Work plan or talk plan?

ECO was truly looking forward to the development of a Multi-Year Strategic Work Plan (MYSWP) at this ATCM. As the meeting comes to a close, however, we find ourselves concerned about the process that has been launched. Parties worked diligently for two days in the workshop, several days in the meeting, during coffee breaks, and in the evenings to come to an agreement on a strategic plan. While the emergence of a bare bones plan feels like an achievement, is it really going to make future work more strategic or more efficient? It seems as if the ATCM has committed itself not to an actual work plan, but to a plan to work on the work plan – every year! Are we going to have to go through the same cycle over and over again? If every ATCM spends every day discussing how to “populate” the next year of the plan, it risks becoming a displacement activity. Particularly in the context of our new eight-day meeting, this seems like a recipe for delaying, rather than making, important and necessary substantive decisions.

It was somewhat puzzling for ECO to observe the resistance to even the concept of a strategic approach to planning ATCM’s work. Indicating a desire to provide additional focus, on a particular issue or set of issues, at a particular time, in recognition of emerging trends, threats and innovations, is good for ATCM members. It is also a relief for the experts and observers who have a keen interest in the work of the Commission, as it helps them plan their own work and contribute high quality materials and research.

So what is missing from the MYSWP?

Research groups, logistics operators, and tour groups going to Antarctica almost always plan their activities well more than one year in advance. Why are the ATCPs unable to manage a similar amount of foresight?

There were multiple efforts to plan out more than one year in advance. But no matter what was attempted, be they bracketed text, colors, italics to denote indicative text for future intended work, these attempts were resisted and, mostly, removed. This was a good faith attempt to indicate that this future work was proposed and flexible, and would not block any other work or issues that might arise. However, even minor suggestions to plan work step wise on a topic over a range of years was forestalled. ECO thinks this will cause work within the ATCM to move, shall we say, glacially?

While ECO acknowledges that the key action points involved serious consideration to reach consensus, the MYSWP missed the opportunity for the ATCPs to articulate a vision for the future of Antarctica. It is difficult to work through smaller action steps without an overarching appreciation of what the ATCPs ultimately desire for Antarctica.

As noted in Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, the ancient Chinese military treatise, "Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat." Fortunately Antarctica is a natural reserve devoted to peace and science, and removed from nasty international discord. However, the main loser in the absence of a strategy is Antarctica itself. Let's hope that strategic discussions next year will be more...strategic.
A BRIEF NOTE ON BIOPROSPECTING

ECO congratulates the Legal and Institutional Working Group for agreeing on a Resolution on Biological Prospecting. Following up on Resolution 7 in 2005 and Resolution 9 in 2009 and based on the Working and Information Papers presented in Brussels, it is agreed that there is a need for further research and analysis on the trends of bioprospecting in the Antarctic Treaty Area.

Governments will report on bioprospecting carried out by their national Antarctic programs and nationals, which hopefully will provide a better understanding of those activities and in turn allow for better assessment of their environmental impacts. ECO appreciates the constructive debate, in which many Parties participated actively. This bodes well for the Parties' future discussions, including developing a working definition of what "biological prospecting" means in an Antarctic context.

ECO suggests that the intent to conduct biological prospecting should be declared in Parties’ submissions to the Electronic Information Exchange System and the Resolution encourages consideration of how to improve information exchange, including adapting the EIES.

Also, given how many Southern Ocean organisms are the subject of patents, ECO suggests that a suitable mechanism should be established so that harvesting of marine living resources in the Southern Ocean related to biological prospecting is more clearly identified.

THE ROAD TO BREMERHAVEN

This July, CCAMLR (an institution of the Antarctic Treaty System) has scheduled a special meeting in Bremerhaven, specifically to deal with the question of MPAs. This is a historic opportunity for members to collectively establish some of the keystones in the system of Marine Protected Areas that CCAMLR has mandated for some years and to leave an enduring legacy.

However, at this ATCM, progress in the margins has been slow, and uncontroversial mentions of support from ATCM parties have not eventuated as Resolutions. We wonder why? It is clear that the world will again be watching the meeting in Bremerhaven, and ECO urges everyone to collaboratively work together to achieve success. To squander this opportunity would be tragic and CCAMLR would be much diminished if this were the outcome.