Report about 2020-2021   
Antarctic Summer Campaign   
Uruguayan National Antarctic Program

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Information Paper submitted by Uruguay

Summary

On the occasion of the XLIII Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and XXIII Committee for the Protection of the Environment, the Uruguayan National Antarctic Program, through its Manager, the Instituto Antártico Uruguayo, is pleased to share the main activities developed within the framework of the 2020-2021 Antarctic Summer Campaign.

During 2020, the Uruguayan Antarctic National Program´s authorities implemented restrictions and protocols to crew and scientific who travelled to Antarctica, including mandatory PCR testing and additionally isolation time before take-off.

The Uruguayan National Antarctic Program worked on three protocols applicable to the Artigas Station (BCAA), Logistics and crew to carry out a safe and preventive campaign. The main summer campaign objective was limited to a regular supply, maintenance mission and an essential scientific activity.

With all the measures taken, Uruguay has largely succeeded in keeping the coronavirus out of its Antartic Scientific Station.

Despite the Campaign achieved, our program remains cautious SARS-CoV-2 highlights the existing vulnerabilities in Antarctica and may produce new challenges, so the main objective for Uruguay is to be preventive and cautious in the measures taken.

Operative organization of Antarkos XXXVII Expedition

The coordination of the Campaign operations within the framework of Covid-19 was very difficult, due to the uncertainty, the possible infection and the budget recession that the country had to adopt. In this sense, our program took the decision to close the Uruguayan seasonal station "T/N Ruperto Elichiribehety" (ECARE), and to require the Hercules C-130 aircraft of the Uruguayan Air Force to carry out the Antarctic operations in Artigas Station (BCAA).

Uruguay had to make a historic decision throughout the Antarctic activity, which was to coordinate direct 24-hour flights. In 24 hours, flights were made from Montevideo (Uruguay) to Antarctica and from Antarctica to Punta Arenas (Chile) to Montevideo.

The first departure date was 16th of December, transferring from Montevideo to BCAA summer and winter crew, technicians, working groups, scientists and logistic cargo.

On January 4th, 2021 the second flight was performed, transferring from Montevideo to Artigas Station, logistic cargo and re-deploying personnel (incoming and outcoimng crew, scientists and technicians that had been deployed in the 1st flight).

The third stage was on April 13th, 2021, transferring cargo from Montevideo to Artigas Station and returning to the country technicians and scientists who are not part of the winter crew.

Finally, during the third stage, the winter crew was inoculated with the covid-19 vaccine, highlighting the support of the doctor from the Russian Bellingshausen Station.

**Scientific and technological activities during the 2020-2021 summer campaign**

Scientific activity was also reduced due to logistical and operational factors during this campaign. Even so, the projects and research carried out were consistent with their quality and objectives. In this sense, 9 National Projects were approved for the 2020-2021 campaign (7 Scientific Projects and 2 Environmental Monitoring Projects) focusing on three important scientific aspects: geosciences, life sciences and environmental monitoring.

Regarding technologies, Artigas Station has improved during this austral summer its communication capabilities with the launching of a new Intelsat 21 satellite channel in Ku band, with direct connection to 6Mbps Internet.

This upgrade improves data transmission capabilities to support real-time signal acquisition. In particular, its intended use is the observation of seismic and earthquake data.

In addition, the remaining bandwidth will improve the convenience and social communication of the hibernation equipment.

General overview of Antarctic cooperation 2020-2021

Although the Covid-19 pandemic has fostered a sense of local control around the world, in Antarctic affairs there has been an extraordinary sense of community, a sense that we are all in this together, one case, one death, one infection in Antarctica is everyone's case.

Antarctic cooperation has also been reduced this season, but Uruguay understands that the prevailing factor is the recession in logistical, operational and scientific activity of all the Parties in order not to expose the continent.

Cooperation is a fundamental pillar of the Antarctic Treaty. In the 2020-2021 summer campaign, cooperation focused on research projects and logistical support. In this Antarctic campaign, through the coordination of the Instituto Antártico Uruguayo, work was carried out in the following scientific projects (Evaluation of the structure of the soundscape and the impact of anthropogenic noise on Ardley Island (Maxwell Bay), AntarPLAST, Penguins as sentinels of anthropogenic impact and climate change in the Antarctic ecosystem, and Multicompartmental study of contaminants in the Fildes Peninsula), in particular two of them were supported by researchers from Argentina and Spain who were working from Artigas Station.

Regarding logistical support, Uruguay is especially grateful to Brazil (Brazilian Antarctic Program) and Chile (Chilean Antarctic Program) for their support in the framework of the operational and logistical needs during the summer campaign.

General Conclusions

There are large differences in how Parties deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, Uruguay supports the exchange of experiences among the Parties, the measures adopted, the activities developed within the framework of an Antarctic Campaign, the information is important to make known the experiences of the different countries so that others can learn from these experiences and improve the actions in the Antarctic Treaty Area.