Summary of the intersessional discussion on inspection reports under Article VII of the Antarctic Treaty and Article 14 of the Environment Protocol

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Information Paper submitted by Norway and Spain

***Summary***

ATCPs, Observers’ and Experts’ intersessional review of the reports from the inspections carried out by Australia and the United Stated in 2019-2020 Antarctic season underscored the value of inspections to enhance compliance with the environmental protection standards and to improve logistical aspects of Parties’ Antarctic activities. The amount of work, resources, logistics and effort that went into preparing and undertaking these inspections was also highly valued. The participants noted the importance to keep updated the information in COMNAP database to ensure easy and safe communications and the use of the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES) to keep an updated record of activities, installations and equipment present in the Antarctic Treaty Area.

CEP Members’ and Observers’ intersessional review of the reports from the inspections carried out by Australia and the United States in the 2019-20 Antarctic season concluded that the two inspections had shown that there generally speaking is a high commitment to the environmental aspects of station operations at most stations, in accordance with the goals, provisions and standards of the Protocol. Members and Observers commented on the importance of the inspection instrument, noting the importance of maintaining transparency and exchanging information regarding all activities in Antarctica. The desirability of an active use of the [EIES](https://eies.ats.aq) was noted in this context. They also encouraged inspected Parties to pay attention to the recommendations made in the reports to allow improvements of the environmental aspects of their activities.

***Introduction***

During the austral summer 2019/2020, Australia and the United Stated conducted inspection activities under Article VII of the Antarctic Treaty and Article 14 of the Environment Protocol. After the cancellation of the XLIII ATCM in Finland 2020, it was decided to open two forums, with separate threads for ACTM and CEP respectively, devoted to discussion and consultation among Parties on the inspection reports. The Antarctic Treaty Secretariat opened the forums in June 2020, one to Consultative Parties, Non-Consultative Parties, Observers and Experts the other to CEP Members and Observers. The inspecting Parties, Australia and the United States, posted their respective inspection reports in early August 2020. This paper include the summaries of the intersessional discussions on these inspection reports.

Summary of ATCM forum

Comments from three Parties were received, Argentina, Chile and South Africa. All participants thanked Australia and the United States for their very clear and thorough reports presented and underscored the value of inspections to enhance compliance with the environmental protection standards and to improve logistical aspects of Parties’ Antarctic activities. The amount of work, resources, logistics and effort that went into preparing and undertaking these inspections was also highly valued.

In relation to the inspected Parties, participants highlighted the cooperative spirit of all stations visited and their strong commitment to realizing their activities under the Antarctic Treaty’s norms and compliance with the Protocol. Participants also encouraged inspected Parties to pay attention to the recommendations made in the reports to allow improvements of the logistical and environmental aspects of their activities.

Specifically on the inspection reports, participants noted the importance:

* To keep updated the stations’ contact information in all databases of the System -particularly COMNAP’s, to ensure easy and safe communications.
* That progress on all activities -including any type of construction or improvement- be consistent with CEE´s and advice provided by the CEP.

Participants also stressed the need to encourage:

* An adequate communication of systems and protocols between nearby stations, as a way to enhance cooperation and assist in cases of contingencies or emergencies.
* An improved use of the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES) to keep an updated record of activities, installations and equipment present in the Antarctic Treaty Area and to provide timely information’s to the ATS and CEP concerning new construction or substantive repairs according to the Protocol.
* The sharing of Parties’ good practices and challenges in the operationalization of the use of new technologies, and in the management of unused facilities.

In addition, participants have recognized:

* The logistical collaboration with the inspection teams from third Parties which allowed both for a reduction of the impact of deployment in the field, as well as for a sensible cost reduction.
* The high standards of compliance of the inspected facilities: in particular improved water treatment facilities, increased use of renewable energy sources, modernization of waste treatment facilities, automation technologies and general prioritization of science.
* The efforts of the Parties inspected to consider innovative and more efficient approaches for the new constructions and operations in Antarctica, and the common challenge to address environmental issues associated with older stations to reduce negative impacts on the Antarctic environment.
* The information’s share in reports concerning the management of hazardous material and waste of facilities visited.

