

ECO



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XVII ANTARCTIC TREATY CONSULTATIVE MEETING

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It has become clear to ECO that the Antarctic Treaty Parties will not establish an independent inspectorate while in Venice. While the effective implementation of the Protocol (and consequently the Antarctic environment) will almost certainly suffer because of this lack of action, ECO would like to suggest an alternative arrangement.

Article 14 (2) (b) of the Protocol allows the Treaty States to designate observers at ATCMs to "carry out inspections under procedures to be established by an Antarctic Treaty Consultative

Meeting." With this in mind, ECO would like to suggest that ASOC be designated as one of the inspectors under the Treaty. ASOC has the requisite experience, having participated in over 13 unofficial inspections in the

Treaty area. Five of these, conducted by coalition member Greenpeace, have visited over 40 bases over the past six years. These environmental inspections, although unofficial, were organised and funded entirely by Greenpeace supporters. Obviously, people all over the world care deeply about what is happening "on the ice."

ASOC's technical, political and environmental expertise offers the ATCPs a unique opportunity to respond to this public concern immediately and effectively. Additionally, it would provide a landmark level of involvement for citizens around the world to become an active part of the preservation of a continent that they hold so dear.

ECO suggests that Treaty Parties act quickly to designate ASOC as an inspector at this meeting so that its reports may prove a useful addition to the next ATCM.

THE NEW EFFICIENT ATS: Secretariat, CEP and Inspectorate

ECO has the impression that - at last - welcome progress is being made on at least one of the institutions which are needed to make the Protocol work: the Secretariat. ECO trusts that agreement can be reached this week on matters such as its financing and location. By Friday, the timetable for the establishment of the Secretariat should be agreed.

ECO sees the Secretariat, the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) and the Inspectorate as being closely linked. Together, they could provide for a fully comprehensive system of environmental protection.

Secretariat

In order for the Treaty and Protocol to operate efficiently, it is clear that the Secretariat should service both ATCMs and the CEP. There are many ways in which the CEP will need the assistance of the Secretariat.

For example, the EIA process -- one of the corner-stones of the Protocol -- depends on having the Secretariat and the CEP working together. The CEP should be involved in all stages of the EIA process. It should draw up guidelines for the interpretation and implementation of all aspects of Annex 1.

At the IEE stage, complete IEEs should be made available at least to the CEP and Secretariat. The Protocol does not specifically anticipate this. It only requires the distribution of a list of IEEs, while the documents themselves must be available only on request. We urge all parties to make documents available as a matter of course, however, to the institutions, other parties and observers. The Secretariat would support the CEP by collecting and circulating IEEs and CEEs, and would perform the important task of making all these available for public comment.

The schedule in the Protocol for circulating and commenting on CEEs is very tight. Taking into account the time that the drafts will spend

in transit, the actual time for comments is not long. ECO is presenting an alternative communications system to help improve this situation. [See article on ANT-Net in this issue.] Again, it is clear that the role of the Secretariat is key in keeping track of the dates, and in ensuring that the CEP has appropriate support in making its input to the EIA process.

The Secretariat has a vital role in facilitating the process of commenting on CEEs. It should receive copies of all IEEs and CEEs, proposals for activities both from governments and non-government operators (including logistics, tourism, scientific activities, and areas to be visited), inspection reports from parties (both under Article VII of the AT and under Art 14 of the Protocol), and from the Inspectorate.

CEP

In order to fulfill the task of "minimising or mitigating environmental impacts of activities in the Antarctic Treaty area," the CEP needs automatic access to information, including assessments of proposed activities. We have articulated in detail the functions of the CEP in the ASOC Information Paper that was introduced at this meeting.

SCAR, and in particular GOSEAC, must play an important advisory role in the work of the CEP. Virtually the entire list of the CEP's functions will benefit from advice from SCAR as well as from other experts such as ASOC, often in response to focused questions and requests for assistance. If

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10,000 TOURISTS TO VISIT DUMONT D'URVILLE!



