The Act on the Promotion of Polar Activities of the Republic of Korea

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**Information Paper submitted by the Republic of Korea**

***Background***

In April 2021, the government of the Republic of Korea enacted the Act on the Promotion of Polar Activities (hereinafter referred to as the ‘Polar Act’). The purpose of this Act is to promote the activities of the Korean Polar Program in the Arctic and Antarctic, and to increase Korea’s contribution towards addressing the global challenges faced by humanity, such as climate change.

The Polar Act is based on the basic principle that the polar regions shall exist for the common good of humanity and all activities shall be carried out while recognizing the importance of environmental conservation. The Act is also grounded in the understanding that it is the obligation of each Consultative Parties to cooperate and establish Antarctica as a region of peace under the Antarctic Treaty system.

The Polar Act is a new development that is distinguishable from the existing ‘Act on Antarctic Activities and Antarctic Environmental Protection’ (hereinafter referred to as the ‘Antarctic Act’), which is a legislation that contains the commitment to the protection of the Antarctic environment and regulations to implement the provisions. The Polar Act was enacted to facilitate and promote Korea’s polar activities and build competencies in research and development (R&D), operation and safe management of polar infrastructure, and environmental protection in the polar regions. The ‘Polar Act’ also aims to support activities such as education and training, economic cooperation in the Arctic, international cooperation and outreach.

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|  | **Act on Activities in the Antarctic Area and the Protection of Antarctic Environment (Antarctic Act)** | **Act on Promotion of Polar Activities in the Polar Regions (Polar Act)** |
| **Nature** | Restriction on and permission of activities in Antarctica | Systematic support for and promotion of Activities in the Arctic and Antarctica |
| **Significance** | Domestic legislation to support the international law; A law enacted for domestic implementation of the Antarctic Treaty | Globalization of domestic policies; provide systemic support for activities in the Polar regions |
| **Objective** | Peaceful use and environmental protection of the Antarctic | Sustainable development of the polar regions, environment protection, support for and systemic promotion activities in the polar regions |
| **Scope** | Activities in the Antarctic such as scientific research and environmental management | Activities in both the Arctic and Antarctic |

Table 1 – Comparison of the Antarctic Act and the Polar Act

The Korean government plans to introduce the ‘Basic Plan for the Promotion of Polar Activities’ every five years from 2023, based on the Polar Act, in order to present a more detailed direction on how the objectives of the Act will be met.

***Key Provisions***

The Polar Act encourages activities related to the polar regions and developing government policies for supporting Korea’s polar activities. The aim of the Act was to develop a system for comprehensive support. The Articles of the Polar Act contains provisions that would serve as a foundation for support and related to research and development (Article 8), training of human resources with an expertise in the polar region (Article 9), promotion of economic cooperation in the Arctic (Article 10), facilitation of international cooperation (Article 12), and education and outreach (Article 15).

In addition, the enactment of the Polar Act provides a legal framework for universities, research institutes, and businesses in Korea to utilize Korean polar research infrastructure, namely research stations in Antarctica and icebreaking research vessels more efficiently (Article 6).

In order to fulfill the goal of the Polar Act, the Korean government plans to produce ‘Basic Plan for the promotion of polar activities’ with a view to developing detailed plans for policies suggested by the Polar Act. It will contain the following: to stimulate investment, establish the ‘Integrated Polar Information System’ to systematize the collection and management of the data observed in the polar regions, and to set ‘Safety Management Guidelines’ for infrastructure management to enhance operational safety.

With the enactment of the Polar Act, Korea now has the legal basis for promotion of polar activities, the policy basis for development of the detailed promotion plans on a five-year basis, and supporting system to implement projects such as ‘Integrated Polar Information System’ and ‘Safety Management System.’

***Expected outcomes and Plan for Follow-up Action***

In particular, the Korean government plans to promote the three follow-up actions for the Polar Act.

First, the government will establish the ‘Basic Plan for the Promotion of Polar Activities’ every five years, to present the goals, strategies, and tasks for the Korean polar activities. The first Basic Plan will be applied to the year 2023-2027. Before the Act was in effect, the ‘Basic Plan for the Promotion of Research Activities in Antarctica’ was only pursuant to the Antarctic, but the Act will now enable Korea to establish ‘Basic Plan for the Promotion of Polar Activities’, which will be more comprehensive and encompass both poles.

Second, the government plans to build systems that can practically support the promotion of polar activities such as the ‘Integrated Polar Information System’ and the ‘Safety Management System.’ Currently, the observation data was collected and managed by each research institutions and researchers. The new information system will now be able to gather and manage data, systematize its management by standardization of exchange methods and systematic classification. The integrated data platform will be able to provide improved accessibility and convenience of using the data. In addition, the government plans to build the system for preventing accidents in the polar regions by laying out the ‘Safety Management Guidelines’ for the infrastructure and enhancing the supervision of the infrastructure operators.

Third, the Act will establish a cooperative ecosystem where the government, businesses, the academia, and research institutions can jointly conduct research projects more seamlessly.

Lastly, the Act aims to address issues of the polar regions, which consists of Arctic and Antarctic, two regions with significant differences in circumstances and environments in better integrated manners. However, there are room for improved efficiency through harmonization of the policies, especially in infrastructure management, education and outreach, and response to climate change.