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## **Update on work to develop a methodology to assess the sensitivity of sites used by visitors**



## Update on work to develop a methodology to assess the sensitivity of sites used by visitors

Information paper submitted by Australia, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States, in conjunction with IAATO

### Summary

This paper provides an update on work to develop a methodology to assess the sensitivity of sites used by visitors, and on planned next steps. Following discussion of this topic at CEP XIX in 2016, suggestions on the further development of the draft methodology for site sensitivity were received from other Members and Observers. The authors plan to revise the methodology, drawing on these suggestions, and then conduct ‘desktop’ testing, in preparation for potential trial application of the methodology in the field.

In addition, the paper briefly considers Recommendation 7 of the 2012 CEP Tourism Study on “‘best estimate’ trigger levels to assist in guiding monitoring efforts”, noting that the ATCM has asked the CEP for advice on this topic, and has scheduled consideration of that advice for 2018.

### Background

The CEP’s report on *Tourism and Non-governmental Activities in the Antarctic: Environmental Aspects and Impacts* (ATCM XXXV/IP33) recommended that a method of assessing the sensitivity of sites to tourist visitation be developed, to inform analyses of relative sensitivity and to assess appropriate management needs. ATCM XXXV (2012) requested the CEP to advance this recommendation as a matter of priority. This is reflected in the CEP 5-year work plan, which identifies addressing the recommendation as a Priority 1 task. A group of members has worked to address this recommendation, reporting at subsequent CEP meetings, including in ATCM XXXVII/WP17, ATCM XXXVII/IP12 and ATCM XXXVIII/IP103.

At CEP XIX in 2016, the meeting discussed ATCM XXXIX/WP16 ‘*A methodology to assess the sensitivity of sites used by visitors: prioritising future management attention*’ (New Zealand, Norway, Australia, and the United States). The paper provided an update on work to develop a simple, readily-applied method for assessing the sensitivity of sites to visits by tourists, with the objective of assisting the CEP to identify those sites that may benefit from further management attention.

In summary, the methodology involved:

- using available information to identify key values/features present at a site;
- applying expert judgement to consider whether there is an appreciable risk that the identified values/features might be affected by ‘normal’ tourism activity (with a definition of ‘normal’ activity provided); and
- using the results to provide an assessment of each site’s sensitivity to disturbance from tourism activity.

During CEP XIX, Members made suggestions for matters to consider in the further development of the methodology, including: the concepts of relative and inherent site sensitivity; the size of the site; likely use of the site; distribution of values on the site; temporal factors; and the importance of evaluating the methodology in the field. The Committee welcomed the report on progress, and encouraged Members and Observers to provide feedback on the approach outlined in the paper (*CEP XIX report*, paragraphs 253-257).

### Update on intersessional work

In the intersessional period, the author group contacted those Members and Observers who provided comments during discussion of WP16 at CEP XIX, to invite further feedback on the draft methodology, including any specific suggestions for changes or improvements.

Suggestions were received in the following broad areas:

- consideration of how the site is actually used by visitors, including consideration of likely interactions between the values of the site and visitor activity;
- consideration of the spatial aspects and arrangement of a site;
- refinement, expansion or additions to the list of values/features listed in the methodology;
- recording and considering additional site characteristics, including physical features or characteristics that may not in themselves represent values;
- assigning weightings or ratings to different values;
- defining the information sources to be used to assess a site;
- providing guidance on, or a definition of ‘appreciable risk’;
- seeking to incorporate activities other than ‘normal’ tourism activity, different intensities of tourism activity, and parameters relating to known tourism activity at the site; and
- taking uncertainty into consideration (dealing with absence of information about the presence of a value, or lack of information about whether a value might be affected).

The author group welcomes the helpful suggestions for improving the methodology, as well as the general support expressed for the concept of a simple, readily-applied method for assessing the sensitivity of sites to visits by tourists.

### **Next steps**

The author group, in consultation with interested Members and Observers, will consider and seek to incorporate the suggestions received into a revised version of the methodology. It is then proposed to conduct ‘desktop’ testing to compare the results generated by the methodology with the expert judgement of those with detailed knowledge of particular sites. This process would likely help identify issues and limitations to help further refine or modify the methodology. Depending on progress with development of the methodology, and resourcing, consideration will also be given to conducting field tests.

The authors would welcome further feedback on the methodology, and would welcome the involvement of interested Members and Observers in advancing this work.

### **Request from the ATCM regarding Recommendation 7 of the CEP tourism study**

ATCM XXXIX, in discussing tourism and non-governmental activities, revisited the recommendations arising from the 2012 CEP Tourism Study, and requested the CEP to “develop a series of ‘best estimate’ trigger levels to assist in guiding monitoring efforts, as outlined in Recommendation 7 of the 2012 CEP Tourism Study” (ATCM XXXIX Final Report para 271). The ATCM has scheduled discussion of CEP advice in response to this request for ATCM XLI (2018), to ‘discuss the advice of the CEP regarding improvement of visitor site monitoring arising from recommendation 7 of the CEP Tourism Study’.

Recommendation 7 stated that ‘*Consideration should be given to developing a series of ‘best estimate’ trigger levels to assist in guiding monitoring efforts. This could include identifying certain parameters (e.g. the number of landed tourists per season at a site) that would, if reached, trigger a need for a review of the effectiveness of current management at the site. Such an approach would be underpinned by the site sensitivity analysis referred to in Recommendation 3 above.*’

The author group notes that, as outlined in Recommendation 7, the identification of trigger levels to guide site monitoring and management efforts would appropriately be informed by an analysis of sites’ sensitivity to visitation. For example, it may be appropriate to prioritise monitoring and management efforts on sites with characteristics that confer greater susceptibility to environmental impacts (i.e. sites that are more ‘sensitive’ to tourist visitation), and which receive a higher level of visitation (e.g. number of tourists landed per season, number of visiting groups per season). The principle of applying site visitation/management arrangements with reference to site characteristics/sensitivity has already been established, to some extent, through Visitor Site Guidelines which often recommend daily limits on the number of landings and

restrictions on landings from vessels carrying more than a certain number of passengers. Accordingly, it would seem appropriate to continue work to further develop the site sensitivity methodology, as a next step relevant to advancing both Recommendation 3 and Recommendation 7.

Additional guidance as a result of site sensitivity assessments, and guidance on the circumstances under which a site might need a review of the effectiveness of current management arrangements (informed by ‘best estimate’ trigger levels), will contribute to a more systematic approach to site management. Overall, the development of practical and implementable arrangements for monitoring and managing site visitation will benefit from broad engagement by stakeholders including scientists, tourism operators and environmental managers.