

ATCM homepage

Summary

At ATCM XXI in Christchurch, New Zealand, Norway offered to explore new means of document distribution, especially giving thought to electronic means of distribution.

During the preparations for ATCM XXII, an ATCM world wide web homepage (<http://www.tromso.npolar.no/atcm>) was established by the Norwegian Polar Institute (NPI) in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It was furthermore decided to examine the possibility of using the ATCM homepage as a means of distributing documents. A protected page which gave restricted access to submitted ATCM XXII information papers was consequently established under the ATCM homepage.

Norway believes that the establishment and operation of a WWW-site for the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) will greatly enhance the transparency of the ATS, based on the Consultative Parties' decisions and practice thus far. To that effect, a homepage could provide a vehicle for enabling an easy access to the official ATCM documents, upon their becoming publicly available. In accordance with the Consultative Parties' decisions and practice, this will in principle be from the closure of the ATCM at which documents were submitted. Parties could also consider making some documents publicly available via a WWW-site before the closure of an ATCM, or even before its opening.

General background

In March 1998 a homepage for ATCM XXII was made accessible to the Treaty Parties and the world community on the world wide web (WWW). The homepage was prepared by NPI in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The establishment of the homepage primarily had three aims:

- to provide delegates with easy access to information about ATCM XXII (program, venue, facilities, etc.)
- to provide delegates with easy access to information about the city in which the meeting was to take place
- to provide information about the Antarctic Treaty System and Antarctica to the public at large

The ATCM XXII homepage was designed as to give an as simple as possible access to the information provided in the homepage. Readers should refer to Appendix 1 for further information on the structure and contents of the homepage.

Due to the fact that the homepage was established relatively late (i.e. close to the opening of ATCM XXII), the homepage has in all likelihood not reached its full potential as an information tool for ATCM XXII. Based on the registered general response level, however, it is believed that an ATCM homepage does have a high potential as an information tool for delegates and other interested people.

The homepage established for ATCM XXII may constitute the basis for homepages for future ATCMs. This would enable host countries to establish an ATCM homepage without needing to establish a new framework for it. Refer to sketch in Appendix 2 for illustration of possible use of the ATCM XXII homepage in a future ATCM homepage.

Document distribution on the WWW

At the time of the establishment of the ATCM XXII homepage it was decided to include a protected page which would provide the ATCM XXII delegates access to ATCM XXII information documents.

The document page was established with both username and password protection. Antarctic Treaty Parties and ATCM Observers were informed about the access information through diplomatic channels in an ATCM XXII Circular Note.

As this form for document distribution was initiated as a pilot project, it was decided that only information papers would be made accessible. Parties were requested to specifically note whether they wished their information papers posted on the homepage when submitting a paper to the ATCM XXII Secretariat. Papers were as far as possible posted continuously as they were received by the Secretariat, although some time lag was experienced, mainly due to limited available resources.

Only a limited number of the submitted information papers were posted on the protected page. It is considered likely that to a large degree this is a consequence of the novelty of the concept, and that the option of posting of documents would become more utilized at future ATCMs if the option continues to be provided.

Statistics indicate that the net-accessible documents page has been visited regularly by various parties, and thus seem to indicate that there is utility in providing access to documents in this manner.

More and more international organizations and other international collaborative fora utilize the WWW for document distribution and as a communication tool. It is Norway's hope that document distribution via electronic means (e-mail and Internet) in the future also may replace the slow and costly document distribution system currently practiced in the ATS. It is believed that this will aid the ATCM Host Government greatly in their preparations of a meeting.

The WWW and the public availability of ATCM documents

Since the period of 1960s and early 1970s, when the ATCM documents were generally not available to public, the ATS has passed through a gradual process of evolution towards transparency. Since early 1980s, the Consultative Parties have discussed the public availability of documents as a regular agenda item at ATCMs, in order to make information about Antarctica and the ATS better available to all those interested in it. Decisions taken by the Consultative Parties, and their practice consistently followed in this matter, have in the course of the 1990s enabled public availability of all official documents of all the ATCMs held so far.

The documents of the ATCMs are now, in principle, available to the public as from the closure of the ATCM at which these were submitted, unless indicated otherwise by the Party submitting a document. However, there still exist practical obstacles to the

transparency of the ATS. The papers are available in theory, but are hardly *accessible* in practice. While the Consultative Parties have, through their decisions and practice, allowed for public availability of ATCM documents, they have still failed to ensure easy access to these documents.

In order that the Parties succeed to ensure the transparency of the ATS, Norway firmly believes that all official documents from ATCMs, including both working and information papers, should not only be offered available but also made accessible, as far as possible. One way of remedying this situation is to establish an archive on the WWW, to be accessed through an ATCM homepage (see suggested structure in Appendix 2).

