Competent Authorities discussion forum on tourism regulatory activities: report by the convener

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Summary

ATCM XLII in 2019 agreed to establish a permanent web-based forum for Parties to discuss tourism regulatory activities and exchange knowledge and experience. The forum is convened by the working group co-chair with responsibility for the ATCM tourism agenda item. This paper reports on the establishment of the forum, and the development of an agreed scope and purpose, identification of priority issues for initial focus, identification of opportunities for enhanced cooperation between competent authorities, and an ongoing work plan and schedule. Parties are encouraged to have their competent authorities participate in the work of the group as appropriate.

Background

ATCM XLII considered WP19 *Antarctic Tourism Workshop, 3-5 April in Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Chair’s Summary and Key Recommendations* (Netherlands, United Kingdom). The meeting agreed to establish a permanent forum to allow national Competent Authorities to discuss tourism regulatory activities, and exchange knowledge and experience (paragraphs 372– 374, ATCM XLII final report). The meeting agreed that the forum would be convened by the working group chair responsible for the tourism agenda item, and that participants may wish to establish a work plan. In establishing the forum, the ATCM identified the following tasks:

1. identifying specific challenges and opportunities for enhanced cooperation in the implementation of the Protocol;
2. providing advice to the ATCM on emerging issues related to tourism regulation; and
3. formulating advice to the ATCM, via delegations, on specific relevant issues.

Establishment of the forum and working arrangements

In consultation with the convener, the Secretariat established a new online forum for the convened Competent Authorities discussions. This forum is intended to discuss tourism-related issues of general relevance to the competent authorities, and enhance cooperation across a range of issues. To ensure the continued sharing of information directly between competent authorities and others about specific proposed activities, two pre-existing forums have been retained (one restricted to Parties, and one that is also open to observers and experts).

Work proceeded in a number of stages over two intersessional periods (taking into account the cancellation of the 2020 ATCM), in a similar manner to ATCM intersessional contact groups. Discussions commenced with proposals from the Convener on scope and purpose, working arrangements, workplan and schedule, identification of opportunities for enhanced cooperation, and identification of priority issues for initial discussion. Argentina, Chile, France, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Uruguay participated in the discussions. The discussions and working documents can be accessed by Parties in the ATCM online discussion forum.

The convener noted that previous discussions had identified a long list of Competent Authorities issues that could benefit from consideration in the forum, and suggested that it would be useful to identify a smaller number of priority issues to address initially. Views were invited from participants on the issues they considered to be highest priority. To assist in this consideration, the convener provided a summary list of issues previously raised (from the ATCM discussion forums, the report of the 2019 Rotterdam Antarctic tourism workshop (ATCM XLII IP11), the ATCM XXXVIII Special Working Group on Competent Authorities Issues, and relevant ATCM Measures and Resolutions). Participants were also invited to suggest any additional issues (including new and emerging issues) that were not so far included on the list. Finally, views were invited from participants on opportunities and challenges for enhanced cooperation between the competent authorities.

Outcomes of discussions

Scope and purpose

The participants discussed details of the scope and purpose of discussions (within the mandate established by ATCM XLII), and agreed on a statement (below) to guide work in the forum.

*Scope and purpose:*

The competent authorities will consider issues related to authorisation of tourism and non-governmental activities that have general relevance for most competent authorities, with a view to:

* identifying specific challenges and opportunities for enhanced cooperation in the implementation of the Protocol, ATCM Measures and Resolutions;
* identifying for ATCM consideration emerging issues related to tourism regulation; and
* formulating advice to the ATCM, via delegations, on specific relevant issues related to the evaluation and authorisation of tourist and non-governmental activities.

The forum will be convened by the ATCM working group chair responsible for the tourism agenda item. Discussion will be guided by a work plan, and will address issues as agreed by participants, including new and emerging issues as necessary. The convened forum is open to participation by all national competent authorities and wide participation is encouraged. The convened forum is not intended to replace the other web-based forums for discussion and consultation on specific tourism and non-government activity proposals.

Identifying priority issues for initial discussion

The group considered competent authorities issues that have been previously raised, and provided views on their priorities. A list of five priority issues was agreed (below, not in priority order). The group noted that other issues could be added or prioritised at any point as necessary.

*Priority issues for initial focus:*

* Harmonisation of standards;
* Nested permits / permits where multiple activities are authorised by different Parties on the same expedition;
* Compliance and enforcement issues of common interest to the competent authorities (excluding arrangements under national legislation);
* Issues arising from new activities or those seldom conducted, and potentially risky activities;
* Scientific activities associated with tourism activities.

A number of potential new issues were raised in the discussion. The group considered these, and noted that some had already been discussed in the ATCM as policy matters, and that some were outside the scope of the forum, or would require further development. There was no agreement to further consider these additional issues in the discussions of the forum.

Opportunities for enhanced cooperation

Ideas and views on opportunities for enhanced cooperation between competent authorities were collated. These included, in addition to the forum itself: *ad hoc* meetings of competent authority representatives, including in the margins of the ATCM; building working-level contacts between competent authorities; theme-based webinars; and videoconferences.

A number of participants observed that recent experiences with virtual meeting platforms and other online tools demonstrate that effective and efficient cooperation can occur using virtual and online tools. Some participants also regarded face to face meetings (in the margins of the ATCM and/or separately convened) as desirable when conditions allow.

The group will continue to progress this work virtually, in the web-based forum. As specific issues from the priority list are discussed in more detail, the group will consider whether aspects of the work might benefit from focused attention, for example via a virtual meeting or webinar. More detailed discussion of potential face to face meetings will await improvements in the health and travel situation.

Ongoing workplan and schedule

The group will begin discussion of the priority issues following ATCM XLIII, with a first stage of discussion to commence in mid-August 2021.

Participation in the convened forum

The convened forum is open to participation by all national competent authorities and wide participation is encouraged.