Infrastructure supporting tourism and other non-governmental activities in Antarctica

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**Summary**

ATCM XLIV (§ 229 of the Final Report) agreed to continue an Intersessional Contact Group (ICG) on permanent facilities for tourism and other non-governmental activities in Antarctica. In three rounds of discussions, the ICG made an inventory of existing permanent and semi-permanent infrastructure currently used or co-used for tourism and other non-governmental activities, exchanged views on possible concerns relating to such facilities and discussed the question of whether the ATCM should take action on the issue. The report of the ICG is an attachment to this WP and should be considered together with the proposal for a draft Resolution text in this WP.

1. **Introduction**

During the 2021-22 ICG and ATCM XLIV several Parties and experts noted, that where Resolution 5 (2022) focuses on preventing the construction and/or exploitation of permanent infrastructure used exclusively for tourism and other non-governmental activities over multiple seasons, the broader issue of infrastructure supporting tourism and other non-governmental activities deserves further discussion. Therefore, ATCM XLIV decided that the ICG should continue its work to address this issue.

The report attached to this WP summarises the lively and productive discussions, to which a large number of Parties and experts contributed : Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Germany, Norway, United Kingdom, United States of America, ASOC and IAATO.

Discussions focused on developing an inventory of infrastructure supporting tourism and other non-governmental activities, discussing potential concerns as well as potential policy responses for consideration by ATCM XLV.

1. **An inventory of infrastructure supporting tourism and other non-governmental activities in Antarctica**

Generally, participants indicated that they would welcome the establishment of an inventory of permanent and semi-permanent or temporary infrastructure in Antarctica.

Based on the ICG discussions, the following categories of infrastructure have been distinguished for the purpose of making the inventory, attached to the ICG-report as an annex:

1. Permanent infrastructure, originally and currently primarily dedicated to **science** (e.g., research stations, set up and run under the auspices of a National Program), which is **co-used** to any extent**[[1]](#footnote-1)** to support tourism and other non-governmental activities and **allowing for overnight stays**;
2. Permanent infrastructure, originally and currently or formerly primarily dedicated to **science** (e.g., research stations, set up and run under the auspices of a National Program), which **only allows for limited number of guided tours** of the facility and/or for **providing information** to tourists;
3. Permanent and semi-permanent/temporary infrastructure for **logistical support**, used or co-used to any extent to support tourism and other non-governmental activities (e.g., logistical facilities set up and run either under the auspices of a National Program, or by a non-governmental actor);
4. **Permanent** infrastructure originally **destined** for tourism and other non-governmental activities and not falling within categories A to C.
5. **Semi-permanent and temporary** infrastructure, originally **destined** for tourism and other non-governmental activities (e.g., land based, deep field camps and associated logistical infrastructure that are run by a non-governmental actor).

ICG participants suggested different approaches for updating the overview with the aim of avoiding a static, one off inventory. The conveners have followed suggestions and consulted the Secretariat on this issue. It was confirmed that all the necessary information can be included in the EIES and that the repository may be updated on the basis of the EIES.

1. **Concerns relating to such infrastructure, including, for instance, environmental concerns and pressure on the search and rescue capacity of national programs**

Contributions to the ICG indicated that participants are keen to engage in developing more coherent and robust policies in relation to tourism and NGO land-based infrastructure in Antarctica.

In the final report of the ICG to ATCM XLIV (WP36), a number of concerns relating to permanent infrastructure for tourism and other non-governmental activities have been identified. Most participants in the current ICG 2022-23 expressed the view that these concerns also apply to infrastructures, and some additional concerns have been raised.

These additional concerns relate to the level of activity (e.g., skiing, hiking, etc.) and ‘potential civilization problems’ (waste, sewage, emissions and noise) that permanent and semi-permanent/ temporary infrastructure for tourism implies. It was also noted that concerns did not only relate to new infrastructure for tourism and other non-governmental activities but also to already existing infrastructure originally designed for the support of National Programs and currently also supporting tourism .

From the discussion, it became apparent that in current situations there is often a mix of governmental and NGO activities, which may hinder governance responses.