Finally, participants pointed out that they:

* May wish to collectively consider some kind of coordination procedure between Parties that inform they will be conducting inspections, so as to avoid repetition of inspections of the same stations in any one season, and
* Share some concerns about the management of potentially hazardous waste in some facilities as describe in the reports.

The inspecting Parties thanked all comments received to their reports on the Antarctic Treaty inspections conducted in early 2020.

Summary of CEP forum

Five Members (Belarus, Chile, France, India, Republic of Korea and South Africa) and one Observer (ASOC) have provided comments on the environmental aspects of the reports.

Two of the inspected Parties (Republic of Korea and Belarus) responded and acknowledged the comments posted during the review, and one of these (Republic of Korea) provided detailed responses to specific comments and questions raised. These responses are available on the CEP Discussion Forum for Members to review and consider.

Both the inspecting Parties noted Members’ and Observers’ insightful comments on the environmental aspects of their report and were pleased to receive positive remarks on their respective inspection reports.

Participating Members and Observers thanked Australia and the United States for their very clear and thorough reports presented and underscored the value of inspections to enhance compliance with the environmental protection standards. *They also encouraged inspected Parties to pay attention to the recommendations made in the reports to allow improvements of the environmental aspects of their activities*.

Themes and observations of a general nature regarding environmental aspects of the inspections that came across during the discussion are highlighted in the paragraph below. The many detailed comments that were made on specifics relating to the various stations remain available on the CEP Discussion Forum as reference and for consideration for both the inspected Parties, as well as other Parties.

An overarching conclusion the participants acknowledged was that the two inspections had shown that there generally speaking is a high commitment to the environmental aspects of station operations at most stations, in accordance with the goals, provisions and standards of the Protocol. Specifically, the participants commented on the following encouraging observations drawn from the inspection reports:

* Participants commented positively on the inspection observations that there seems to be a match between operations and mitigations measures at the newer stations and the environmental impact assessments prepared for the installations, eg. the Comprehensive Environmental Evaluations (CEE).
* Participants noted with appreciation the level of scientific engagement and collaboration in research between stations located in the same region. Jang Bogo and Mario Zucchelli station were particularly highlighted in this regard. *Participants nevertheless underlined the desire to see even further increased cooperation, specifically also with regard to data sharing and publications*.
* The high focus on and use of renewable energy at many of the stations was commended, and *Parties were encouraged to share their good practices and challenges in the operationalization of the use of these new technologies*.
* The well advanced waste management practices at most of the stations was noted positively, although sharing concerns about some aspects of waste handling, in particular potentially hazardous waste, at some of the stations.
* The participants noted the numerous good examples of innovative and safe handling and storage of fuel, but noted that additional efforts would be required at some of the stations to decrease risks of spills further.
* The clever use of seawater at several of the stations was highlighted, although at the same time noting the lack of information regarding amount of and handling of by-products (brine) in most of these cases.
* Participants supported the efforts relating to management underpinning the proposed new ASPA at Inexpressible Island, and commending the cooperation between China, Italy and the Republic of Korea in this regard.
* Several participants commented on the ongoing environmental monitoring as well as regular reporting to the ATCM concerning the runway under construction near Mario Zucchelli Station, *and encouraged Italy to continue to keep the ATCM informed on progress*.

While the general gist of comments were positive and highlighting encouraging environmental sensitive management and operations at the stations, a few issues emerged as a common concern by those who participated in the review. Specifically, they pointed to the following challenges and issues:

* While recognizing that good practices were in place, participants underscored the importance of stations being vigilant and careful in operating greenhouse facilities, noting that using soil (non-sterile) and seeds is a huge invasive species risk which must be handled accordingly.
* Several participants commented on the status of the CEE process for the new station at Inexpressible Island, noting that the final CEE should be completed and submitted as soon as possible.
* Recognizing that Parties have a common challenge in addressing environmental issues associated with older stations such as the inspected Molodezhnaya, participants nevertheless underscored that removal, remediation, repair or re-use of the station to reduce the risk of further environmental impacts should be regarded as a priority, even if it represent a very considerable logistic and environmental management challenge. *Participants encouraged the exchange of information about good practices for the management of unused facilities*.

Finally, participants commented on the importance of the inspection instrument, noting the importance of maintaining transparency and exchanging information regarding all activities in Antarctica. The desirability of an active use of the [EIES](https://eies.ats.aq) was noted in this context.