Report of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition
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1. Introduction

ASOC is pleased to be in Beijing for the XL Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. This report briefly describes ASOC’s work over the past year, and outlines some key issues for this ATCM.

ASOC’s Secretariat is in Washington DC, USA and its website is http://www.asoc.org. ASOC has 24 full member groups in 10 countries and supporting groups in those and several other countries.

2. Intersessional activities

Since XXXIX ATCM ASOC and its member groups’ representatives participated actively in intersessional discussions in the ATCM and CEP fora.

ASOC and member group representatives attended a range of meetings relevant to Antarctic environmental protection including the XXXV CCAMLR Meeting, International Maritime Organization meetings relating to the Polar Code, the SCAR Open Science Conference 2016, the IAATO annual meeting, and others. At the 2016 CCAMLR meeting, the Ross Sea Marine Protected Area (RSMPA) was designated, a goal which ASOC has been working towards since 2008. Additionally, from 1st January 2017 the International Code for shipping in polar waters took effect, another goal towards which ASOC has been working since 2008. ASOC has continued to engage with the development of the research and monitoring plan for the MPA, since this is critical to the success of the MPA in accomplishing its objectives.

ASOC member organization WWF released their Tracking Antarctica report at CCAMLR XXXV and has provided information in Tracking Antarctica: A WWF report on the state of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean (IP 152). Tracking Antarctica provides a scientific update on the state of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean and highlights recommended solutions. In particular it highlights the need to increase efforts to create a network of MPAs in the Southern Ocean and to develop a more robust response to climate change.

ASOC and WWF are also members of the Antarctic Wildlife Research Fund (AWR), which provided $150,000 to fund three scientific research projects on Antarctic marine ecosystems.

3. Priorities for ATCM XL

ASOC has three major priorities for the ATCM. Below, we detail our recommendations for actions that ATCPs can take at this ATCM under each of those priority areas.

- Expansion of protected areas network

The network of Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (ASPAs) does not fully protect the range of values included in Annex V of the Protocol. In our IP Considerations for the systematic expansion of the protected areas network (IP 153), ASOC notes that the adoption of a protected area response that matches current environmental pressures is becoming all the more apparent, and urgent, as human presence in continues to grow across a range of terrestrial, coastal and marine environments; and impacts from climate change increase. ASOC suggests that the ATCM initiates a systematic conservation planning process as soon as possible to expand the network. To assist this process, ASOC has compiled an online database of information relevant to the designation of new areas. We hope the database will be useful to ATCPs and would be happy to receive feedback on how we can improve it.

Furthermore, in ASOC update on Marine Protected Areas in the Southern Ocean 2016-2017 (IP 149) we provide an update on CCAMLR’s work on MPAs, including an MPA discussion at CCAMLR XXXV in 2016, and encourage the ATCM to undertake a process of systematic conservation planning similar to CCAMLR’s. This would be important in order to apply the protected area tools of the Environmental Protocol effectively across the Antarctic Treaty area.
• Precautionary management of tourism and other activities

The ATCM has discussed tourism extensively over the past few years, but has made few decisions about how to move forward. To assist the ATCM in taking the next steps on this issue, ASOC has provided Options for Visitor Management in the Antarctic (IP 150). This paper discusses some approaches to visitor management in other parts of the world and suggests how the ATCM can apply those approaches to the Antarctic context. Overall, ASOC stresses that it is important for the ATCM to begin a process that will result in consensus decisions about tourism.

Managing non-SOLAS vessels in the Southern Ocean (IP 151) highlights that recent work on the Polar Code at the International Maritime Organization does not cover fishing vessels or private pleasure craft, which represent a significant proportion of the vessels operating in the Southern Ocean. Since many ATCPs have previously noted their concern about the potential risks to human life and the environment from unsafe vessel operations, ASOC recommends that Parties adopt a Decision on the need for concerted action at the IMO to ensure that Phase 2 of work on non-SOLAS vessels at the IMO commences urgently and concludes satisfactorily with no further delay.

• Development of an active ATCM response to Antarctic climate change

ASOC believes that the Antarctic Treaty System, including the ATCM, must take urgent action to address the impact of climate change on the Antarctic environment. In Antarctic Climate Change Report Card (IP 147), ASOC summarizes and highlights recent scientific findings on climate change that demonstrate the seriousness of the changes underway in the Antarctic. There are a number of management actions that the ATCM could take, including the designation of protected areas that can serve as climate reference zones, that could increase ecosystem resilience and the ability of scientists to monitor and understand these changes.

Overall, ASOC encourages the ATCM to be proactive on issues that influence significant Antarctic values, and move from discussion to decision.

4. Concluding Remarks

Over the past year, ASOC has engaged with many and varied partners, including IAATO, SCAR, CCAMLR, the Coalition of Legal Toothfish Operators (COLTO), and the Antarctic Wildlife Research Fund (AWR), to work broadly towards identifying strengths and weaknesses existing in the Antarctic Treaty System procedures and practices, while suggesting solutions to these gaps. We value our engagement with these groups, as well as with Antarctic Treaty Parties.

In particular, ASOC would like to highlight our paper with IAATO, Collaborating on Antarctic Education and Outreach (IP 148), which describes some successful joint work our organizations have done over the past year. We plan to continue these efforts and thereby expand the knowledge of the public about Antarctica. We welcome further collaborations with other Parties, Observers and Experts.