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Reducing Single-Use Plastic and Waste Generated by Polar Tourism

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An Information Paper by IAATO

Summary

The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) and its northern counterpart, the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) have jointly pledged to reduce single-use plastic and microplastics across their areas of operations. This Information Paper provides a brief overview of recent efforts and presents IAATO's new guidelines for visitors; "*Reducing Waste – Guidelines for Visitors to the Antarctic*". IAATO encourages the continued sharing of information, including methods and technologies, to help the Antarctic community to take steps to reduce the use of plastics.

Background

In 2017, IAATO accepted an invitation to become a member of the UN Environment Program (UNEP) Clean Seas Campaign (www.cleanseas.org) along with its sister association in the north, the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO). The campaign is part of a broad strategy to protect oceans and their resources for generations to come. In collaboration with key partners, the campaign targets litter at source and encourages action from stakeholders everywhere. It aims to drastically reduce single-use plastic and microplastics, and to minimize their impact on the environment. This includes securing a global ban on microplastics in personal care and cosmetics products, and changing people's habits when it comes to everyday items like plastic straws, cups and bags.

UNEP invited a select group of 'private sector leaders', including IAATO and AECO, to join the campaign to provide expertise, advice and raise awareness, acknowledging that the reputation of the associations and their market value would be beneficial. Given that AECO and IAATO share the same ambitions to combat plastic waste, they formed a joint working group to share information, maximise success and impact at the poles, and avoid duplicating efforts.

An Update on IAATO's Plastic Reduction Programme

IAATO and AECO have worked jointly together to develop a Plastic (including microplastic) Reduction Programme that includes:

- Auditing ongoing efforts, interest and willingness to develop further;
- Sharing ideas, innovation, best practices and experiences with the wider polar communities. This includes IAATO joining the SCAR Action Group on plastics;
- Developing appropriate guidelines for target audiences in multiple languages;
- Continuing to supporting research into understanding the effects and impacts of plastic pollution;
- Motivating enhanced industry involvement in marine debris removal efforts. IAATO will formally participate in the CCAMLR Marine Debris Programme, commencing in the 2019-2020 season;
- Developing a joint communications strategy to raise awareness and inform about IAATO and AECO efforts and inspire others to follow suit;
- Developing an IAATO environmental policy for greening offices and meetings that will include a brief to send to potential meeting venues and delegates highlighting IAATO expectations for eliminating single-use plastics.

Reducing Waste – IAATO Guidelines for Antarctic Visitors

Ahead of the 2019 Arctic and Antarctic season, AECO and IAATO have introduced new guidelines for visitors to the polar regions that aim to reduce single-use plastics. The guidelines encourage visitors to prepare for their journey by avoiding the use of disposable items, including wet wipes, bottles and products containing microbeads, and to continue environmental efforts on their return home. Member operators will include the guidelines in the pre-departure information distributed to clients prior to the start of their polar journey. IAATO's guidelines, *Reducing Waste – Guidelines for Antarctic Visitors* are included as Attachment 1.

IAATO encourages the continued sharing of information, including methods and technologies, to help the Antarctic community to take steps to reduce the use of plastics.