



**XLII Antarctic Treaty
Consultative Meeting**
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IAATO Mandatory Observer Scheme

Attachments:

Atcm42_att099_e.pdf: Appendix 1: IAATO Observer Report Form for Ship-based Operations with Landings

Atcm42_att100_e.pdf: Appendix 2: IAATO Observer Scheme Guidelines

IAATO Mandatory Observer Scheme

Information Paper Submitted by IAATO

Summary

At its 2019 Annual Meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, IAATO Operators voted unanimously to implement a scheme of periodic mandatory observations of all member operations. This action represents a significant strengthening of IAATO's ongoing efforts to assure itself and other stakeholders that its Operators comply with all IAATO and Treaty policies and procedures. It also creates opportunities for collaboration with parallel suggestions for observer schemes from ATCM representatives [see ATCM XLII WP19 *Antarctic Tourism Workshop, 3-5 April in Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Chair's Summary and Key Recommendations*; and ATCM XLII WP43 *An on-board observer scheme for tourist vessels operating within the Antarctic Treaty area*].

Background

Since its foundation in 1991, IAATO has sought to develop mechanisms to ensure that members practice safe and environmentally responsible private sector travel to Antarctica. A variety of ways to monitor compliance with IAATO and Treaty guidelines have been implemented over the years, but the backbone of IAATO's system of checks on Operators' adherence to guidelines has always been in-field observations conducted by qualified personnel.

For most of IAATO's history, in-field observations have been conducted as part of the membership application process. Companies applying to join IAATO are required to file all necessary forms with the appropriate Competent Authority (sending copies of these forms to IAATO), to make a public presentation at the IAATO Annual Meeting and answer questions from Operators, and to carry an IAATO-approved observer during the first season of operation in Antarctica.

As tourism and tourist activities in Antarctica have expanded in volume and scope, the role of IAATO Observer has grown correspondingly more detailed and complex. As an example, the current IAATO Observer Report Form for Ship-based Operations with Landings runs to 12 pages and comprises 106 open-ended questions. The form is attached as Appendix 1. In addition, IAATO has developed three other checklists – for yachts; for cruise-only operations; and for deep field operations. Each of these is a living document, updated annually as best practices evolve and as new activities become the subject of IAATO procedures and guidelines.

Until 2010, this initial observation leading to membership was the only observation an Operator need participate in (1) so long as they were not involved in an incident that contravened IAATO or Treaty guidelines and (2) so long as they carried passengers to Antarctica at least once every three years. In 2010-11, IAATO introduced an Enhanced Observer Scheme that entailed internal and external checklists of compliance with policies and procedures as well as a voluntary in-field observation. This scheme is described in ATCM XXXIV IP107 *Towards an IAATO Enhanced Observer Scheme*.

The results of the voluntary observations IAATO has conducted since the introduction of the Enhanced Observer Scheme have been very useful both to IAATO and to the Operators who have volunteered. IAATO has been assured that the activities of Operators continue to meet and exceed guidelines and recommendations, and individual Operators uniformly report that they find the scrutiny of an outside observer extremely helpful as a check on their own systems.

Enhanced Observations become Mandatory

Building on the success of this voluntary scheme of enhanced observations, and as part of IAATO's strategy for managing the growth of tourism going forward, Operators voted at the IAATO Annual Meeting in 2018 to endorse the principle of regular mandatory observations of all IAATO operations. At the 2019 Annual Meeting, this principle was implemented in a scheme that establishes a schedule of observations that requires each IAATO Operator's activities to be observed (1) during its first year of operation and (2) at least once every five years subsequently.

This is a significant undertaking. It will require considerable additional effort on the part of IAATO Operators, the IAATO Secretariat, and individual observers. IAATO has dedicated both personnel and financial resources for coordinating these efforts.

IAATO has also agreed Guidelines that define the knowledge and experience required of an IAATO approved Observer and outlines the responsibilities of the three parties – IAATO, the Operator, and the Observer – in the observation process [see Appendix 2]. This mandatory scheme will be rolled out in the 2019-20 season.

Opportunities for Collaboration and Cooperation with Treaty Parties

Any system of operational observation is necessarily resource intensive. It involves identifying and adopting criteria against which to measure performance, recruiting skilled observers, and arranging for and funding their passage to and from the observation site. As a system that is applied across multiple activities on a regular, coordinated basis it also involves establishing mechanisms for receiving, evaluating, and following up on the reports produced. IAATO has made significant progress in all of these areas, and stands ready to share those experiences with Treaty Parties, where useful, and potentially also collaborating and cooperating with Treaty Parties on a scheme of observations that can serve all stakeholders' commitment to further safe and environmentally responsible tourism to Antarctica.