In light of development of modern means of communication, Norway believes it to be a best practical way in the preparation of an ATCM, that all the official documents submitted to the Host Country are placed at a password protected Home Page. As from the closure of an ATCM, any password restrictions on the protected document page for that ATCM should be eliminated, so as to make all official documents publicly available. Parties should indicate, when submitting official documents for the Meeting in question, whether they intend certain document not to be made public.

Furthermore, Norway believes that there are no real obstacles for a large number of official documents submitted to the ATCMs to be made publicly available already in advance of an ATCM. In fact, it is believed that this could increase general public involvement in and awareness of Antarctic management issues in the contemporary international community.

Based on the above, Norway believes that in preparation of future ATCMs there should be an option for Parties to make their ATCM documents available to the public also in advance of the commencement of the Meeting. In practice, this could be accomplished by establishing a page for net-accessible documents which is not password protected in addition to a protected page.

Based on the above discussions Norway proposes that the ATCM XXII adopt a decision for which a draft text is attached.

Draft Decision [] (1998) **ATCM Home Page**

The Representatives,

Decide:

An Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting Internet Home Page (*ATCM homepage*) shall be established at the World Wide Web (WWW).

The *ATCM homepage* shall *inter alia* contain:

a) in an area freely accessible to the general public:

- general information on Antarctica and the Antarctic Treaty System;¹

- within the resources available and in accordance with paragraph 3 of this Decision, an archive of official documentation from the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings, containing working and information papers submitted to the Meetings, as well as the Final Reports of the Meetings with text of annexes.

b) in a password protected area accessible only to the Antarctic Treaty Parties and the Antarctic Treaty System Observers², experts invited by the ATCM and any other entities that the ATCM decides should have such access:

- official documents submitted electronically to the Host Government in advance of an Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting;
- any practical information related to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, which the Host Government may wish to communicate this way.

As from the closure of an Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, and if no Delegation has indicated its intention to the contrary when submitting a document, the Host Government shall enable free public access to all the official documents which have been placed on the *ATCM homepage*, by removing the password protection from these.

Should any Delegation, when submitting a document to the Host Government indicate that the document can be placed in the *ATCM homepage* area freely accessible to the general public in advance of the Meeting, and if no other Antarctic Treaty Consultative Party objects within 30 days from the placement of that document on the *ATCM homepage* password protected area, the Host Government shall remove the password protection from that document.

Norway, as the Host Government of the XXII Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting shall, based on the Home Page prepared in advance of the XXII Meeting, establish the *ATCM homepage*, and shall maintain it until three months after the closure of ATCM XXII.

Thereafter, within the resources available and pending any more permanent solution agreed upon by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties, the *ATCM homepage* should be maintained by any subsequent Host Government of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, from three months after the closure of the previous Meeting until three months after the closure of the Meeting it hosts³.

This Decision shall be operative at adoption.

Footnotes:

¹ Developed in pursuance of paragraph 132 of the Final Report of the XXI Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting.

² as referred to in Rule 2 of the Revised Rules of Procedure for Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (1997)

³ Cf. Guidelines for Pre-sessional Document Circulation and Document Handling, paragraph 7.

ATCM Homepage - Overview of Structure

Level 1: "The homepage" - containing three gateways to level 2

Level 2.1.: ATCM General information

Level 2.1.1: The Treaty. Information about the Antarctic Treaty.

Level 2.1.2: The Treaty Meetings. Information about work.

Level 2.1.3: The Environmental Protocol. Information about the Protocol and the CEP.

Level 2.2.: ATCM XXII

Level 2.2.1: Delegates' Handbook

2.2.1.1: Delegates' ABC to the Meeting

2.2.1.2: General information for delegates to the XXIIth ATCM

2.2.1.3: Receptions and Excursions

Level 2.2.2: Meeting Program.

Level 2.2.3: Documents and Annotated Agenda. **(NB: protected)**

2.2.3.1: List of Documents

2.2.3.2: Net-accessible Documents

2.2.3.3: Annotated Agenda

Level 2.2.4: List of Participants

Level 2.2.5: News to delegates

Level 2.2.6: Information about Tromsø - the Host City.

Level 2.3: Antarctica (information to the general public)

Level 2.3.1: Description.

Level 2.3.2: Research

Level 2.3.3: Environmental Management

Level 2.3.4: Norway in Antarctica

Level 2.3.5: Pointers to other Antarctic sites

[Home](#) [News](#) [List of Delegates](#) [Delegate Handbook](#)
[Documents](#) [Meeting Program](#) [Tromsø](#)

22.05.98 : [Norwegian Polar Institute](#) : [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)

