



ANTARCTIC TREATY
CONSULTATIVE MEETING

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IAATO Draft Operational Procedures for Shallow Water Freediving and Polar Plunging

Attachments:

atcm48_att130_e.pdf: Attachment 1 - IAATO Assessing New Activities Checklist
atcm48_att131_e.pdf: Attachment 2 - IAATO Draft Operational Procedures for Shallow
Water Freediving
atcm48_att132_e.pdf: Attachment 3 - IAATO Draft Operational Procedures for Polar
Plunging
atcm48_att133_e.pdf: Attachment 4 - IAATO Operational Procedures for Underwater
activities
atcm48_att134_e.pdf: Attachment 5 - IAATO Operational Procedures for Submersibles
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1

IAATO Draft Operational Procedures for Shallow Water Freediving and Polar Plunging

Summary

This paper provides information from IAATO about recent draft additions to its operational procedures for activities in Antarctica: *IAATO Draft Operational Procedures for Shallow Water Freediving* and *IAATO Draft Operational Procedures for Polar Plunging*. New operational procedures are created by relevant committees, working groups, or subcommittees within the association, and, as required, in consultation with outside experts. IAATO is also pleased to work collaboratively with Antarctic Treaty Parties with regard to activity guidance they would find helpful during the permitting/authorisation process.

Background

IAATO's suite of operational procedures for responsible activities is integral to advancing the association's mission to promote safe, environmentally responsible private sector travel to Antarctica. As such, all activities are planned to have no more than a minor or transitory impact on the Antarctic environment. This approach aligns with IAATO's view that well-managed activities that avoid disturbance and harmful impacts can create an enriching learning opportunity for visitors.

Since its inception in 1991, IAATO has drawn on both its own guidance and that adopted by the ATCM to support effective visitor management and implementation of the Environment Protocol. In 1992, IAATO first presented its "Guidelines of conduct for Antarctica visitors" to the ATCM (ATCM XVII IP065 *Tourism in Antarctica guidelines for a low-impact presence*, and ATCM XVII IP076 *Responsible tourism in Antarctica*). At ATCM XVIII-1 in Kyoto in 1994, IAATO's "Visitor Guidelines" and "Tour Operator Guidelines" were codified by the Parties into Recommendation XVIII-1.

This early work underpins today's comprehensive suite of tourism management documents. IAATO maintains its operational procedures, along with relevant guidelines and decisions from the ATCM, SCAR, COMNAP and others in its Field Operations Manual (FOM), which is updated at least annually and made available to National Competent Authorities (ATCM 46 (2024) IP104 *IAATO Field Operations Manual (FOM)*). The FOM is essential to ensuring that member Operators and their field staff understand their obligations to conduct safe, environmentally responsible activities in Antarctica and have access to the appropriate documentation to ensure no more than a minor or transitory impact. An abridged version is also publicly available via the newly updated mobile app, IAATO Antarctic Expedition App.

IAATO regularly reviews procedural documents in the FOM, including developing new procedures where needed. This process involves the association's thematic committees, working groups, and subcommittees in consultation with outside experts as required. IAATO reports new procedures and guidelines to the ATCM and CEP, as appropriate (e.g., ATCM 48 CEP 28 IPXXX *A Five-Year Overview and 2025-26 Season Report on IAATO Operator Use of Antarctic Peninsula Landing Sites and ATCM Visitor Site Guidelines*; and ATCM 47 (2025) – CEP 27 IP035 *IAATO Operator Response to High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza*). IAATO also maintains an "Assessing New Activities Checklist" (Attachment 1), developed from ATCM and IAATO requirements, to assist Operators when considering discussions of a new activity with their National Competent Authority.

In this paper, IAATO presents two new operational procedures and offers this update to ATCM 48 – CEP 28 as part of its ongoing, industry-led efforts to strengthen the management of responsible activities.

IAATO Creation of Draft Operational Procedures for Shallow Water Freediving and Polar Plunging

Visitors immersing themselves in Antarctic waters is a tradition dating back to the earliest expedition voyages. While the "polar plunge" remains a consistently offered experience from vessels of all sizes, visitors also immerse themselves through freediving, snorkelling, SCUBA diving and, at times, open-water swimming. These, like all activities in Antarctica, are permitted or authorised in advance of the season by National Competent Authorities through Environmental Impact Assessments, Advance Notifications and, where relevant, Waste Management Permits.

Utilising IAATO's specialised knowledge of SCUBA and other in-water activities, these draft procedures were developed to address the need for further guidance identified by National Competent Authorities.

The following draft operational procedures were presented at IAATO's Annual Meeting in Annapolis, Maryland, USA, April 21-23, 2026:

- *IAATO Draft Operational Procedures for Shallow Water Freediving* (Attachment 2)
- *IAATO Draft Operational Procedures for Polar Plunging* (Attachment 3)

Additionally, IAATO also has other Operational Procedures for prolonged underwater activities such as SCUBA, snorkelling and Submersibles:

- *IAATO Operational Procedures for Underwater activities* (Attachment 4)
- *IAATO Operational Procedures for Submersibles (HOV)* (Attachment 5)

As with any new activity and/or site guidance, the operational procedures will remain in draft form for the following season. While operators are expected to follow the draft guidance to the best of their ability during the upcoming season, this path provides a period of feedback from those in the field, which helps to strengthen the document prior to formal adoption at the following year's IAATO annual meeting (Prague, April 20-22, 2027)

For further information on IAATO activities, see ATCM 46 (2024) IP107 *A Catalogue of IAATO Operator Activities*.