

Arctic Council – Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME)

Arctic Marine Tourism Project (AMTP) - Best Practice Guidelines

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**Note: Design and layout of document to follow upon SAO/Ministerial approval of text*

Purpose and Scope

The Arctic Marine Tourism Project (AMTP) is the first project in a potential suite of renewed efforts by the Arctic Council's Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group to analyze and encourage sustainable tourism across the circumpolar Arctic.

Recognizing the unique and wide-ranging management challenges associated with the growth of tourism in this region, the Arctic Council, at the 2013 Kiruna Ministerial meeting, indicated its support for the development of a cross-cutting initiative centered on strengthening sustainability within the industry and based upon the needs and priorities identified within recent Arctic Council documents including the Senior Arctic Official's Report to Ministers (2013), the Arctic Ocean Review Final Report (2013) and Canada's Arctic Council Chairmanship (2013-2015) Program Priorities.

In broad terms the AMTP attempts to identify issues or gaps where the Arctic Council can add value through the articulation of best practice guidelines specific to marine based Arctic tourism. In undertaking this project the PAME Working Group has produced a document that:

- Takes into account regional variations, types of vessels and tourism operations and multiple stakeholder perspectives;
- Considers the intended audience(s) for best practice guidelines;
- Minimizes duplication by being aware of existing guidelines and best practices related to Arctic marine tourism; and
- Focuses on aspects of Arctic marine tourism that fall outside the competency of, or remain unaddressed by, the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Aware of the diversity of actors engaged in Arctic marine tourism, the AMTP also recognizes that many operators with a longstanding history in the Arctic - in particular members of the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) - tend to be familiar with the risks, issues and considerations related to Arctic marine tourism. Generally, these operators set a positive example, including for those less experienced with the challenges of Arctic marine tourism like pleasure craft. Indeed, many of these experienced operators have good relations and communications with local communities and coastal administrations and conduct their operations in a responsible, safe, and environmentally sustainable way.

The AMTP best practice guidelines document is primarily based on the outcomes of two international workshops convened to gather relevant experts from government, industry, academia, the not-for-profit sector, and indigenous and Arctic communities to present and share information on Arctic marine tourism. The results of these workshops have been distilled and subsequently strengthened by complementary PAME documentation

and interdisciplinary review by Arctic Council member governments through relevant working groups.

Introduction

In the context of the AMTP ‘Arctic marine tourism’ is understood to include activities or interactions that are in some way facilitated by (though not limited to) the operation of a vessel in Arctic waters. While a convenient shorthand, it is recognized that the term does simplify an otherwise diverse industry and range of activities that reflect many regional and geographical variations. Accordingly, unless otherwise specified, the best practice guidelines that follow are intended for broad application and not necessarily exclusive to vessel operators, but rather the coastal administrations and local communities directly involved in aspects of Arctic marine tourism as well.

‘Sustainable Arctic tourism’ is given the same definition used by the Arctic Council’s Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) in the Sustainable Model for Arctic Regional Tourism (SMART) Report¹ to mean “tourism that minimizes negative impacts and maximizes socio-cultural, environmental and economic benefits for residents of the Arctic”.

No specific geographical limit for the Arctic is used in the context of the AMTP as neither PAME nor the Arctic Council has established a single use definition of the area. Rather, because the best practice guidelines contained below are not predicated on geographic boundaries, Arctic States are encouraged to determine their appropriate range of applicability within areas subject to their respective national jurisdictions. It is also anticipated that responsible operators will employ these best practice guidelines as appropriate when in the high seas areas of the Central Arctic Ocean.

The AMTP best practice guidelines is a voluntary document encouraging action on behalf of the Arctic Council, Arctic States, and in some instances collaboration between the two, and is meant to strengthen, not preclude, the range of existing mandatory requirements and voluntary policies and guidance currently in place to support sustainable Arctic marine tourism issued by levels of government, industry, industry associations and the NGO community.