WATCH YOUR MONITORING, FOLKS!

ECO congratulates the Treaty Parties for their discussions on monitoring, and for convening the Group of Experts on Environmental Monitoring in Buenos Aires earlier this year. It is only through good monitoring programmes that the Treaty System can obtain the necessary information about the impacts of activities on the Antarctic environment, to enable sound management decisions to be made.

ECO cannot help noticing, however, in the report from the Group of Experts meeting,

occasional reversion to the bad old days, where operators made ad hoc judgments on the basis of little evidence, that certain impacts were not serious (or in the language of the Protocol, significant). The report, for example, states in five places that certain practices are unlikely to have significant impacts:

- o disposal of sewage and waste water into ice pits,
- o sewage and waste water discharges from ships,
- o sewage and waste water discharge from stations into the sea,
- o fossil fuel combustion and storage, and
- o human activities conducted in accordance with the Protocol with respect to flora and fauna and Protected Areas.

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MONITORING

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In only two of these instances does the Report recommend that further study should be carried out to confirm these opinions.

ECO has two concerns with this. The first is that the impacts from some of the most common practices are being placed off limits to further study. This goes against a basic principle of environmental impact assessment, that predictions about impacts should be verified by monitoring.

If the prediction is that the impact is insignificant, this prediction needs to be tested also. Of course, judgments will have to be made about priorities for monitoring, and ECO agrees that this is what the Group of Experts should have (and to a great extent has) done. However, the Group of Experts

overstepped the mark by taking it upon itself to state that some impacts are unlikely to be significant and therefore do not need monitoring.

ECO's second concern is that terms such as "significant" and "local level" are now being used liberally in papers such as the Buenos Aires report, without any explicit discussion over their definitions. This has far-reaching consequences for future interpretation of the Protocol. The people who attended the Buenos Aires meeting may think, for example, that nutrient enhancement (para 89) from sewage outfalls is insignificant, but ECO disagrees. Such assessments on the significance of an impact will always contain a large component of value judgment, which, for instance, the COMNAP EIA guidelines acknowledge. ECO believes that these value judgments should be made, explicitly, by a much wider community than just SCAR and Antarctic operators.

THE NEW EFFICIENT ATS: Secretariat, CEP and Inspectorate

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the Treaty Parties want SCAR's GOSEAC experts to fulfill some of these responsibilities, provision should be made to pay properly for the work. SCAR's present budget is inadequate, for example, to do the necessary work on management plans. The CEP needs to have a viable budget to contract for the required research and information, whether done by SCAR or others. A proper budget will allow the CEP to use whichever individuals and institutions are best suited to carry out the work needed to implement the Protocol.

The role of the Secretariat as recipient and focal point for distribution and circulation of information generated and condered by the CEP will be crucial. Modern means of communication, such as electronic mail will be very helpful.

Inspectorate

The establishment of an Inspectorate with the mandate to investigate and monitor compliance and to supply the CEP with accurate, up-to-date information on all activities in Anarctica, is crucial to the ability of the CEP to carry out its functions

as specified in Article 12. With information from the Inspectorate, the CEP would be in a strong position to anticipate and address cumulative impacts and help resolve conflicts of use.

Together with the CEP, it would be possible to draw up a schedule of inspections, so as to avoid the past situation of a few stations having many visits, while many were never seen. The Secretariat would then be responsible for circulating all the reports resulting from inspections, and all comments from the CEP on the inspection reports.

Where an activity proceeds, the Inspectorate should have a role in providing unbiased feedback to the CEP. The Secretariat is key to the distribution and circulation of such information, within an outside the ATS.

See the next issue of ECO for information on electronic mail systems as an inexpensive way to exchange and circulate information.

NOW YOU SEE IT NOW YOU DON'T!

From 1987 to 1992 Greenpeace maintained a base at Cape Evans on Ross Island as a spearhead for its campaign to have Antarctica declared a World Park.

That goal came a step closer with the abandonment of the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities and the signing last year of the Madrid Protocol for Environmental Protection.

