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Report of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO)

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ANTARCTICA TOUR OPERATORS (IAATO) is pleased to present a report of its activities to the XXII ATCM, Tromsø, Norway, 25 May - 5 June 1998 in relation to Article III(2) of the Antarctic Treaty.

IAATO is dedicated to appropriate, safe and environmentally sound private-sector travel to the Antarctic. Over the last year IAATO has focused its activities in several key areas, including membership, environmental assessment and improved exchange of information among its members. IAATO and its members join in celebrating the entry into force of the landmark Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.

1. Introduction

1.1 Founded by seven private tour operators in 1991, the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) now includes 28 member and associate member companies in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Germany, Japan, The Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. A current Membership Directory is included with this report (ATTACHMENT A).

1.2 A total of 9,604 persons traveled to the Antarctic on privately-organized expeditions in the 1997-98 season including 9,378 passengers aboard commercially organized ships, 95 persons on chartered yachts and 131 land-based visitors. This continues a trend, representing a slight increase over the previous highest-ever record number of 9,200 ship-borne visitors and 155 land-based visitors in the 1995-96 season. A summary of tourism is presented as a separate information paper to the XXII ATCM, including an estimate of tourist numbers for the 1998-1999 season.

1.3 IAATO held its annual meeting 10-11 July 1997 in Arlington, Virginia, USA, which was attended by 23 representatives and 14 different tour operators.

1.4 The U.S. National Science Foundation will host the 10th annual meeting for Antarctic tour operators at its headquarters in Arlington, Virginia on July 16th, 1998, celebrating a 10-year tradition of constructive dialogue between the government and private industry. The public meeting draws U.S. government representatives, tour operators, conservation organizations, representatives from other national Antarctic programs and the media.

1.5 To further its educational mission, IAATO inaugurated a comprehensive website in 1997 at iaato.org. The site includes the IAATO Membership Directory, IAATO Bylaws and Recommendation XVIII-1 as well as tourism statistics compiled by the U.S. National Science Foundation. The site also includes links to national programs and other sources of Antarctic information on the internet. IAATO expects to add to the kind and amount of information posted on the site, which will give researchers in particular easy access to tourism data. A plan is in development by IAATO.

1.6 IAATO members value the opportunity to participate at this Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and other international venues. Liaison with national Antarctic programs as well as scientific and environmental organizations is an important objective of IAATO and its members. In addition to the ATCM, IAATO was represented at several workshops and conferences, including the recently concluded

Antarctic Futures Workshop organized by Antarctica New Zealand in Christchurch.

2. Membership

2.1 At its annual meeting, IAATO elected five provisional (new) members: Adventure Associates (AUS), Clipper Cruise Line (USA), Plantour & Partner (Germany), Pelagic Expeditions (UK) and Special Expeditions (USA). Both Special Expeditions and Clipper Cruise Line, previously active in the region, return to the Antarctic in 1998-1999. Adventure Associates has sponsored voyages to the Antarctic since 1991, most recently in conjunction with Quark Expeditions.

2.2 Pelagic Expeditions is the first yacht operator to join IAATO, a significant step in outreach to the charter yacht community. Purpose built for polar expeditions in 1987, *Pelagic* sailed to the Antarctic for its eighth season in 1997-98. Sally Poncet (*Damien III*) and Eric Leyes (*Croisieres Australes*) have both attended the IAATO Meeting in past years and maintain regular contact with the Secretariat.

2.3 Members were also pleased at the participation at the meeting of Japan Euro-Asia Service. JES has indicated its interest in joining IAATO as a full member in 1998-99. With the addition of JES, the five countries with the largest number of its citizens traveling to the Antarctic (U.S., Germany, Australia, U.K., Japan) will all be represented as members of IAATO.

3. Field Coordination

3.1 As part of its annual exchange of operational information, IAATO compiles and distributes Vessel Call Data (ATTACHMENT B).

3.2 Expedition leaders and ship's officers circulate their itineraries and maintain regular contact throughout the season to coordinate visits to individual sites and exchange general information, a key factor in managing Antarctic tourism and mitigating any potential environmental impact.

3.3 This ongoing and routine contact between vessels and with the Adventure Network Emergency and Medical Evacuation Response office in Punta Arenas (EMER) is also a key component of effective emergency response.

3.4 Vessel Call Data is provided as part of the annual exchange of operational information. The information is posted by the COMNAP Secretariat on the COMNAP website for reference by national Antarctic programs.

4. Environmental Impact Assessment

4.1 IAATO members submitted various environmental impact assessments to appropriate national authorities for planned activities for the 1997-1998 season, including Initial Environmental Evaluations to Australia, New Zealand and the U.S.

4.2 IAATO notes that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will hold a public scoping meeting on experience with the Interim Final Rule, "Environmental Impact Assessment of Nongovernmental Activities in Antarctica," on July 15th. The time and venue will be published in the Federal Register.

5. Procedures to Prevent the Introduction of Alien Species

5.1 IAATO looks forward to participating in the workshop announced by Australia at the Antarctic Division headquarters in Hobart, 25 - 28 August, 1998 (XXII ATCM/IP4).

5.2 IAATO members continue the practice of safeguarding against introduction of alien species to Antarctica. Visitors are required to clean their boots and check their clothing before and after each landing. Boot washing stations are standard on all tour vessels.

