Promoting Scientific Research to Inform the Antarctic Decision-Making

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Antarctic Decision-Making**

**Working Paper submitted by China**

***Summary***

In 2019, the ATCM XLII and the CEP XXII discussed, inter alia, two items such as marine spatial protection and management and other Annex V Matters. Discussion of the two items touched upon the science needs to support decision-making one way or another. ATCM and CEP agreed to included the two items into the CEP Five-Year Plan to continue and promote the study on them. In order to further the fundamental role of science in the Antarctic governance, China suggests promoting the Antarctic scientific research and collating baseline data on Antarctica and Southern Ocean with a view to increasing the reliability and countability of science used in the Antarctic decision-making process and ensuring the adaptability of the decisions to the future changes.

***1. Introduction***

In July 2019 the ATCM and the CEP held their annual meeting in Prague. The meetings discussed, inter alia, two items such as marine spatial protection and management and other Annex V Matters. In respect of marine area protection and management, the meetings considered a report (WP 48) by New Zealand on informal intersessional discussions held by interested Parties to develop a response to the ATCM request in Resolution 5 (2017) (ATCM Report 2019, paragraphs 74-79). On other Annex V Matters, the great attention was given to the outcome of the Joint SCAR/CEP Workshop on Further Developing the Antarctic Protected Areas System, held in Prague, Czech Republic from 27 to 28 June 2019 (ATCM Report 2019, paragraphs 80-83).

When discussing Resolution 5 (2017), the issue of the failure of CCAMLR to develop the Ross Sea region Marine Protected Area’s Research and Monitoring Plan was raised once again. In other words, the issue relates to some extent to the possible relation of research activities undertaken within the framework of the ATCM and the CEP to the objectives of RSRMPA. On the outcome of the Joint SCAR/CEP Workshop, distinct views were expressed and split on the needs of scientific assessment of the current Antarctic protected areas system. According to the publications and a report presented during the Joint SCAR/CEP Workshop, assessment is the very first step of systematic conservation plan. Many Members of the CEP agreed upon the importance of assessment before moving to a decision on the management choices (CEP Report 2019, paragraphs 178-179).

Although the Joint SCAR/CEP Workshop in 2019 centered its work on the Antarctic protected areas system, no scientific assessment had been conducted as to the current protected areas. Only an objective report about the current ASMA and ASPA was prepared and forwarded to the CEP and then to the ATCM. After intensive discussion, CEP ‘agreed to assess the effectiveness of the current series of ASPAs with regard to the provisions of Article 3.2 of Annex V, and in light of the other provisions of the Environment Protocol (including consideration of methodologies); encouraged Members, SCAR and other Observers and Experts to prioritise and support further research that will build on the existing body of scientific evidence to support the further development of the protected area system in accordance with Article 3.2 of Annex V; encouraged to establish a repository of information relevant to identifying ASPAs within a systematic environmental-geographic framework.’ To that end, the CEP further ‘agreed to develop a guideline for systematically developing the protected area system, including identifying goals/objectives, assessment of current protected areas, related science requirements, priorities for actions to be taken by the CEP and Parties, timeframe for action and implementation, and measures to evaluate progress.’(CEP Report 2019, paragraph 182)

At the end of the 2019 ATCM XLII meeting, the ATCM and the CEP agreed to include into the CEP Five-Year Plan the issue of marine spatial protection and management and the issue of Overview of the protected areas system as items of Priority 2. In comparison with other items included in the CEP Five-Year Plan, the introduction of non-native species for instance, the two issues did not outline specific scientific knowledge and information needs. To further the fundamental role of science in the Antarctic decision-making process, China hereby suggests that the CEP specify the scientific knowledge and information needs for ‘marine spatial protection and management’ and ‘overview of the protected areas system’ by reference to ‘the introduction of non-native species’. By so doing, it will help guide Members to plan and undertake their Antarctic research programs and facilitate scientific cooperation among Members.

***2. Recommendations to the CEP***

In regard of marine spatial protection and management, China proposes that the CEP conduct a comprehensive marine environment impact assessment on the scientific basis, and then identify management gaps. Such a marine environmental assessment may include the following scientific elements:

1) identification of key biotic and abiotic criterion, indicators and parameters, to support the assessment of the status and trend of terrestrial and marine environment of and its dependent and associated ecosystems;

2) the history, status and trends of human activities under the Protocol, and the extent of its impact on the environment;

3) the effectiveness of current management measures;

4) identification of the threats from human activities to be solved, and the management gaps, especially the need for a higher level of protection for specific values beyond that achieved by other forms of planning and management measures under the Protocol (Resolution 1 (2000);

5) building a comprehensive database, including the baseline data in relation to the quality of the Antarctic marine environment..

As for the scientific knowledge and information needs for overview of the protected areas system, China’s suggestions are as follows:

1) collating baseline data and undertake baseline study;

2) identifying the threats and risks to Antarctic environment protection, in particular to distinguish the threats and risks arising from human activities in the Antarctic and those from natural changes;

3) identifying driving forces behind the threats and risks and their indicators and parameters;

4) assess feasibility of protected areas system in addressing these identified threats and risks in terms of the goals and cost-effectiveness, and identify alternative options;

5) continue to research, monitor and assess the threats and risks and their indicators and parameters.