In light of these positive developments Greenpeace considered the decommissioning of World Park Base in favour of more mobile and flexible options for future expeditions to the Antarctic. A draft Initial Environmental Evaluation was produced and after wide circulation the final decision was taken to remove the base.

Once the decision had been taken to dismantle the base, three principles were set that governed the planning process and the actual course of the dismantling project. They were:

- a) to minimize any additional environmental impacts created by the removal;
- b) to take appropriate remedial action against the environmental impacts that the base had had on the Cape Evans site over its five years of operation; and
- c) to design and conduct an environmental monitoring programme to assess the impact that the Greenpeace facility and previous parties had had on the Cape Evans site.

During the months preceding the expedition's departure, detailed plans were made for every aspect of the dismantling operation. Timetables were developed that took into account expected weather and sea ice conditions at Cape Evans and the need to

preserve the high safety record that Greenpeace operations had achieved in the Antarctic over the previous six years.

An experienced team of personnel was assembled to carry out the programme that included many veterans of Greenpeace Antarctic expeditions as well as representatives of all five previous overwintering teams.

A comprehensive stowage plan for the expedition vessel MV Gondwana was prepared in conjunction with the dismantling programme and modifications made to accommodate the amount of deck cargo that would be transported back to New Zealand. Wooden crates were prefabricated to be used for packing the contents of the buildings and store rooms.

One problem identified at this stage was the large volume of 200 litre fuel drums that had to be backloaded aboard the vessel. A method had to be found that would minimize the volume of the drums. Eventually a hydraulic crusher was designed and manufactured that reduced the total volume to one sixth of the original amount.

Also during the preparation period, methodologies for the remediation of the environmental impacts of the base were developed and discussed with many Antarctic scientists. Soil that had been contaminated with spilled fuel, either by World Park Base or by previous occupants of the site, was one of the most important aspects that needed to be addressed.

Several methods of cleaning soil in situ were examined but they were all deemed to cause too much disturbance to the permafrost and in the end it was decided

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NOW YOU SEE IT -- NOW YOU DON'T!

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that the best way to deal with fuel-contaminated soil was a combination of removal of the worst and monitoring of the rest.

The expedition left Auckland, New Zealand on 15 December 1991, and after an uneventful voyage across the Southern Ocean the MV Gondwana was in position to allow work to begin at Cape Evans on December 27.

The following six weeks saw steady progress in the dismantling, packing and backloading of the approximately 170 tons of equipment that comprised World Park Base and its contents. The weather was not particularly favourable but only three days were actually lost to adverse conditions when the two expedition helicopters were grounded because of high winds and poor visibility.

By the end of the second week in January, the fast ice had broken out enough to allow the MV Gondwana to lay off the ice edge only two miles from Cape Evans and, as planned, the pace of the backloading became more efficient. Altogether, the two Hughes 500 helicopters spent a little more than 100 hours in the air to complete the entire removal operation.

Once the main structures had been dismantled, an intensive clean up programme was initiated to remove scattered debris such as paint flakes, wood chips, old nails and other small items. The sites of fuel contamination were marked out, inspected and sampled. The top 15 centimetres of soil in the worst affected areas was dug out and transported back to the ship while fresh soil from further down the beach replaced what had been removed.

Preliminary results from the monitoring estimate the total amount of fuel spilled in five years as approximately 200 litres. Almost three-quarters of that fuel was estimated as having been removed with the soil.

A small granite benchmark was erected on the site in order to provide a consistent measuring point for Greenpeace's future monitoring activities and to indicate that the site has been used for human activities.

Forty-five days after it began, on February 10, 1993, the operation was completed and the first total removal of an Antarctic facility undertaken in compliance with all relevant Antarctic Treaty procedures had ended successfully, safely and ahead of schedule - a testament to the skill, knowledge and respect for the Antarctic environment that Greenpeace has gained over the last seven years of expedition campaigning for World Park Antarctica.



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