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Land-Based Tourism and the Development of Land-based Tourism Infrastructure in Antarctica: An IAATO Perspective

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Information Paper submitted by IAATO

This Information Paper presents a view of land-based tourism, and the development of facilities in support of land-based tourism, from IAATO's perspective.

IAATO's view of land-based tourism is underpinned by two key facts:

- 1) Members of IAATO subscribe to the principle that their planned activities will have no more than a minor or transitory impact on the Antarctic environment. (IAATO Bylaws Article II, Section E.) This powerful statement has guided IAATO since inception and was included in the Bylaws in 2004 to make clear IAATO's position on this matter.
- 2) IAATO supports land-based tourism provided it is conducted in a professional, competent and best-practice fashion and conforms to requirements under the Environmental Protocol.

IAATO does, however, acknowledge the concerns of Treaty Parties towards permanent or semi-permanent infrastructure for land-based tourism and offers the following points as a contribution to the discussion.

Definition of Land-Based Tourism

What constitutes 'land-based tourism' and 'permanent or semi permanent infrastructure'? Clarification of these terms would be useful.

For example, are all the following classed as land-based tourism?

- Groups based on a ship or yacht that overnight on short or extended stays for climbing expeditions or other activities;
- Flight operators that take visitors to field camps or stations for a day visit or to overnight;
- Flight operators that support overland expeditions, mountaineers and ski traverses for extended visits of up to 70 days.

Currently, IAATO members, independent (non-IAATO) operators and government supported expeditions all undertake this range of activities.

What does 'permanent and semi permanent infrastructure' include?

- Marking of paths for conservation or safety reasons;
- Jetties and wharves;
- Aircraft runways;
- Tented camps;
- Construction of hotels;
- Stations offering visitor accommodation for overnight or extended stays;
- Souvenir shops at research stations;
- Museums and Churches.

Until these terms are more clearly defined it is difficult to resolve some of the issues over land-based tourism and permanent or semi-permanent facilities.

Land-Based Facilities and IAATO's Position

Currently, IAATO members use a number of facilities for supporting landings and other tourism activities. Jetties and wharves at stations are used for landing passengers. The prepared runway at King George Island

is used by IAATO and non-IAATO members for one- and two-day tourist visits and fly-cruise trips or for medical evacuation. There are proposals to improve flight instrumentation at the airstrip. There has also been an expansion in recent years in overnight accommodation offered for tourist use at National Operator's stations. All these facilities have been developed for National Program use. They have been offered in one way or another to tour operators but, as yet, no facilities have been developed primarily for tourist use. In addition, tented camps have been erected purely for short- and long-term visitor use, though national programmes have occasionally made use of these camps.

What would IAATO members' response be to proposals to construct facilities specifically or primarily for tourism use? Indications from IAATO members show that their response will vary depending on the facility, cost and location. Improved landing facilities at some locations may be perceived as useful and an 'all weather runway' at a suitable location may have commercial benefits.

Members are clear, however, that none is currently interested in promoting or funding the construction of major facilities such as "hotel" accommodation; not only would this conflict with IAATO Bylaws that ensure all activities have a less than minor or transitory impact but there is the potential to contradict the very 'wilderness and aesthetic values' that are a key element in visitors' desire to see Antarctica.

Any construction activity undertaken by a commercial company organized in a Treaty State would most likely need to undertake an environmental assessment, probably at the level of a CEE. There would be ample opportunity for States to comment on the structure during review by the CEP. The relevant State would also likely apply permit or authorization procedures according to its national laws.

It has been demonstrated that for the last 15 to 20 years both ship- and land-based operators have contributed considerably in the support of scientific research for Treaty Parties.

Trends in Land-Based Tourism

The following table shows trends in land-based tourism by company and Antarctic season.

Year	ANI/ALE	DAP	ALCI
2005-06	212	TBA	n/a
2004-05	221	657	n/a
2003-04	119	398	n/a
2002-03	180	n/a	n/a
2001-02	159	n/a	
2000-01	127	n/a	
1999-00	139	n/a	
1998-99	79	n/a	
1997-98	131	n/a	
1996-97	91	n/a	
Totals	1458		n/a

The table represents 10 seasons of data that is easily obtained. ANI/ALE's activities can be found in all of IAATO's past ATCM Overview of Tourism reports. DAP runs a one day fly in, visit Antarctica and fly out as well as an overnight program on King George Island.

IAATO and Land-Based Tourism – a Suggested Way Forward

- 1) Agree the definitions and terms used for land-based tourism;
- 2) Define the use of station facilities in light of land-based tourism;
- 3) Require non IAATO members to provide data on their land-based activities;
- 4) Endorse the concept that all tourism activity is guided by the principle that tourism should have no more than a minor or transitory impact on Antarctica. This may be sufficient to prevent construction of land-based facilities solely for tourist use. Infrastructures that are 'shared' with national programmes, where tourism is used as a means to support science, should be seen in a separate light;
- 5) Prepare a clear management strategy for human activities and visitor guidelines for existing land-based facilities that accommodate tourists.