the vicinity of ice and shore stranding equipment;
- A review of IAATO’s draft Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) policies following feedback from the previous season;
- Proposed guidelines including activity guidelines and new site guidelines for Yalour Island and Point Wild.

Treaty Party representatives are always invited to join any of the open sessions during IAATO's Annual Meeting and any subsequent workshops.

IAATO Secretariat staff and member representatives participated in internal and external meetings, liaising with National Antarctic Programs, governmental, scientific, environmental and industry organisations. In addition to individual government meetings, IAATO took part in:

- **Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP) 27th Annual Meeting**, Tromsø, Norway, August 2015. IAATO places great merit in good cooperation and collaboration between its Membership and National Antarctic Programs.
- **Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators Conference & Annual Meeting**, October 2015, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- **Future of Antarctica Forum**, onboard IAATO Member vessel, One Ocean Expeditions *Akademik Ioffe* March, 2016.
- IAATO continues to be active in the development of the **International Maritime Organization's** (IMO) mandatory Polar Code as an advisor to Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), participating in various IMO meetings.

Environmental Monitoring

IAATO continues to provide ATCM and CEP with detailed information on member activities in Antarctica and works collaboratively with scientific institutions particularly on long term environmental monitoring and educational outreach. This includes the Antarctic Site Inventory, the Lynch Lab at Stony Brook University and the Zoological Society of London/Oxford University. Additionally, IAATO operators note sightings of fishing vessels for subsequent reporting to CCAMLR in support of the work against IUU fishing.

IAATO welcomes opportunities for collaboration with other organisations.

Tourism Incidents 2015-16

IAATO continues to follow a policy of disclosing incidents to ensure risks are understood and appropriate lessons are learned for all Antarctic operators. Incidents involving IAATO Operators that have been reported to date during the 2015-16 season include:

- On 15 November 2015, Ocean Endeavour struck ice causing some damage to the hull during the night near the South Shetland Islands. The vessel did not require any assistance and with the agreement of the both Flag State and Classification Society proceeded back to the port of Ushuaia to undertake full repair.
- On 14 December 2015, 10 Zodiacs were temporarily stranded at Port Lockroy during a zodiac cruise for 8 hours due to shifting pack ice. IAATO is grateful to the support afforded by the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust during this time, which in addition to the mandatory safety equipment carried ensured that passengers were safe and comfortable during the stranding.
- On 22 January 2016 Henry Worsley, a UK national attempting an unsupported, solo crossing of Antarctica, requested a pick-up because he was running out of time to complete his expedition. On arrival at Union Glacier camp and following examination by Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions medical staff, Worsley agreed to be flown to Punta Arenas, Chile, on a scheduled flight later that day. Further investigation by Clinica Magallanes, Punta Arenas, identified peritonitis. Worsley subsequently died of complications due to the infection.
- During the 2015-2016 season, there were several incidents involving non-IAATO yachts where IAATO operators assisted with the response. These included two groundings: one off Cuverville Island from yacht Tarka and the second near Vernadsky Station of a yacht Angelique II.

- A fuel spill was reported at in proximity to a National Antarctic Program Station and reported to the relevant authorities who facilitated repairs and a clean up.
- At time of writing (22 April), eight successful medevacs had been reported with clients being evacuated either by other IAATO operators, or via a commercial airliner from King George Island.

Scientific and Conservation Support

During the 2015-16 season, IAATO Members cost-effectively or freely transported over 50 scientific, support and conservation staff, and their equipment and supplies between stations, field sites and gateway ports. This included:

- Transfers of scientists between stations;
- Non-urgent medical evacuations;
- Field support of research projects
- Collection of scientific samples and other data collection for research programs (all permitted);
- Transport of scientific equipment to/from stations.
- Citizen science projects, such as HappyWhale.com

Initial reports indicate that IAATO operators and their passengers also contributed more than US\$500,000 to scientific and conservation organisations active in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic during 2015-2016.

Over the past decade, these donations have totalled over US \$4 million.

With Thanks

IAATO appreciates the opportunity to work cooperatively with Antarctic Treaty Parties, COMNAP, SCAR, CCAMLR, IHO/HCA, ASOC and others toward the long-term protection of Antarctica.