Australian Antarctic Treaty and Environmental Protocol inspections: January/February 2020

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**Information Paper submitted by Australia**

Summary

In January 2020, Australian observers conducted inspections of six Antarctic Stations: Jang Bogo Station (Republic of Korea); Inexpressible Island facility (China); Gondwana Station (Germany); Taishan camp (China); Molodezhnaya Station (Russian Federation); and Mountain Evening Station (Belarus). The inspections of Jang Bogo, Inexpressible Island facility, Taishan Camp and Mountain Evening were the first inspections conducted of these facilities. The inspection of Molodezhnaya Station was the first on-ground inspection since 1983.

The inspection team was warmly welcomed at all locations, and was provided with full access to all areas, and responses to all queries. All facilities and activities observed were in compliance with the provisions of the Antarctic Treaty, including with respect to peaceful use and non-militarisation. In conducting the inspections the observer team was guided in part by the inspection checklists adopted under Resolution 3 (2010).

This paper presents a summary of the inspection team’s report. The full inspection report is attached.

In accordance with Article 14(4) of the Environmental Protocol, copies of the reports were provided to the Republic of Korea, China, Germany, the Russian Federation and Belarus for comment. Details of comments received are included in the inspection report for each facility inspected.

Australia draws the attention of the CEP to the conclusion of the inspection team that the facilities and activities observed were in general compliance with the provisions of the Environmental Protocol, although some opportunities for improvements to operational practices were identified.

Following the cancellation of the 2020 ATCM due to the COVID19 pandemic, the attached inspection report was circulated to Antarctic Treaty Parties and CEP members in August 2020 via online forums established by the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat. Several Parties provided comments on the report which were summarised by the Chairs of Working Group 2 and the CEP. The comments are available on the forums and the Chairs’ summaries are available in SP X (ATCM) and X (CEP).

***Summary of observations***

When inspecting Jang Bogo Station (Republic of Korea), Taishan Camp (China), and Mountain Evening Station (Belarus), the inspection team had reference to the Initial Environmental Evaluation (IEE) or Comprehensive Environmental Evaluation (CEE) prepared for the construction and operation of those facilities. The team also took note of China’s draft CEE for a proposed new station at Inexpressible Island while conducting the inspection of China’s temporary facility at the planned location.

The inspection team was pleased to observe innovative approaches to design, operations, efficiency and environmental performance.

*Jang Bogo Station (Republic of Korea)*

The inspection team noted the significant operational monitoring and automation technologies, use of renewable power generation, science support capabilities, and innovation and high standards in waste management. The construction and operation of the station, and mitigation measures for impacts identified in the environmental assessment process adhere to the final CEE prepared by the Republic of Korea.

*Inexpressible Island facility (China)*

China’s Inexpressible Island facility, intended to support activities associated with the development of China’s planned year-round station, is compact and well fitted-out. The facility is still undergoing completion, with a number of systems yet to be installed and commissioned. The inspection team understands the current focus of effort to be on completing the existing temporary facility and gathering more detailed information to support decisions about the precise location of the planned year-round station buildings and associated infrastructure.

*Gondwana Station (Germany)*

Gondwana Station has a small environmental footprint, and the buildings and associated infrastructure are in good condition. The station surrounds are free of modification, debris, spills, or other obvious impacts. Since the previous inspection (by Australia in 2011), the station has been modernised, with energy efficiency and renewable energy generation measures evident.

*Taishan Camp (China)*

The design of Taishan Camp and its support systems are innovative, and the camp has a small environmental footprint. The inspection team regarded the commitment to renewable energy and battery storage, and planned wastewater treatment systems, as particularly notable. When all planned systems and installations are completed, Taishan will be an effective and comfortable facility for the support of China’s activities.

*Molodezhnaya Station (Russian Federation)*

Molodezhnaya Station is an extensive complex of buildings, infrastructure, scientific installations, storages and associated materials, many of which are not utilised for the current operations at the station. Environmental issues associated with ongoing deterioration of unused station infrastructure, contaminants, storage of materials including potentially hazardous substances, and wastes were regarded as a concern by the inspection team. As noted in reports of previous inspections by Australia and other Parties, there are significant environmental issues associated with older stations. Reducing the risk of further environmental impacts associated with these facilities poses very substantial logistical and environmental management challenges for many Parties. These issues were evident in the case of Molodezhnaya Station, and in the view of the inspection team, addressing them should be regarded as a priority.

*Mountain Evening Station (Belarus)*

The inspection team members were impressed with the high standard of design and construction of Belarus’s Mount Vechernyaya Station, its small footprint and minimal landscape modification, the commitment to efficient energy and water usage, and commitment to scientific research. The inspection team noted that Belarus’s plans to commence winter operations are well advanced. The construction and operation of the station, and mitigation measures for impacts identified in the environmental assessment process, adhere closely to the final CEE prepared by Belarus.

***Acknowledgements***

At all occupied facilities Australia’s inspection team was welcomed with warm hospitality, characteristic of the cooperative foundations of the Antarctic Treaty. Australia extends its gratitude to the Republic of Korea, China, Germany, Belarus and the Russian Federation for their cooperation in the conduct of these inspections.

Australia also gratefully acknowledges the Italian National Antarctic Program and personnel of Mario Zucchelli Station, the Russian Antarctic Expedition and personnel of Molodezhnaya Station, and the United States Antarctic Program and personnel of McMurdo Station, for logistic support and the generous hospitality provided to the inspection team.