ASOC Report to the ATCM

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Information Paper submitted by ASOC

Introduction

ASOC is pleased to be attending the XLIV Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. This report briefly describes ASOC’s work over the last year.

ASOC’s Secretariat is located in Washington, DC, USA, and its website is [https://www.asoc.org](https://www.asoc.org/). ASOC has 21 member organizations active in a wide range of Antarctic Treaty countries who are committed to the preservation of Antarctica as a place for peace and science. We are pleased to report that the organizations Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) and SeaLegacy have recently joined ASOC.

During the intersessional period, there were a number of important developments in global environmental protection. New targets for protecting 30% of the land and ocean were agreed at the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in December 2022. This landmark achievement was followed by the adoption of a draft text for a new international legally-binding instrument under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ treaty). However, these important milestones must be viewed in the context of the accelerating climate crisis. The latest AR6 report from the IPCC provides sobering details on the serious impact that climate change is having on our planet, reinforcing the need for immediate action to reduce climate impacts.

This year, the ATCM celebrates the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Madrid Protocol. The Protocol continues to serve as a reminder of the tremendous accomplishments that can occur when nations set aside their short-term interests in the service of long-term environmental preservation. The Protocol remains relevant today, but ATCPs must continue to implement its tools effectively, including through designating new protected areas to meet global 30% protection targets and through protecting vulnerable species such as the emperor penguin.

*Intersessional Activities*

ASOC and its member organizations have been involved in a wide range of activities relevant to Antarctic governance and science during the intersessional period.

WWF held a workshop on *Antarctic governance and China’s participation* in Qingdao, China in September 2022. The workshop enabled researchers and government officials to engage on key Antarctic issues.

Pew Bertarelli supported the SCAR Krill Expert Group in hosting its March 2023 virtual workshop on the development of a stock hypothesis for Antarctic krill. Furthermore, Pew Bertarelli worked with ASOC and other partners to launch the first ever World Krill Day on August 11, 2022. Pew activities included a question-and-answer feature with krill scientist Dr. Kim Bernard, a quiz about krill, 8 facts about krill, and ample social and traditional media coverage. Pew and ASOC worked together with Citizens Institute for Environmental Studies (CIES) in Korea to hold an education webinar for the first World Krill Day featuring a variety of krill experts. Plans are underway for the next World Krill Day on August 11, 2023.

ASOC and several of its members attended the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. ASOC member the International Cryosphere Climate Initiative coordinated the Cryosphere Pavilion, which hosted nearly 20 side events focused on Antarctica and/or the Southern Ocean in relation to climate change; with exhibits for negotiators on ice sheets and sea-level rise as well as impacts on polar ocean fisheries.

ASOC and its members also participated actively in relevant international meetings during the intersessional period, including the United Nations Ocean Conference, the intergovernmental conferences to develop the BBNJ treaty, and Our Ocean in Panama. ASOC also participated in numerous meetings of the International Maritime Organization, including the Marine Environment Protection and Maritime Safety Committees and a number of sub-committees to progress work to improve the implementation of the Polar Code in the polar regions, and to address the loss of plastic fishing gear and update guidance on reducing underwater noise.

ASOC participates as stakeholder/partner in SCAR’s AntICON (Integrated Science to Inform Antarctic and Southern Ocean Conservation), in several international tourism research projects coordinated by the Netherlands Polar Program (ATCM XLV/BG 02), and in various educational activities, including the 2023 edition of the Appel des Pôles/Call of the Poles in France.

Throughout the past twelve months, ASOC contributed to intersessional discussions at the online ATCM and CEP fora including discussions on climate change, protected areas, and tourism, and attended the recent workshop on tourism in Paris. Additionally, ASOC appreciates working with other observers and experts including SCAR, IAATO, and COMNAP.

*Support for policy-relevant science and science communications*

ASOC and its members continue to support a wide range of Antarctic research.

WWF supported research to further our understanding of Antarctic krill’s role in the Southern Ocean ecosystem and global carbon cycle. This research was published in a WWF Report, *Antarctic krill: Powerhouse of the Southern Ocean,* which was launched in October 2022. WWF has also provided support to the Wildlife from Space initiative, led by the British Antarctic Survey, which recently discovered a previously unknown emperor penguin colony at Verleger Point using satellite technology.

In February 2023, WWF and University of California Santa Cruz (USA) partnered with Intrepid Travel to conduct research on baleen whales around the Antarctic Peninsula that will help to further our understanding of their distribution, movement and critical foraging habitats.

A new Pew funded [study](https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ecs2.4083) led by Dr. Victoria Warwick-Evans at the British Antarctic Survey provided the first up to date estimate of the amount of Antarctic krill eaten by a variety of predators in the region, including an estimate that two species of baleen whales consume an estimated 2.1 million tonnes (likely an underestimate) of krill during a single Antarctic summer whereas the fishery that operates in the same area catches 155,000 tonnes of krill per year.

New Pew Bertarelli funded [research](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0964569123001059) led by Vasco Chávez-Molina dives into Southern Ocean applications of managing for climate resilient fisheries and finds that the following tools could be employed for the Southern Ocean: climate models, marine protected areas and dynamic stock assessments.

Research conducted by Greenpeace on its Antarctic expedition in 2021-2022 led to the identification and subsequent designation of seven new vulnerable marine ecosystem areas (VMEs) by CCAMLR in 2022.

In partnership with the Blue Nature Alliance, ASOC supported a number of Antarctic research projects, which included projects on synthesizing existing MPA design using recently acquired data; identifying ecologically and biologically significant areas in the Southern Ocean, and developing an ecoregionalization of the eastern Sub-Antarctic region.

ICCI released its 2022 [State of the Cryosphere Report](file:///Users/claire/Downloads/iccinet.org/statecryo22) in November at COP27, including chapters and research updates on the Antarctic ice sheet as well as Southern Ocean acidification, warming and freshening.

*Concluding remarks*

ASOC and its member organizations are proud to support the Antarctic Treaty System, which prioritizes peace and environmental protection. However, the ATS must not be complacent. Human activities are increasing in the Antarctic, and ATCPs have both the authority and the responsibility to ensure that those activities do not exacerbate the effects of climate change. There is an urgent need to establish new protected areas, regulate shipping and tourism, reduce the footprint of science and tourism, and protect vulnerable species. We are encouraged by recent activities such as the Paris informal workshop on Antarctic tourism, and hope that Parties will move beyond discussion to action.