Analysis of the use of the Electronic Information Exchange System: uploading of Annual Reports and other additional considerations

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Summary

This document analyses the uploading of data corresponding to the information exchange requirements for the *Annual Reports* that the Consultative Parties submitted within the scope of the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES) in the period 2015–2020. It also evaluates, for the same period, specific aspects of each of the three subcategories of information included in the Annual Report: Scientific, Operational and Environmental. Finally, it includes a series of considerations on possible courses of action that this Secretariat could take to continue improving the EIES, if the Parties consider it appropriate.

Background

After having held an extensive debate on the existing requirements for the exchange of information and for the operation of the EIES, ATCM XXXIX (Santiago, 2016) decided to include in its Work Plan for the XL ATCM the task of reviewing the operation of this system.

In response to this requirement, during ATCM XL (Beijing, 2017) the ATS presented SP 10: *Report for the review of the functioning of the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES)*, which aimed to provide the Parties with a description of the various problems present in the system and propose possible improvements and changes.

This document constitutes an extension of SP 10 (ATCM XL) and a response to what has been expressed by recent ATCMs regarding the need for the EIES to be continuously updated and improved (see para [180] ATCM XL, para [45] ATCM XLI and paras [198] and [376] ATCM XLII).

Introduction

In accordance with Article VII of the Treaty, each Party must exchange information on its activities by providing information in advance about its expeditions and the stations, personnel and military equipment that it will use in Antarctica.

This requirement was later embodied in various actions of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. The 1991 Environmental Protocol added important requirements for the exchange of information on environmental matters.

Under the direction of the ATCM, the Secretariat has developed the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES), which functions as a central repository for that information. With Decision 4 (2012), the XXXV ATCM established that the Parties must use the EIES to exchange information in accordance with the Antarctic Treaty and the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty and its annexes.

The information exchange requirements established for the EIES were originally grouped into three categories: Pre-season information, Annual report and Permanent information. These requirements were reviewed on several occasions, including the possibility that certain information could be reported regularly or continuously throughout the year. Decision 7 (2019) adopts the most recent consolidated list specifying the information to be exchanged by the Parties.

This document analyses the uploading of data corresponding to the information exchange requirements for the Annual Reports that the Consultative Parties submitted within the scope of the EIES in the period between the years 2015-2016 and 2019-2020. Specific aspects of each of the three subcategories of information included in the Annual Report category have also been considered for the same period. These subcategories are: Scientific, Operational and Environmental.

The main general findings of this analysis are listed below, along with more specific findings and a series of considerations on possible courses of action that this Secretariat could take in relation to this issue, if the Parties were to consider it appropriate. The full results of this analysis are included in Annex I.

General findings

* Between 2015 and 2020 there was a gradual fall in the percentage of Parties that uploaded their Annual Report to the EIES, from 86% in 2015-16 (25 Consultative Parties out of 29) to 72% in 2019-20 (21 out of 29).
* Only 15 Parties (51.7%) uploaded their Annual Report to the EIES in the 5 years analysed, while 7 Parties (24.1%) did so only twice or less during the same period.

Specific findings

Scientific Information

* The Parties exchanged progressively less scientific information: 62.1% (18 Parties) did so in 2015-16, while only 37.9% (11 Parties) did so in 2019-2020.
* In particular, only 3 Parties (10.3% of the total) provided information on *Forward plans* in 2019-2020. In 2015-16, 13 Parties (44.8%) provided information for this subitem.

National Expeditions

* Overall, the number of Parties providing information on *National Expeditions* fell, notwithstanding a slight rebound near the end of the period analysed. Depending on the year, information on National Expeditions was only obtained from between 70% and 50% of all Parties.
* The drop in the percentage of information on *National Expeditions* uploaded to the system can be seen in all the required items, notwithstanding occasional rebounds in certain ones.
* For example, in this period, the percentage of the Parties that provided information on Stations in this period was between 75% and 50%, depending on the year. Between half and a third provided information on the use of Vessels, while between 50% and 25% provided information on the use of Aircraft. In that time, only two Parties reported the use of Research Rockets.

Environmental Information

* The percentage of Parties that completed at least one field with Environmental Information gradually decreased by 10% between 2015 and 2020.
* Only twelve (12) Parties provided information in at least one environmental field during the entire period considered. Seven (7) Parties did so only once or not at all.
* Between 2015 and 2020, only two (2) Parties included information on Contingency Plans, while only eleven (11) countries provided information on Waste Management Plans. Of all the fields that are required to be completed with environmental information, these two items are the only ones that the Party must provide information for in order to avoid breaching the requirement.

Final thoughts

This study reveals that the uploading of Annual Report data by the Consultative Parties underwent a gradual and sustained decline in the last five years.