A number of concerns that should be dealt with as a matter of priority have been proposed in the ICG, including on cumulative impacts on ecosystems and wilderness values, a lack of spatial planning to prevent expansion, risks of negative effects on scientific research and/or scientific values of Antarctica, the potential assertion of property rights or ‘rights to use’ and related concepts (e.g., lease), the increase of complexity of ownership structures and related questions, for instance in relation to liability, and increasing air traffic and related emissions to and from Antarctica, as well as related concerns on Search & Rescue capacity.

1. **Proposals for the ATCM**

Based on the very constructive ICG discussions and on the conclusions contained in the ICG-report, and with a view to ensuring transparency in tourism developments in Antarctica and to promote progress in Antarctic tourism governance, the Netherlands, as convener of the ICG has formulated three lines for possible ATCM action:

* Initiating further research and discussion on a number of sub-topics;
* The establishment of an inventory of infrastructure for tourism and other non-governmental activities in Antarctica to increase transparency regarding developments (component of a Resolution);
* Taking non-legally binding action that on the one hand sets certain limits to the further increase of (co-)use of infrastructure (either originally designed for science, logistics or tourism) for tourism and other non-governmental activities in Antarctica, while allowing space for governments to develop their own policy, regarding (co-)use of infrastructure for science, e.g. in the context of National Programs..

This results in the following proposals to the ATCM:

1. **The inclusion in the ATCM Multi-Year Strategic Work Plan** of:

* An analysis of the development of air traffic to and in Antarctica to support governmental as well as tourism and other non-governmental activities;
* An analysis of risks and benefits from the perspective of SAR of infrastructure for tourism and other non-governmental activities in Antarctica;
* An analysis of (potential) property issues and related issues, such as liability;
* An analysis of the interconnection between governmental and non-governmental use of infrastructure in Antarctica;
* An identification of currently inviolate areas where semi-permanent facilities for tourism and other non-governmental should not be allowed

1. **The adoption of the following Resolution:**

Resolution … (2023)

Infrastructure for tourism and other non-governmental activities in Antarctica

The **Representatives**,

*Recalling* the designation of Antarctica as a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science in Article 2 and the Environmental Principles contained in Article 3 of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty;

*Also recalling* thatResolution 5(2007) and Resolution 7(2009) referred to the need to avoid that tourism activities contribute to the long-term degradation of the Antarctic environment and values.

*Noting* that Resolution 5 (2022) recommended applying restrictions on the construction and/or exploitation of facilities supporting tourism, where its construction, operations or removal is expected to have more than a minor or transitory impact on the Antarctic environment and values;

*Desiring* to take a pragmatic and precautionary approach in order to prevent wilderness degradation in Antarctica, as agreed in Resolution 7(2009);

*Noting also* the desirability of making available and accessible updated and reliable information on the infrastructure supporting tourism and other non-governmental activities in Antarctica, with the aim of ensuring transparency in tourism developments and promoting progress in Antarctic tourism governance

Recalling Resolutions 5(2007), 7(2009) and 5(2022);

**Recommend** to their governments:

1. To establish, through the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES), a repository of infrastructure supporting tourism and other non-governmental activities in Antarctica, following the model annexed to this Resolution, considering that the inclusion of any infrastructure in this repository does not necessarily imply that this infrastructure and/or its use is legitimized;
2. To request the Secretariat to produce a summarized report and a downloadable table, based on the information provided by Parties to the relevant section of the EIES as detailed in Decision XX (2023), post them publicly on its website and keep them updated;
3. To make every effort to prevent, and not authorise, permit or approve for the expansion of tourism and other non-governmental activities:
   * new situations in which research stations allow co-use for tourism and other non-governmental activities, as meant in category A of the repository;
   * increase in size or capacity of existing permanent infrastructure for tourism or other non-governmental activities, as meant in category D of the repository;
   * the establishment of new semi-permanent and temporary infrastructure for tourism or other non-governmental activities, as meant in category E of the repository, in inviolate areas of Antarctica;
4. That for existing situations as meant in category A of the repository, involved governments are invited to consider setting a maximum ratio of NAP staff/ tourists, and are encouraged to not allow further expansion of co-use for tourism and other non-governmental activities;
5. That their governments, when establishing or authorising new facilities for logistical scientific support, clearly indicate as early as possible in the process whether co-use for tourism and/ or other non-governmental activities is considered appropriate and, if applicable, to identify a limit to the level of such co-use.

1. In the context of this WP and attached report, co-use refers to a secondary function of a facility, less than 50% of the facility activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)