



The Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition

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PRESS RELEASE

Antarctic Treaty Parties Duck Tourism Challenges

ATCMⁱ XXXI concluded today in Kiev without any agreement on proposed Resolutions addressing the increase of Antarctic tourism overall and on discouraging construction of hotels in Antarctica.

“ASOC is very disappointed that the Antarctic Treaty governments were unable to reach consensus on even a single step to reign in rapidly expanding tourism in the Antarctic Treaty Area,” said Ricardo Roura, Coordinator of ASOC’s tourism campaign. “In spite of many excellent and comprehensive papers covering the growth and diversification of the tourism industry, and the sinking of the *M/V Explorer* last November, there was no political will to take the actions needed to protect human lives and the environment.”

The environmental organizations that are members of ASOCⁱⁱ regard this failure of Consultative Parties to protect the values of science and environmental protection espoused in the Antarctic Treatyⁱⁱⁱ and its Environmental Protocol^{iv} as warning signs of a serious blockage in the governance system for Antarctica.

Tourism in Antarctica over the past decade has been characterized by steep annual increases, diversification, and geographic expansion. According to industry statistics, the number of visitors increased to 46,000 thousands in 2007-08. Of these, more than 30,000 passengers set foot ashore, up from 10,000 a decade earlier. The largest increase in the past season has been on ships carrying over 500 passengers, which do not conduct landings, with more than 13,000 passengers traveling in this fashion in 2007-08, up from 6000 the previous year. Tourism is also diversifying, with a growing focus on activities such as kayaking, diving, skiing and mountain-climbing.

ASOC is very concerned about the rapid increases in maritime traffic in the Antarctic in recent years, particularly between the months of November and March, largely fuelled by tourism. This has increased the probabilities of shipping accidents, underscored by the sinking of the Liberian-flagged *M/V Explorer* in the Antarctic Peninsula off King George Island on November 23, 2007. No fatalities resulted from this accident, but an unknown amount of fuel was spilled in the Southern Ocean.^v This is the most serious of a series of shipping accidents in Antarctica in the past several years.

“The sinking of the *Explorer* should be a wake-up call to the Antarctic Treaty Parties,” said James Barnes, ASOC Executive Director. “There are growing commercial pressures in the Antarctic region, and its environmental protection regime is under siege. It is past time for the governments to act.”

Environmental groups fear that tourism is becoming entrenched as the main Antarctic activity in terms of scale and influence, resulting inevitably in the erosion of the intrinsic values of Antarctica and the primary roles of science and environmental protection in the Antarctic Treaty System.^{vi} ASOC believes that the particularly negative forms of tourism currently emerging, including land-based tourism, should be constrained before their scale is beyond the capacity of the Antarctic Treaty System to control them.

“Given tourism trends and the sinking of the *Explorer* we thought that the Parties would react by sending a strong message to the tourism industry that further growth and diversification is not desirable,” said Roura. “However, in the current political climate, even non-mandatory Resolutions could not be approved. The governments are failing in their duty to protect the Antarctic environment.”

There is currently no comprehensive tourism management regime in Antarctica.^{vii} Existing tourism instruments do not yet impose any legal obligations and have not curbed the steep growth trajectory of the industry. The only tourism Measure approved in recent years would require mandatory insurance and contingency plans for tourism activities in Antarctica, but it has not yet become effective, and there are even insinuations that some Parties may not ratify this instrument domestically.^{viii}

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ⁱ The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting is the annual meeting of the Parties to the 1959 Antarctic Treaty.

ⁱⁱ ASOC participates in Antarctic Treaty meetings as an accredited Expert Organization. It includes 31 full members in 20 countries.

ⁱⁱⁱ The 1959 Antarctic Treaty.

^{iv} The 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.

^v According to the Chilean Navy, the *Explorer* was transporting about 210 m³ of petroleum derivatives, made up of D.M.F.O., oils, lubricants and petrol.

^{vi} The Antarctic Treaty System means the Antarctic Treaty, the measures in effect under that Treaty, its associated separate international instruments in force and the measures in effect under those instruments. International instruments include the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, the Protocol (which entered into force in 1998), the 1972 Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals (CCAS), and the 1980 Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). The 1988 Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (CRAMRA) has not entered into force and is not likely to be, having been essentially abandoned in favor of the Protocol, which has a specific prohibition on mineral resource activities.

^{vii} To the extent that an Antarctic tourism regime can be discerned at all, it is largely provided by generically applicable Protocol standards, weakly supplemented by (with the exception of Measure 4, 2007, which has not yet become effective) non-legally binding guidelines emanating from the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, and industry’s own voluntary standards.

^{viii} Measure 4, 2007, requires those organizing or conducting tourist or other non-governmental activities to demonstrate that “...appropriate contingency plans and sufficient arrangements for health and safety, search and rescue (SAR), and medical care and evacuation have been drawn up and are in place prior to the start of the activity” and that “...adequate insurance or other arrangements are in place to cover any costs associated with search and rescue and medical care and evacuation.”