There are many possible reasons for this, and a detailed analysis of these reasons is beyond the scope of this paper. During the last Consultative Meetings, the Secretariat received comments from some Parties regarding the need to seek mechanisms that would facilitate the uploading of information. Some of the actions implemented in this regard were the general redesign of the platform already implemented and detailed in SP 9, and improvements in the availability of additional mechanisms for uploading information using pre-made templates. However, it should be noted that the difficulties may in some cases be due to the way in which the origin requirement is stated, and therefore any possible solution to these difficulties is beyond the remit of the Secretariat.

Against that background, and given the importance of the continuous uploading of data to the EIES to ensure the efficacy of the system, the ATS has focused on analysing possible initiatives aimed at furthering its improvement, with the objective of preventing any increase to – and eventually reducing – the bureaucratic burden the Parties must overcome to compile and submit this information. The need for these initiatives to allow summary reports and thematic maps to be produced that provide complete and higher quality information based on the data exchanged was also taken into account.

In addition to the initiatives already implemented, such as the redesign of the platform and the incorporation and improvement of devices that facilitate the uploading of data, it would be possible to implement search tools, a system to alert to empty fields, and early expiration warnings aimed at administrators responsible for publishing information. Also, initiatives could be taken aimed at reviewing the current requirements and building capacities to increase and improve the participation of the Parties in uploading data to the system. The Secretariat would enthusiastically participate in such initiatives.

The Secretariat remains attentive to what is required by the Parties, should they consider it appropriate to move forward in these matters.

Annex I: Full study results

Below is the full data[[1]](#footnote-1) of this study on the uploading of data corresponding to the information exchange requirements for the Annual Reports that the Consultative Parties submitted within the scope of the EIES in the period 2015–2020. Particular aspects of each of the three categories of information included in the Annual Report are also included. These categories are: Scientific, Operational and Environmental.

1. Uploading of the Annual Report

Figure 1 shows the recent data for the uploading of Annual Reports. A Party is considered to have submitted this information when it has submitted the corresponding form, regardless of the type/volume of information contained therein.

*Figure 1: Recent data for the uploading of Annual Reports*

The graph shows a gradual fall in the percentage of the Parties that submitted the Annual Report, from 86% in 2015-16 (25 Consultative Parties out of 29) to 72% (21 out of 29) in 2019-20.

The information obtained also indicates that only 15 Parties (51.7%) submitted their Annual Report in the 5 years analysed, while 7 Parties (24.1%) did so only twice or less during the same period.

1. Submission of data by category of information

Figure 2 shows the percentage of data uploaded in each of the three information categories included in the Annual Report: Scientific, Operational and Environmental Information. Again, a Party is considered to have submitted this information when it has done so for any of these three categories, regardless of the type/volume of information contained therein.

*Figure 2: Data uploaded in the three categories of information included in the Annual Report: Scientific, Operational and Environmental*

In this case, a sustained fall is again observed throughout the 2015-16 to 2019-2020 period for the 3 categories, although the fall is somewhat more pronounced for the Scientific Information item. It is also observed that:

1. Every time a Party submitted an Annual Report, it always included some type of operational and environmental information. For this reason, both curves coincide (this is discussed in more detail in points 4 and 5 of this Annex).
2. The percentage of Parties that submitted scientific information decreased steadily from 62.1% (18 Parties) in 2015-16 to 37.9% (11 Parties) in 2019-2020.
3. In each of the years evaluated, the percentage of Parties that submitted scientific information was lower than for the rest of the categories, and this gap between categories gradually widened from 24.1% in 2015-16 to 34.5% in 2019-2020. Thus, while in 2015-16, of the Parties that submitted Annual Reports, 72% (18 Parties out of 25) included some type of scientific information, in 2019-2020, that percentage fell to 52.4% (11 Parties out of 21).
4. Submission of Scientific Information

Currently, the information on the scientific projects that the parties currently develop or plan to develop in Antarctica includes two different sub-items: a) *Forward plans* and b) *Science activities in previous year*, as stipulated in point 2.1. of the Annex to Decision 7 (2019).

Figure 3 shows the percentage of Parties that submitted information for each of these sub-items. As in the previous cases, a Party is considered to have complied if it submitted information for that sub-item, regardless of the type/volume of information included.

*Figure 3: Percentage of Parties that submitted scientific information, by category.*

In this case, we see that:

1. Whenever a Party submitted scientific information, it included information referring to the sub-item *Science activities in previous year*. For that reason, both curves coincide.
2. The percentage of Parties that submitted information for the subitem *Forward plans* gradually fell from 44.8% (13 Parties) in 2015-16 to 10.3% (3 Parties) in 2019-2020.
3. The gap between the percentage of Parties that submitted information on *Forward plans* and the percentage of Parties who submitted information on *Science activities in previous year* increased from 17.2% in 2015-16 to values close to 30% in the last 3 years analysed. Thus, in the first two periods, of all the Parties that submitted Information on *Science activities in previous year*, more than 70% also included information on *Forward plans*. For 2019-2020, that percentage fell below 30% (3 Parties out of 11).
4. Submission of Operational Information

Under this item, the Parties exchange information corresponding to National (governmental) and Non-governmental Expeditions, as established in point 2.2. of the Annex to Decision 7 (2019).

