Report of the management group for Antarctic Specially Managed Area (ASMA) No. 4 Deception Island for the period 2022/23

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Summary

This paper highlights the discussions held during the informal meeting of the Deception Island Management Group (DIMG) that occurred in the margins of the XLIV ATCM (2022). The aim of these informal meetings is to exchange information, try to improve the management of Antarctic Specially Managed Area Nº 4, Deception Island, and share information on actions that have occurred during the intersessional period.

Background

Deception Island (latitude 62°57’S, longitude 60°38’W), South Shetland Islands, is a unique Antarctic island with important natural, scientific, historic, educational and aesthetic values. An area of 98.5 km2 encompassing Deception Island, Port Foster, and several small outlying islands was formally adopted as Antarctic Specially Managed Area (ASMA) No. 4 by Measure 3 (2005). The Management Plan has been revised by Measure 10 (2012) and Measure 10 (2019). The next review of the current ASMA No. 4 Management Plan shall commence by 2024.

The Management Group is formed by representatives from the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties of Argentina, Chile, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. The Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC) and the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) act as advisors to the group. Spain is currently chairing the group and Norway will take over this role for two years commencing at the close of XLIV ATCM.

Topics discussed during the 2022 meeting in Berlin included:

* the planned ASMA Management Plan review by 2024;
* the status of the Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA) Nº 140 and Nº 145 Management Plan reviews submitted to XXIV CEP (2022);
* an update on the works done at Gabriel de Castilla Station to stabilise the coast erosion; and
* the status of the Deception Island website and the current situation and seismic-volcanic surveillance network of the Deception Island volcano.

***Review of the ASMA Management Plan and Management Plans of ASPAs Nº 140 and Nº 145***

The revised Management Plan of ASPA No 140 ‘Parts of Deception Island, South Shetland Islands’ was considered by the CEP who recommended its adoption. The revised Management Plan for ASPA No 140 was approved through Measure 15 (2022).

The revised Management Plan for ASPA No 145 ‘Port Foster, Deception Island, South Shetland Islands’ was reviewed by the CEP Subsidiary Group on Management Plans (SGMP) that recommended its adoption. After differing understandings of the requirements of Decision 9 (2005), the CEP concluded that the revised Management Plan should be submitted to CCAMLR for approval before forwarding to the ATCM for adoption. The revised Management Plan for ASPA No 145 was presented to CCAMLR-41(2022) and was approved by the Commission. The revised Management Plan for ASPA 145 will be resubmitted for potential adoption at ATCM XLV.

***Situation of coast erosion at Gabriel de Castilla Station***

Since the 2019-2020 campaign, certain works at the Gabriel de Castilla Station have been carried out to stabilise and mitigate coast erosion. Apparently, the actions have been successful, and it seems that the erosion has been restrained. There was a general agreement within the management group that this circumstance could be considered one of the effects of climate change and may be occurring in other Antarctic locations. It was suggested that this stabilising action could be usefully applied at other stations where similar erosion processes are taking place.

***Deception Island web page***

The webpage has not been updated in many years and much of the information is now out of date. During the 2023/24 intersessional period we plan to undertake a review of the website, including making an assessment of the utility of the content and to get an understanding of how much it is used and discuss the possibility of the Treaty Secretariat hosting the web page that includes all documentation and regulations approved for the island in a simple and accessible way, before making a recommendation on the most appropriate way forward to the DIMG in 2024.

***Situation and surveillance network of Deception volcano.***

The volcanic surveillance network of Deception Island has been expanded, old equipment has been renewed and the seismic network has been completed. The new sensors are transmitting data in real time and it is hoped that this date reporting will continue during wintertime when the Spanish Antarctic Station Gabriel de Castilla is closed. IP99 explains in detail the updates of the surveillance system. There is a proposal from COMNAP to open a technical working group in the Peninsula region (IP85), with the aim of exploring the situation in larger scale.

Apart from that, Argentina, through the Servicio Geológico Minero Argentino, started a Volcanic Monitoring Project whose main objective is the deployment, operation and maintenance of a permanent instrumental network for real-time monitoring of volcanic activity on Deception Island, in order to provide relevant information that can help mitigate the volcanic risk on the island. In the short term, a seismological, geodetic and visual monitoring network will be installed with real-time data transmission to the mainland. The medium-term objective is the implementation of automatic supervised monitoring, evaluation of activity status and issuance of activity reports. Based on this work, Spain and Argentina created the Seismological Network for Surveillance of the Deception Volcano, which improves the monitoring networks of both countries. IP XX explains in detail the work carried out.

***Other topics***

The DIMG has concern about the potential for oil spills to occur in the caldera far from the stations’ area of influence. Argentina and Spain are working jointly to review their oil spill preparedness and will prepare a joint contingency plan if necessary, providing recommendations to non-governmental operators.

During the austral summer 2022-2023 IAATO reported three incidents involving IAATO Operators that occurred within the ASMA No. 4 Deception Island. These three incidents have been reported to the relevant National Competent Authority (NCA). Two involved lost anchors or anchor chains. The third incident resulted when a passenger did not follow the Site Guidelines for Visitors No. 17 (Whaler’s Bay) and climbed atop a water boat in area 14 of the SGV.