¹ SDWG. Final Report - Sustainable Model for Arctic Regional Tourism (SMART). Rovaniemi, Finland, 2006, 44 pp (<https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/33>).

Best Practice Guidelines

Noting the potential benefits of sustainable Arctic marine tourism and mindful that these benefits are best realized through active and collaborative engagement among coastal communities, government agencies, industry, academia, and other stakeholders

The Arctic Council Should...

- **Develop a standardized framework for, and encourage the preparation of, site-specific guidelines for near-shore and coastal areas of the Arctic visited by passengers of marine tourism vessels and pleasure craft**

Aware that the ecological and cultural diversity of the Arctic can benefit from individualized or context-specific approaches to management, the preparation of voluntary site-specific guidelines can be an effective method for encouraging sustainable use, mitigating certain safety and environmental risks, addressing risks to areas of vulnerability, and educating visitors on ecological, cultural and historical features unique to a particular area. Moreover, site-specific guidelines are a tailored tool that complement and support more general activity guidelines and broader national or regional approaches to tourism and marine management.

As site-specific guidelines are primarily intended to be tools for tourists and tour operators arriving via marine vessels, the development of an Arctic Council framework for reference and use by governments, industry and industry associations, visitors, and other interested parties should reflect relevant and practical content. Consideration should therefore be given to characteristic features including, *inter alia*, topography, bathymetry, flora and fauna, cultural heritage, hazards and prohibited activities, emergency points of contact, applicable regulations and guidelines, and visual maps or graphical representations of local features.

It is recognized that certain site-specific guidelines have already been or are in the process of being developed for parts of the [Arctic](#), across many of the coastal areas of [Antarctica](#), and by various Arctic States. Inspiration should therefore be drawn from these efforts, including collaboration and partnership where and as appropriate in the formulation of a standardized framework for the future establishment of Arctic site-specific guidelines.

- **Encourage science based collaboration between vessels engaged in Arctic marine tourism and academic/research communities**

With a propensity to regularly visit areas less commonly frequented by or accessible to other types of Arctic ocean going vessels, many vessels engaged in marine tourism can potentially provide a versatile multi-purpose platform for research, experiments and observations more incidental to traditional tourism activities via arrangements that might otherwise be prohibitive to the researcher due to vessel availability or cost.

While the nature of Arctic voyage planning and the need for built-in contingencies to address variables such as weather and ice can make for difficult, if not unpredictable planning, cooperation between the Arctic marine tourism industry and the academic/research community is nevertheless encouraged to the extent possible, provided that applicable science licensing regimes are adhered to, and under circumstances where the partnership is of mutual benefit.

- **Identify, and as appropriate, endorse practical in-the-field best practice guidance for sustainable Arctic marine tourism**

In addition to the various flag, coastal and port state requirements more generally applicable to vessels operating within the Arctic region (including the requirements of the Mandatory Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters), marine tourism is also subject to a wide range of industry, industry association, and NGO guidelines and protocols. Given the breadth and depth of guidance material currently being used by vessels within the Arctic marine tourism industry, developing *additional* Arctic Council best practice guidelines for *specific* activities common to Arctic marine tourism (e.g., wildlife viewing, zodiac operations, historic site interactions) risks being duplicative of the efforts made by local experts in the preparation of similar material.

Consideration should instead be given to identifying and articulating Arctic Council endorsement for consensually agreed upon existing material developed within appropriate fora, therefore allowing this material to be maintained and updated from time to time. Additionally, the Arctic Council should also consider conducting a gap analysis to identify activities for which best practice guidelines might still be lacking.

