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IAATO Deep Field and Air Operations Biosecurity Procedures - An update

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Information Paper submitted by IAATO

Summary

This paper reports on recent developments to biosecurity procedures for IAATO's deep field and air operators. Aware of the potential for human activities to introduce non-native species and microorganisms, and their obligation to the Environment Protocol, IAATO members developed mandatory biosecurity procedures for all their operations over twenty years ago. IAATO deep field operators implemented procedures tailored to their activities, following tools provided by COMNAP and SCAR. To ensure consistent application, existing practices were collated into a procedural document that is specific for IAATO deep field and air operations. Trialed successfully during the 2022-2023 season, this document has now been formally adopted by IAATO.

Background

In recognition of the potential for human activities to introduce non-native species and microorganisms, and their obligation to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, IAATO implemented mandatory procedures in the year 2000. The association reported these developments to the ATCM and CEP in 2005¹ which included methods used by deep field operators. IAATO's biosecurity procedures have since developed to become a recognised cornerstone of the organisation's work towards fulfilling its mission for the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel.

IAATO currently has five member operators conducting deep field activities carrying less than 1% of the total number of Antarctic visitors annually. IAATO deep field and air operators implement biosecurity procedures that are tailored to their unique operations, working closely with their National Competent Authorities (NCAs) and the National Antarctic Programmes they support. Their biosecurity procedures are further guided by ATCM, CEP^{2,3} and SCAR information⁴. Additionally, they follow tools developed by COMNAP/SCAR, such as the Checklists for supply chain managers for the reduction in risk of transfer of Non-Native Species⁵ and the COMNAP Practical Training Module for Non-Native Species. All relevant documents are included in the IAATO Field Operations Manual, which is updated annually.

While this approach has worked well over the years, the Association determined that collating existing biosecurity practices into a procedural document that is specific for IAATO deep field and air operators would help ensure consistent application and offer value to the operators and their NCAs. All IAATO operational procedures are subject to routine review and development in tandem with thematic committees and working groups. In this case, the procedures were developed in consultation with IAATO's Deep Field and Air Operators Committee. Following successful field trials during the 2022-2023 season, they were formally adopted at the IAATO Annual Meeting in Hamburg, Germany, 24-27 April, 2023 (Attachment 1).

References

1. ATCM XXVIII – CEP VIII IP097 *Update on Boot and Clothing Decontamination Guidelines and the Introduction and Detection of Diseases in Antarctic Wildlife: IAATO's Perceptive.*

2. ATCM XXXIII-CEP XIII WP008 *Draft Procedures for vehicle cleaning to prevent transfer of non-native species into and around Antarctica.*
3. Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) Non-Native Species Manual 2019 Edition.
4. Dewar, M., Wille, M., Gamble, A., Vanstreels, R., T., Smith, A., Varsani, A., Ratcliffe, N., Black, J., Lynnes, A., Barbosa, A. & Hart, T. (2022) *The Risk of Avian Influenza in the Southern Ocean: A practical guide for operators interacting with wildlife.* View preprint: <https://ecoevorxiv.org/repository/view/3686/>
5. Inter-continental Checklists For supply chain managers of the National Antarctic Programmes for the reduction in risk of transfer of non-native species. COMNAP/SCAR (May 2019) <https://www.comnap.aq/s/Inter-continental-Checklists.pdf>. [Also available in brochure and poster format]