5.3 Recognizing that tourists are a highly mobile population in the Antarctic, visiting a number of sites within a short time, IAATO looks forward to advice from SCAR and researchers on the best practices to avoid transfer of exotic organisms to Antarctica and translocation of organisms between sites.

6. Reporting of Tourism and Non-Governmental Activities

6.1 Following Resolution 3 (1997) Antarctic tour operators made use of a standard reporting form as adopted by ATCM XXI. Again this season IAATO received a complete set of Post Visit Site Reports from Antarctic tour operators.

6.2 IAATO strongly supports the use of this single form, which reduces the burden of paperwork and facilitates studies of the scope, frequency and intensity of tourist activities. Following the recommendation of the Meeting (Final Report of XXI ATCM, Item 9, para. 90) and after consultation with the U.S. and New Zealand, IAATO is presenting a short paper on its experience with the form this season.

6.3 As part of its ongoing work, IAATO is investigating the development of a database version of the form that will facilitate compilation and analysis of tour data.

6.4 IAATO notes that detailed information on visits to specific Antarctic sites by shipborne tourism has been collected systematically by the U.S. National Science Foundation, tour operators and IAATO since 1987, a valuable data set in any analysis of potential cumulative impact.

7. Relevance of Developments in the Arctic and the Antarctic

7.1 Three IAATO members, including two members of the IAATO Executive, participated in a February 1998 WWF Arctic Tourism Project workshop in Reykjavik.

7.2 The Project has published "Ten Principles for Arctic Tourism" in addition to a "Code of Conduct for Tour Operators in the Arctic" and "Code of Conduct for Arctic Tourists." More information on Arctic tourism and the environment can be found online at www.ngo.grida.no/wwfap.

7.3 Many IAATO members operate programs in the Arctic as well as the Antarctic, including voyages to Baffin Island, Northwest Passage, Greenland, Iceland, Svalbard, Russia and Alaska. Similar measures to protect the environment and minimize potential impact are taken in the Arctic as in the Antarctic.

Apart from the relevance of the Arctic, a similar model of ship-based travel with a large and experienced staff is used in other environmentally sensitive destinations worldwide.

8. Site Assessment

IAATO members thank Oceanites and the Antarctic Site Inventory Project for publication of the *Oceanites Site Guide to the Antarctic Peninsula* and *Compendium of Antarctic Peninsula Visitor Sites* this season. These valuable publications give expedition leaders, IAATO environmental officers and passengers detailed information about individual site characteristics useful in managing site planning and visits. All IAATO vessels and home offices have copies of these reports.

9. Education and Training

9.1 Following the suggestion of the meeting (XXI ATCM Final Report, Item 13, para. 133), the IAATO Secretariat distributed a survey on Education and Training that was developed by COMNAP. The results are presented as an information paper to XXII ATCM. This paper also includes descriptive information on standard staff training programs by IAATO members.

9.2 IAATO notes that the experience of its members, vessels, officers, crew and staff is of key importance to safe and responsible operations.

10. Implementation of Recommendation XVIII-1

10.1 In consultation with COMNAP, individual national Antarctic programs and consultants, IAATO continues to research, develop and use industry-wide programs and standards wherever necessary to ensure self-sufficiency and proper conduct in the Antarctic.

10.2 These initiatives include a medical evacuation contingency plan, standard medical information, slide presentation on "Guidance for Visitors to the Antarctic," and a standardized table of contents for training materials and handbooks. IAATO values its growing and constructive dialogue with COMNAP on these operational issues.

11. Emergency Response Action and Contingency Planning

11.1 All IAATO-member companies have Shipboard Oil Pollution Emergency Plans (SOPEP) in place that satisfy regulation 26 of Annex I of MARPOL. These plans are being tailored for Antarctic operations in light of operational considerations and requirements of the Environmental Protocol.

11.2 Following Resolution 1 (1997), IAATO is presenting a draft information paper on contingency planning to ATCM XXII for comments and discussion. This plan will be discussed in detail at the IAATO annual meeting, July 15 & 17, 1998.

11.3 Abandon ship, fire and other emergency drills are required aboard ship by international maritime law.

12. 1997-98 Scientific and Environmental Research Initiatives

12.1 IAATO member companies continued to provide logistic and scientific support to national Antarctic programs and Antarctic organizations in 1996-97. Members see themselves as a resource for science and welcome the opportunity to assist. Specific requests for logistic or other support should be made to individual members or the IAATO Secretariat. A current directory is attached to this report.

12.2 The primary support to science remains transport of researchers and station personnel, including a major transfer of personnel this season in and out of the U.S. Palmer Station due to late delivery of a USAP vessel. Scientists from Russia and Argentina also traveled aboard member vessels.

12.3 In addition, members of the Antarctic Site Inventory Project were provided with accommodations, transport and access to visitor sites. A representative of In.Fue.Tur traveled as an observer on one voyage this season.

12.4 IAATO members also transported equipment and supplies, including materials for the ongoing refurbishment of Brown Station and the emergency transport of a refrigerated container at Arctowski Station to Ushuaia for repairs. Scientific equipment was also transported from Fremantle to Davis Station.

12.5 The Russian Antarctic Expedition chartered the *Multanovskiy* for work in the Antarctic.

In addition to support for science programs, tour operators and passengers continued their tradition of direct financial contributions to organizations active in Antarctica, including the Scott Polar Research Institute, UK Antarctic Heritage Trust, Antarctic Heritage Trust, South Georgia Whaling Museum and Humpback Whale Identification Project.

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