- **Encourage the voluntary carriage of Automatic Identification System (AIS) technology onboard all vessels engaged in Arctic marine tourism activities**

Automatic Identification System (AIS) technology can provide information about a vessel's position, course and speed by way of terrestrial and satellite communications to maritime administrations (and others) for reasons ranging from improved safety and maritime domain awareness, to statistical and trend analysis. According to the Safety of Life at Sea Convention (SOLAS), AIS technology must be fitted onboard ships 300 GT or more engaged in international voyages, cargo ships 500 GT or more not engaged in

international voyages, and on all passenger ships (defined by SOLAS as a ship carrying 12 or more passengers) regardless of their size.

While many of the vessels currently engaged in Arctic marine tourism activities are already subject to AIS carriage requirements, there remain others (particularly smaller pleasure craft) that fall below the mandatory SOLAS threshold for carriage. Further, given the unique hazards common to Arctic operations, and that there is a tendency for many of these smaller vessels to operate in particularly remote areas, it is recommended that all vessels engaged in tourism activities be voluntarily outfitted with AIS technology. Doing so provides coastal administrations with a more comprehensive picture of vessel traffic in the event of an emergency, may assist in any necessary response or search and rescue (SAR) activity, and provides coastal communities equipped with the proper technology to potentially increase their awareness of inbound visitors.

- **Compile and regularly update a publically available repository of circum-Arctic marine tourism information**

As a means of information sharing and awareness building, the Arctic Council (through collaboration amongst its working groups) should facilitate the compilation of Arctic marine tourism statistical information, information on related guidelines and regulations, other relevant information from Arctic States, Permanent Participants and observer States and organizations at the Arctic Council, and make this information publically available through the Arctic Council and/or PAME Working Group website with the intent to update it from time to time.

- **Encourage the ratification of the Ballast Water Management (BWM) Convention by all Arctic States and observers States**

In a single voyage Arctic marine tourism can involve the movement of vessels through multiple marine and coastal ecosystems, the disembarkation and embarkation of passengers at various terrestrial sites, and the commencement or finalization of such a voyage in areas well outside the Arctic region. The generally transitory nature of Arctic marine tourism and the range of possible vectors associated with both passenger and vessel highlight a potential risk of invasive species transfer.

One international attempt to address the transmission of marine invasive species through the control of ballast water is through the *International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments* (or BWM Convention). Adopted by the IMO in 2004 though not yet in force, the BWM Convention will require certain vessels to implement measures aimed at reducing the transmission of harmful invasive species via ballast water.

Accordingly, all Arctic States and observer States at the Arctic Council are encouraged to ratify the BWM Convention as soon as practicable as a means of reducing potential invasive species transfer, though other potential measures to address invasive species transfer, particularly by smaller or non-ballast carrying vessels should also be encouraged.

Arctic States Should...

- **Encourage the streamlining of governmental marine tourism permitting and oversight processes**

The nature of Arctic marine tourism is such that vessels routinely operate across multiple international jurisdictions during the course of a single voyage. Even within the borders of a single Arctic coastal state, the requirements for vessels engaging in tourism activities can be complex to the point that they act as unintended barriers of operation or limit sustainable economic development potential.

Collectively, Arctic coastal States should strengthen cooperation and coordination efforts that streamline requirements and/or processes and support marine based tourism while maintaining appropriately protective levels of safety and environmental stewardship.

Individually, Arctic States should also consider, to the extent that relevant safeguards are maintained, streamlining processes that can act as a deterrent to sustainable Arctic marine tourism operations. Simplified processes, such as a single window of entry wherein potential tour operators can access clear and comprehensive information on required permits, licences, costs, and other relevant information can potentially lead to heightened levels of compliance, safety and environmental awareness, and sustainable economic benefit.

Arctic States in Cooperation with the Arctic Council Should...

- **Encourage targeted outreach and awareness campaigns**

Arctic marine tourism encompasses a variety of vessels, owners, operators and crew with varying amounts of Arctic experience, and passengers with wide-ranging backgrounds and nationalities. The degree to which marine tourism can negatively impact the Arctic region also varies, though expedition style cruise tourism in particular is generally run by prudent operators invested in ensuring environmental and cultural sustainability.

