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 24 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 International Cryosphere Climate Initiative has re-joined ASOC since the XLIII ATCM.

Although the ongoing pandemic and current global affairs prove undoubted difficulties to the work of the ATCM, it is now more than ever, that Consultative Parties need urgently to address the impacts of climate change in Antarctica and its surrounding ocean. In the words of the UN Secretary-General on the publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Working Group III Report *“Mitigation of Climate Change”* in April, “*The jury has reached a verdict. And it is damning…It is a file of shame, cataloguing the empty pledges that put us firmly on track towards an unliveable world......Climate scientists warn that we are already perilously close to tipping points that could lead to cascading and irreversible climate impacts.”*ASOC therefore encourages the ATCM to rise to the occasion and provide urgent protection to vulnerable ecosystems and prevent irreversible damage at this time of rapid change.

2021 marked several major Antarctic anniversaries, including the 60th anniversary of the entry into force of the Antarctic Treaty, the 30th anniversary of the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection, and the 40th meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). Furthermore, the 40th anniversary of the CAMLR Convention coming into force was celebrated earlier in 2022. These milestones highlight the need to embark on a new era of Antarctic preservation and conservation, including designating new protected areas, assigning emperor penguins the status of Specially Protected Species, and responding to the impact of climate change.

*Intersessional Activities*

Many of ASOC’s activities in 2021 focused on celebrating and reflecting on the above-mentioned anniversaries. Some highlights are listed below, together with other intersessional activities.

On March 30, 2021, The Pew Charitable Trusts organized a workshop at The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. Twenty international experts discussed how changes in the Southern Ocean impact global climate regulation, marine ecosystems and human communities, and the policy responses needed to address climate risks. The report echoed grave concerns about the ongoing climate crisis. Pew also supported various technical and management focused events throughout the last year including: *A Global Dialogue on Biodiversity, Law and Governance* with the University of Colorado, Macquarie University and Wuhan University and a task force planning for the *Second Southern Ocean Decade* workshop in September 2021.

In June 2021, ASOC launched and promoted its online digital story map during last year’s ATCM. The story map, *Securing the Next Thirty Years of Antarctic Protection*, features infographics, animation and video on black carbon pollutants, climate change, current status of some penguin species, and also protected areas. It also highlights Antarctic governance and environmental protection issues, and reiterates the importance of the ATS to secure full-scale Antarctic environmental protection.

ASOC also organised a public outreach campaign on Southern Ocean protection. In September 2021, musicians from around the world took part in a virtual performance called *OnlyOne Antarctica*. The virtual concert, supported by the Blue Nature Alliance, in collaboration with Lookport and OnlyOne was streamed live across social and media channels including Tencent in China and Lookport. The concert was a success with over 270,000 views across multiple platforms.

OnlyOne and SeaLegacy hosted a public Antarctic art exhibit in New York City in September 2021. The exhibit, *Antarctica: The Greatest Sanctuary* featured photography from ocean conservationists Paul Nicklen, Cristina Mittermeier, Andy Mann, and John Weller showing the power and beauty of Antarctica. Panels of the exhibit were also on display at the Our Ocean Conference in Palau in April 2022.

ASOC participated in the international conference *Antarctica: Present and Future* in Madrid, Spain, on October 4, 2021. This conference welcomed ministers, leading scientists, experts and representatives of the NGO community from around the world to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Madrid Protocol. The event reviewed the achievements since the implementation of the Protocol and reflected on challenges ahead for the next thirty years of Antarctic protection.

ASOC also participated in the virtual fortieth CCAMLR meeting in October of 2021; and at the virtual SC-CAMLR symposium in March 2022. During the CCAMLR meeting, ASOC shared on its social media platforms messages from Antarctic youth to the countries that govern Antarctica. Video participants expressed their reasons for valuing Antarctic conservation and their vision for future Antarctic protection.

At the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille (September 2021), Pascal Lamy and Geneviève Pons – “champions” of ASOC Member Antarctica2020 – delivered a petition to the President of France Emmanuel Macron of 1.5 million worldwide signatures that call for the protection of Antarctica. The petition was subsequently handed over to the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and to the President of Spain Pedro Sánchez.

ASOC has participated via the Friends of the Earth International (FOEI) delegation in the meetings of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), including the meetings of the Maritime Safety Committee and its Navigation, Communications, and Search & Rescue sub-committee and a correspondence group which have adopted guidelines for fishing vessels and pleasure yachts operating in polar regions and developed mandatory regulations on navigation and voyage planning for these vessels in polar regions. ASOC has also contributed to work at the IMO on marking and reporting of abandoned lost and discarded fishing gear and developed an infographic on marine plastic pollution from shipping.

ASOC attended the 26th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, supporting a WWF event on blue carbon at the Panda Pavilion and several official side events. ASOC member the International Cryosphere Climate Initiative hosted a Cryosphere Pavilion, which included many Antarctic climate-related events.

ASOC member Agenda Antarctica published the 8th volume of its publication *Antarctic Affairs* with a focus on the 30th anniversary of the Protocol.

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. Additionally, ASOC appreciates working with other observers and experts including SCAR, IAATO, and COMNAP.

*Support for policy-relevant science and science communications*

Greenpeace undertook an expedition to the Antarctic Peninsula region with a focus on the remote Weddell Sea (January-March 2022). Sea ice in Antarctic waters has reached the lowest extent on satellite record since 2017. This enabled the expedition to reach into the Weddell Sea, where it conducted a deep submarine dive believed to be the southernmost scientific dive in a crewed submarine.[[1]](#footnote-1) Researchers documented and identified an abundance of life and vulnerable ecosystems on the Antarctic seafloor. This expedition is part of Greenpeace’s “30x30” campaign to protect thirty percent of the global ocean by 2030. Research conducted from this scientific dive will be used to identify and designate Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems and secure the crucial protection it urgently needs.

In March 2021, with the support of the Blue Nature Alliance, ASOC partnered with the Museum of Natural History in Paris, France to develop biodiversity indicators for Southern Ocean conservation planning. The project will produce a map of bioregions based on species phylogenetic diversity (phyloregions). Identification of phyloregions is a powerful method that allows researchers to map distance among species assemblages (“phylogenetic turnover”) between regions and determine priority areas for conservation.

In August 2021, ASOC gave a presentation on climate change and Southern Ocean resilience at an online lecture series organised jointly with Lomonosov Moscow State University Marine Research Center and the International Humanitarian Cooperation in the context of several ocean and climate science events devoted to the launch of the UN Decade of Ocean Science.

*Concluding remarks*

ASOC is delighted to attend the XLIV ATCM as the world continues to navigate multiple global crises. The Antarctic Treaty is one of the most successful multilateral treaties in history and has successfully promoted a spirit of international cooperation for decades. The milestone anniversaries celebrated in 2021 give us reason to reflect on strengthening Antarctic cooperation and to address the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. Successful Antarctic governance requires increasing the commitment to full-scale Antarctic environmental protection.

There is an overwhelming political will to address the threats to the health of Antarctica, including adopting new comprehensive protection measures such as marine protected areas, expanding the system of specially protected areas, assigning Specially Protected Species status to the emperor penguin, and taking action on climate change. ASOC urges ATCPs, and all Antarctic bodies and actors, to constructively and fully engage in international discussions that restore the ambition of the Antarctic Treaty system.

1. The expedition completed 12 research dives in 10 days. The southernmost dive took place in the Weddell Sea at 65°03.624’S, 055°54.300’W, on 9 March 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)