

## Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and ASOC – Policy Background

The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) is the annual meeting of the Parties to the 1959 Antarctic Treaty. From 23 May to 2 June 2022, the 44<sup>th</sup> ATCM will be hosted by Germany in Berlin to address important issues and priorities for Antarctica.

The Antarctic Treaty System is the international framework through which rules and standards are laid down for the great white continent “in the interest of all mankind”. It is widely believed to be one of the most successful international agreements, and its negotiation during the Cold War is an inspirational symbol of what States can achieve through cooperation – even during a time of great political conflict and adversity. In 1991, States signed the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty in recognition of the need to address threats to the Antarctic environment. The Protocol designates Antarctica as “a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science.”

The principles and objectives of the Antarctic Treaty are advanced through the decisions taken at the annual ATCM, hosted on a rotating basis in alphabetical order by the 29 Consultative Parties<sup>1</sup> which are full voting members of the Treaty. There are also 25 Non-Consultative Parties<sup>2</sup>, an increasing number of which – though still a minority – are active in Antarctica and the Antarctic Treaty System, although they do not participate in the decision-making. The ATCM lasts for almost two weeks, conducting most business through Working Groups, including the Policy, Legal and Institutional WG, and the Science, Operations, and Tourism WG. The Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) also meets during the ATCM. The CEP is not a decision-making body but provides advice to the ATCM.

The ATCM and CEP discuss a wide range of topics related to the protection of the Antarctic environment, including:

- 1) Science issues, future science challenges, scientific cooperation and facilitation
- 2) Implications of Climate Change for Management of the Antarctic Treaty Area
- 3) Tourism and Non-governmental Activities in the Antarctic Treaty Area, including Competent Authorities Issues
- 4) Area Protection and Management Plans
- 5) Conservation of Antarctic Flora and Fauna
- 6) Environmental Impact Assessments

The central tenet of the Treaty is that the Antarctic continent and its surrounding waters are not owned by any one country and must only be used for peaceful purposes for the advancement of science, cooperation, and the wellbeing of all humanity. Some Consultative Parties maintain a claim to parts of Antarctica, but while the Treaty does not require signatories to renounce claims, it also does not acknowledge the validity of any claims or require other signatories to do so. Neither does it permit any new claims or increases in existing claims.

In this spirit of cooperation, the ATCM makes all decisions by consensus. There are three major types of outcomes of ATCM decision-making:

- A Measure, which is legally binding once it has entered into force.

---

<sup>1</sup> Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Bulgaria, Chile, China, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the USA and Uruguay.

<sup>23</sup> Austria, Belarus, Canada, Colombia, Cuba, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Korea (DPRK), Malaysia, Monaco, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, Turkey, and Venezuela.

- A Resolution, which encourages action, but is not legally binding.
- A Decision, which is an administrative action, usually relating to a short-term event, and like a Resolution, hortatory

### **ASOC Priorities at ATCM 2022**

The Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC) is invited to ATCMs as an Expert, a status it has held since 1991. It is the only environmental non-governmental group with such access.<sup>3</sup> In 2022, ASOC is calling on Parties to the Antarctic Treaty to:

- Designate new Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (ASPAs) to preserve biodiversity, particularly as climate change impacts on the Antarctic environment increase.
- Assign Emperor Penguins the designation of Specially Protected Species, due to this iconic Antarctic species' acute vulnerability to the melting and loss of sea ice and other climate impacts.
- Respond to the accelerating impacts of climate change with a plan of action to protect species and habitats in the region.
- Institute new precautionary measures to manage Antarctic tourism and ensure that it causes minimal environmental impact.

### **The ATCM and marine protection**

While the ATCM is separate from the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), and does not make decisions concerning the proposals to create three new MPAs in the Southern Ocean, both bodies fall under the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). Additionally, 26 of the Parties to the Antarctic Treaty are also Members of CCAMLR. Thus CCAMLR and the ATCM share a common objective - preserving the health of Antarctic species and ecosystems, and must pursue similar policies to respond to the threat of climate change and to protect biodiversity.

ASOC believes that both the ATCM and CCAMLR must work together to protect Antarctica as a whole. Thus, while ASOC calls on all CCAMLR Members to agree to increased marine protection in 2022, the ATCM should complement this protection with new protected areas on land and in coastal areas, and increased management of tourism. By jointly pursuing ambitious conservation policies, CCAMLR and the ATCM can once again demonstrate the international leadership that was once the hallmark of the ATS.

---

<sup>3</sup> Formally ASOC is an "Expert" to the ATCM and an "Observer" to the CEP meetings. In practice the role of ASOC is that of observer, as the term is commonly used outside the ATS.