In an effort to address the types of vessels that might operate in a poorly informed or less than sustainable way, Arctic States or Arctic Council working groups in partnership with key stakeholders should develop targeted awareness and education campaigns

emphasizing, *inter alia*, the importance of voyage planning, cultural differences, and heightened environmental protection. Specific attention should be given to pleasure craft and others with minimal Arctic experience.

Moreover, given the role played by Arctic Council observer States, it is recommended that they be engaged in the development of outreach and awareness campaigns and assist with the dissemination and where appropriate, translation, of material targeted to observer State domestic audiences.

- **Support continued and improved access to maritime information**

Recognizing advancements in satellite-based and in-situ weather and ice information, and that improved access to this information can contribute to the reduction of risk, Arctic States should, to the extent practical and where not already done, make available this type of information to vessels engaged in Arctic marine tourism activities in a format appropriate for receiving at high latitudes. Wherever possible, operators should also seek to obtain relevant traditional and local knowledge.

Similarly, aware of the status of Arctic navigational charting relative to other ocean areas, and that the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) has established an Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission (ARHC) to coordinate hydrographic activity and cooperation within the Arctic, the Arctic Council should endorse the continued voluntary crowd-sourcing of bathymetric data as a complementary process to the official production of nautical charts and explore the role that the Arctic Council could play in facilitating the transfer of this data from industry to the ARHC.

- **Promote improved communications and regular engagement between vessel operators and the local coastal communities they visit or pass by**

Done properly, sustainable marine tourism can be of mutual benefit to visitor and resident alike, resulting in shared cultural and educational experiences and potential economic benefit. While primarily incumbent upon the visiting party to cultivate and respect this relationship, nurturing it where there is positive reception and respecting it when there is not, the coastal community is not entirely without responsibility, as active two-way communication in areas where tourism is indeed wanted improves the overall likelihood of a successful visit.

To reduce the likelihood of negative interactions, visiting vessels and local coastal communities should promote and espouse basic principles of communication, planning and respect throughout all stages of the voyage beyond those required by the community or coastal state. By maintaining regular, advanced, and open lines of communication expectations are better managed by all, potentially alleviating or validating identified issues or concerns.

- **Encourage the establishment of predictable community contacts**

Advanced planning and notifications of arrival between vessels engaged in Arctic marine tourism and the coastal communities they intend to visit can be compromised in the absence of established communication channels and predictable points of contact.

A lack of awareness or complete absence of community contact points can result in unannounced arrivals and associated issues, concerns or conflicts. Indeed, even with a pre-established onshore contact point, there is no guarantee of immediate or regular communication.

Given the range and diversity of Arctic coastal communities no one-size-fits-all approach is likely to fully address this issue. Instead, several complementary possibilities should be explored to advance a more predictable process for ship-to-shore communications, including the possibility of arrangements with local airport authorities due to typically longer staffing hours and availability of communications technology.

In addition, the Arctic Council (through its working groups) should play a role in advancing communications between parties engaged in Arctic marine tourism by compiling and maintaining a publically available directory of coastal community contacts. Information could be regularly solicited during working group meetings and updated from time to time.

- **Encourage the development of visitor ‘codes of conduct’ for individual coastal communities or regional areas**

Either separately or as a sub-component of individual site-specific guidelines, Arctic States in close collaboration with regional or local levels of government are encouraged to develop individual codes of conduct for visitors to coastal communities that reflect cultural considerations and the unique human dimension of the Arctic.

While certain general principles apply to visitors regardless of the Arctic coastal community or region being visited, the development of individualized material can highlight important or specific information that might differ from one community to the next. Moreover, a list of ‘do’s and don’ts’ related to cross-cultural understanding (e.g., bartering practices, traditional harvesting) tailored to visitors is a means of reducing potential conflict and managing overall expectations. These codes of conduct should be maintained and made publically available through the Arctic Council and/or PAME website.