It should be noted that only a fraction of all Parties organize non-governmental expeditions to Antarctica from their territory.

Figure 4 shows the percentages of the Parties that submitted information on National and Non-governmental Expeditions, and those that did not. In the case of Non-governmental Expeditions, we have indicated which Parties completed the fields corresponding to these expeditions with wording such as: *No new information has been provided during the reported period*. The percentage of Parties that did not submit an Annual Report is also shown.

*Figure 4: Percentage of Parties that submitted information on National and Non-governmental Expeditions, by category.*

From the analysis of figure 4, we can see that:

1. There is a general decline in the number of Parties reporting on National Expeditions, notwithstanding a slight upturn near the end of the period considered. If we add to this the Parties that did not submit an Annual Report, we can conclude that in the period studied, no information was obtained on National Expeditions from between 30% and 50% of the Parties, depending on the year.
2. The number of Parties reporting on the organization of Non-governmental Expeditions under their jurisdiction remained relatively constant between 2015-16 and 2019-20, ranging between 41% and 48% of the total number of Parties.

National Expeditions

The required information on National Expeditions is subdivided into five different categories: Stations, Vessels, Aircraft, Research Rockets, and Military

For its part, Figure 5 shows the percentage of Parties that uploaded information for these categories. A Party is considered to have provided information if it includes any type of information in the respective field, even when that information indicates that the Party has not used Stations, Vessels, Aircraft or Research Rockets or has not carried out Military activities.

*Figure 5: Percentage of Parties that submitted information on National Expeditions, by category.*

The analysis of figure 5 shows that:

1. There was an overall decline in the percentage of information submitted in all categories, notwithstanding a slight upturn in certain categories (e.g. Military and Stations).
2. Only 8 Parties included information in at least one field of the five categories in all the periods considered.
3. Of those Parties that submitted annual reports, there were 12 Parties that in one or more periods did not include information on any of the five categories corresponding to National Expeditions.
4. The Parties that provided information on Stations in this period constitute between 75% and 50% of the total Parties, depending on the year.
5. Parties that reported the use of Vessels in this period represent between a third and a half of all the Parties, while those that reported the use of Aircraft represent between 25% and 50% of all Parties, depending on the year.
6. During the 2015-16 to 2019-20 period, only two Parties reported the use of Research Rockets: one on two occasions, and the other on one occasion.
7. Submission of Environmental Information

For the purposes of this analysis, environmental information is considered to be that included in points “2.3. Permit Information” and “2.4. Environmental Information” of the Annex to Decision 7 (2019).

Fields completed with environmental information

First, as can be seen in figure 6, the percentage of Parties that provided some type of data in at least one (1) of the fields corresponding to environmental information has been analysed. This does not include Parties that completed these fields with wording such as: *No new information has been provided or no new measures/procedures have been established during the reported period*.

*Figure 6: Percentage of Parties that submitted environmental information.*

We can thus observe that:

1. Between 80 and 86% of Parties that submitted their Annual Report completed at least one field with environmental information in the period considered.
2. However, given that there are Parties that did not submit their Annual Report every year during the 2015-16 to 2019-20 period, the total percentage of Parties that completed at least one field with environmental information gradually decreased from 69% (20 Parties) to 58.6% (17 Parties) in said period.
3. Only twelve (12) Parties complied with the annual submission of information for at least one environmental field during the entire period considered, while seven (7) Parties did so on only one occasion or not at all.

Contingency and Waste Management Plans

The fields that are required to be completed with environmental information depend on the type and level of activities carried out by the Party in Antarctica, with the exception of Contingency Plans and Waste Management Plans. This applies to Parties managing any type of facility or vessel in Antarctica, which is the case for the vast majority of the Parties.

During the period considered, only two (2) Parties included information on “Contingency Plans”. One Party did so once, and another Party did so two years in a row.

During the period considered, only eleven (11) countries provided information on “Waste Management Plans”. Five (5) of them did so on one occasion, while the remaining six (6) did so on more than one occasion during the period 2015-16 to 2019-20.

Other fields with environmental information

The rest of the environmental information exchange requirements include:

* List of IEEs
* Measures for Compliance with the Protocol
* Procedures relating to EIAs
* Monitoring activities report
* Conservation of Flora and Fauna (Permits)
* Inventory of Past Activities
* Prevention of marine pollution
* Measures taken to implement the provisions of Annex V
* Permits for entry to ASPAs
* Report of change or damage to Protected Areas (ASPAs, ASMAs and HSMs)

In all these cases, the type and volume of information submitted by a Party will depend on the type and level of activities that the Party carries out in Antarctica, or on the regulatory activity that it carries out in a given year.

For example, a Party that does not carry out activities in an ASPA will not need to grant any entry permits. For that reason, these items have not been considered in the present analysis and will require a more detailed study.

1. Data collected at 30/12/2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)