



Agenda Item:	CEP 7c
Presented by:	IAATO
Original:	English

## **Proposed Amendment to Antarctic Treaty Site Guidelines for Hannah Point**



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### Summary

Following an incident at Hannah Point, Livingston Island, when an elephant seal, possibly disturbed by visitors, went over a cliff, the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) have internally adopted a precautionary extension to one of the closed areas included in the Antarctic Treaty Site Guidelines for Hannah Point, should elephant seals be hauled out in the area at the time of a visit. This paper briefly describes the incident, and suggests that the Committee for Environmental Protection may also wish to consider incorporating the precautionary extension to Closed Area B within the existing Site Guidelines.

### Introduction

Hannah Point on Livingston Island has been visited by tourist, non-governmental expeditions and National Antarctic Program expeditions annually since the early 1990s: records of IAATO member visits to the site have been reported annually to the CEP and ATCM (e.g. ATCM XXXIII IP062 *Report on IAATO Member use of Antarctic Peninsula Landing Sites and ATCM Visitor Site Guidelines – 2008-09 Season*). The site is notable for its diversity of wildlife and high concentrations of breeding bird colonies. Consequently, it was one of the earliest proposed Antarctic Treaty Site Guidelines and was assessed during an on-site review in 2006 (*ATCM XXIX WP001 Report of the CEP Intersessional Contact Group on Site Guidelines for Visitors to Antarctica*). The site guidelines for Hannah Point set some of the strictest visiting limitations for ship visits and since the adoption of the Antarctic Treaty Site Guideline for Hannah Point, the level of visitation at the site has dropped considerably (see ATCM XXXIII IP *Spatial Patterns of Tour Ship Traffic in the Antarctic Peninsula Region* and Table 1 below).

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Table 1: Number of IAATO member visits per season at Hannah Point.

1999-2000	54	2005-2006	79
2000-2001	53	2006-2007	44
2001-2002	37	2007-2008	24
2002-2003	44	2008-2009	29
2003-2004	61	2009-2010	22
2004-2005	61	2010-2011	20

### Background

On 23 February 2011, IAATO Member Quark Expeditions vessel, Ocean Nova, landed at Hannah Point. Quark Expeditions are authorised by the USA and have been members of IAATO for nineteen years. The Expedition Leader (EL) onboard has nearly 20 years experience as an EL in the Antarctic Peninsula and has passed the IAATO online assessment programme. Also onboard the vessel were representatives of the UK Foreign Office and UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency who were getting transport back to Ushuaia, although they were not ashore at the time of the incident.

Prior to the landing the EL gave a PowerPoint presentation on the site, its sensitivities and the Antarctic Treaty Site Guidelines, including noting the cautionary notes regarding proximity to wildlife in the vicinity of the cliffs. At the site staff members were stationed at specific points around the site to manage the visitors, including by the cliff and jasper dyke area, as it was noted that there was a small group of elephant seals hauled out in the vicinity. Shortly after passengers arrived in the vicinity of the group of elephant seals the guide asked the passengers to move back from the seals and not to form a horseshoe around them as one or two of the seals raised their heads to observe the passengers. However, after the passengers had been guided further back and a period of time had passed with the seals apparently settled down, one seal moved away from the group and slid over the 6-7m cliff to the shallow water below. It was assumed that the elephant seal was fatally injured by the fall.

### **Response Actions**

Immediately following the incident IAATO circulated a message to all IAATO vessels still operating in the area to alert them to the incident and ask them to keep away from the cliff edge area if elephant seals were present. In addition, Quark Expeditions conducted an internal investigation and submitted a report to both IAATO and to the USA competent authority. The USA is currently conducting an investigation in to the incident under the US Antarctic Conservation Act. IAATO and Quark Expeditions are awaiting the outcome of that investigation.

The incident was further discussed at IAATO's 22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting (Hobart, 9-12 May, 2011) and, following advice from the IAATO Field Operations Committee, the membership agreed an additional precautionary measure to the application of the Antarctic Treaty Site Guidelines for Hannah Point. The addition states:

*Closed Area B is extended to include the jasper dyke and area along cliff edge if elephant seals are hauled out in the vicinity.*

All IAATO members, with immediate effect, will implement this additional requirement. This measure was agreed within IAATO without presupposing the outcome of the US investigation, but with a view to implementing a precautionary measure to minimise the likelihood of such an event occurring at this site again.

### **Suggestion for CEP**

IAATO thought it would be helpful to bring this incident and their agreed response action to the attention of the CEP, noting that IAATO vessels are not the only visitors to Hannah Point each year. Notwithstanding the ongoing US investigation, IAATO suggests that the CEP may wish to consider whether the additional precautionary measure described above would be a useful addition to the existing ATCM Site Guidelines at this stage.