ASOC Report to the ATCM

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Information Paper submitted by ASOC

Introduction

ASOC is pleased to be attending the XLIII Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. This report briefly describes ASOC’s work over the past two years.

ASOC’s Secretariat is in Washington, DC, USA, and its website is [https://www.asoc.org](https://www.asoc.org/). ASOC has 23 member groups representing a wide range of ATS countries. We are pleased to report that three new groups have joined since the 2019 ATCM: Blue Marine Foundation, Global Choices, and World Parks Inc.

Intersessional activities

Since the XLII ATCM in Prague in 2019, much has changed in the Antarctic world. While the 2019 CCAMLR meeting was held in person, the 2020 ATCM meeting was cancelled, and CCAMLR was held virtually for the first time in its history. This necessitated significant changes to ASOC’s work. Although our international team is used to connecting virtually, not having periodic occasions to meet in person has dramatically changed our work.

Online engagement

For example, last year, during the time period that the ATCM would have been held, we prepared a variety of social media content under the theme “ATCM Week” to share with the public. This included interviews with ATCM experts, infographics, and animations on climate change in the Antarctic. The animations, which were in Spanish and English, were produced by the Chilean Antarctic Institute (INACH), who graciously partnered with ASOC so that we could share them on social media simultaneously and reach a wider audience.

ASOC also hosted two well-attended webinars on Antarctic issues, *What’s holding back protection of the Antarctic Ocean?* and *The future of Antarctic Peninsula protection.* The webinars included panellists with a variety of backgrounds in policy, science, industry and nature photography who provided a diverse range of perspectives on how to protect the Antarctic environment. Many audience members subsequently provided feedback expressing their appreciation for the interesting and at times provocative discussions.

ASOC presented at the virtual SCAR meeting and the virtual Polar Law Symposium. ASOC also participated in the virtual CCAMLR meeting in October of 2020. During the meeting, as a substitute for the usual reception that we sponsor, we invited delegates to virtual film festival featuring several short films on Antarctica.

In April 2021, The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Wilson Center’s Polar Institute convened an online expert working group of Antarctic scientists from a range of disciplines to explore how changes in the Southern Ocean impact global climate regulation, marine ecosystems, and human communities, and to explore the short-term management and government actions needed to address climate risks.

ASOC plans to have a public virtual event later in the year to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Protocol.

Support for policy-relevant science

WWF supported the Retrospective Analysis of Antarctic Tracking Data (RAATD) project led by SCAR, with support from the Centre de Synthèse et d'Analyse sur la Biodiversité, France. RAATD is an impressive demonstration of the spirit of international cooperation of Antarctic science, bringing together 4060 individual animal tracks from 17 predator species including humpback whales, emperor penguins, southern elephant seals and wandering albatross collected by more than 70 scientists across 12 national Antarctic programmes. While this work is expected to be helpful in the design of marine protected areas (MPAs) it can also be useful for understanding which coastal and terrestrial areas habitats are critical to Antarctic species, and therefore inform ATCM action as well.

Greenpeace undertook an expedition with two of its vessels, facilitating research on declining chinstrap populations in relatively remote colonies, recording a decline of up to 70% in some areas. It also exposed the underlying issues with regulation of transhipment activities, observing a number of transhipments around the South Orkney Islands and releasing a report, Fishy Business, detailing the many problems it has encountered in this area.

Engagement with other organizations

ASOC continues to engage in the virtual meetings of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) through ASOC members with Consultative Status at the IMO, with a focus on the development of safety measures for non-SOLAS vessels, in particular fishing vessels and private yachts operating in polar waters. Guidelines for fishing vessels over 24m in length (i.e. all Southern Ocean fishing vessels) and for private yachts of 300 gross tonnage and above and not engaged in commercial trade have recently been adopted. These Guidelines are of importance to ship operations south of 60oS since over 50% of vessels qualify as non-SOLAS vessels and it will be important that ATPs and ATCPs encourage the application of the IMO guidelines to fishing vessels and private yachts sailing south of 60oS. ASOC continues to engage in the IMO’s work to introduce mandatory navigation and voyage planning provisions for these same vessels, and also in other aspects of IMO’s work that will have relevance to vessel operations in the Southern Ocean including addressing marine plastic litter, underwater noise and ships’ climate (CO2 and black carbon) emissions.

Greenpeace, Pew and WWF have worked with the Association of Responsible Krill Operators (ARK) and a number of independent scientists to review the voluntary restricted zones agreed by the krill industry in 2018, including agreeing an expansion to an area closed year-round around Hope Bay.

Concluding remarks

The pandemic has undoubtedly made the work of the ATCM more difficult. However, along with the 30th anniversary of the Protocol, the pandemic gives us a reason to reflect on our current relationship with the natural world. The signing of the Protocol was a watershed moment for environmental protection. The world is now reckoning with new, urgent threats to the entire planet. ASOC believes the ATCM and the Protocol have a vital role to play in responding to these threats. One message we have been pleased to receive during our enhanced online engagement with the public is that Antarctic continues to inspire people all over the world. Even if they have not visited in person, they are fascinated by the region and its incredible species and want it to remain intact. Likewise, it has been rewarding to see the dedication and commitment of colleagues, including our fellow Observers and Experts, who have found creative ways to continue doing work related to the ATCM and CEP despite the limitations of the pandemic.

ASOC is looking forward celebrating the anniversary of the Protocol this year, and urges ATCPs, and the ATS as a whole, to not only reflect on the Protocol’s successes, but recommit to its implementation. If we are to address the challenges and threats to the health of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, the ATCM and CCAMLR must increase their ambition and adopt new comprehensive protection measures such as MPAs and ASPAs. We have no doubt that it is possible to ensure that the next thirty years are even more successful than the first thirty, but only with sufficient political will.

In closing, ASOC would also like to express our deepest sympathies to the family of Adrian Dahood-Fritz, who passed away in a tragic accident in September of 2019. A brilliant scientist as well as a dedicated ATCM rapporteur, Adrian was well known to many of us within ASOC and we will greatly miss her passion for Antarctica.