Notification of the Intention of Canada to request recognition of Consultative Party status

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Information paper submitted by Canada

Canada would like to inform the Consultative Parties of its intention to request recognition of Consultative Party status pursuant to the “Guidelines on the procedure to be followed with respect to Consultative Party status” adopted by Decision 2 (2017). Our plans are to submit our request and the supporting dossier to the depositary Government in October 2021 in order to respect the deadline of 210 days prior to ATCM XLIV.

Canada recognizes the Antarctic Treaty System as the key multilateral mechanism for decisions on the regulation and management of Antarctica. Canada acceded to the Treaty in 1988 as a non-Consultative Party, and ratified the Protocol on Environmental Protection in 2003. We are committed to the key principles of the Antarctic Treaty, in particular maintaining peace and cooperation, the freedom of scientific investigation, and the protection of the continent’s fragile environment. As an international leader on polar issues, with extensive connections to the region’s research, tourism, governance, and history, it is time for Canada to join our international partners and take a more active role as a steward of the Antarctic.

Active in the Antarctic for over 100 years, Canada is a leading contributor amongst non-Consultative Party states in publishing Antarctic scientific research. Canadians have sustained involvement in Antarctic research over decades, with researchers from Canadian institutions contributing to over 1300 Antarctica-related publications between 1997 and 2018. Between the years of 2011 to 2018, Canadian researchers have contributed more than 80 distinct publications per year. From 2008 to 2017, our Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council supported 55 grants and awards for Antarctic research, for a total of CAD $6.69 million across 28 researchers and 16 trainees. The Antarctic mapping missions of Canada’s RADARSAT satellites provided repeated coverage of Antarctica and contributed to a revolution in the understanding of Antarctic ice-sheet dynamics. Also through the Canadian Space Agency, Canada monitors more atmospheric gases than any other nation – vital for international Antarctic research.

Canada is committed to advancing the collective understanding of polar science and stands ready to promote science collaboration with international partners in the Arctic and Antarctic. Researchers from Canadian institutions have repeatedly collaborated with other researchers from around the world, and there are 29 countries that have been affiliated with Canadian Antarctic research between 2016 and 2018. Through the Arctic-Antarctic Exchange mechanism of Canada’s Polar Continental Shelf Program, we provide logistical support to international researchers in Canada’s Arctic regions, in exchange for Canadian researchers receiving logistical support in Antarctica by other nations’ Antarctic programs. We recognize the world-class resources that already exist in Antarctica, and the environmental impact of creating new research stations. We propose therefore to continue to collaborate with international partners to foster Antarctic research, including exchanges with research facilities in the Canadian Arctic, upholding the spirit of scientific cooperation enshrined in the Treaty.

Canada is committed to the conservation and protection of Antarctica in recognition of its significance in sustaining unique and irreplaceable biodiversity and supporting essential scientific research. We ratified the Protocol on Environmental Protection in 2003 and have been implementing the Protocol and Annexes I-V through our Antarctic Environmental Protection Act since that date. We require environmental evaluations for all Canadian activities in the Antarctic and issue permits each year for scientific and tourism operations. We have implemented the provisions of Measure 4 (2004) and Measure 15 (2009) requiring contingency plans, insurance, and caps on visitor landings.

Climate change is a lived reality, including for Canada’s coastal and northern communities, with developments in the Antarctic having important implications globally. Canada is keenly aware of the role that Antarctica plays in the regulation of global climate systems. For example, McGill University hosts a Canada Research Chair in the Geodynamics of Ice Sheet - Sea Level Interactions focussing on the Antarctic contribution to global sea-level rise. Canada is committed to taking action on the risks posed by climate change and is interested in helping with actions to protect Antarctica from the effects of climate change.

Canada is a key player in Antarctic tourism with Canadian operators carrying a significant share of total Antarctic passengers per year. Canada is committed to promoting responsible tourism that protects the intrinsic value and natural heritage of the Antarctic. Canada is a leader in Antarctic education through the work of Students on Ice, a Canadian not-for-profit foundation with a mandate to educate the world’s youth about the importance of Antarctica and the Arctic region. Students on Ice has taken over 3,500 students and staff from 52 countries on educational expeditions to the polar regions, enhancing their understanding of the regions and inspiring many to become ambassadors for the two poles and the pressing challenges which are experienced in the two regions.

Canada’s polar expertise is extensively employed in Antarctica. For example, Canadian companies provide crucial Antarctic operational support for many national programs and tour operators, including research, logistics, and medical evacuations.

Finally, Canada is engaged in many of the other organizations and treaties that make up the Antarctic Treaty System. We have been an active member of SCAR since 1998. Canada is currently an observer in COMNAP and intends to apply this year for full member status. Canada is a party to the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals (CCAS) and to the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and reports annually under the requirements of these agreements.

In conclusion, we believe that Canada meets the requirements for Consultative Party status and we plan to submit a formal request and information dossier to the depositary Government in full compliance with the Guidelines adopted by Decision 2 (2017). Canada has been active in Antarctic science for over a century and we hope to be able to contribute further to the goals of the Antarctic Treaty as a Consultative Party. We look forward to your support at ATCM XLIV.