

Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands

Annual Update to IAATO - 2016

The Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) would like to offer its congratulations to IAATO on its 25th Anniversary. We are proud to continue GSGSSI's longstanding association and close working relationship with the organisation and its members.

1. Overview

The past 12 months have seen a number of developments within GSGSSI. A new 5-year Strategy 2016-2020 was launched in November. This sets out the Government's vision for visitor management – “to facilitate visits that are safe, responsible, environmentally sensitive and contribute to sustainable management, creating future ambassadors for the Territory”. We look forward to working with IAATO in implementing the strategy in the coming years.

In South Georgia, extensive work has taken place to further enhance the visitor experience at Grytviken. The refurbished 'Slop Chest' was officially opened by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal in January, including the Enduring Eye Shackleton exhibition of Frank Hurley's images to mark the Shackleton centenary. Following completion of ground-breaking work to laser survey the whaling stations, a multimedia interactive experience opened for visitors. And conservation works on the main store and barracks have continued as part of ambitious longer-term plans to maintain and showcase South Georgia's heritage.

Alongside this activity, the operational phase of the habitat restoration project, which many members helped to support, has successfully concluded and work is now underway to monitor the baited areas. Building on this work, the Government has launched a National Biodiversity Action Plan, which sets out our aims to further enhance the terrestrial and marine environment and ensure that the environment is protected and, where practical, restored, for the benefit of all.

In this context we've been delighted to welcome 67 cruise ship visits carrying 8,773 passengers to South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands: the busiest season ever¹. It has also been a particularly busy season for yachts with 21 visits with 150 visitors.

It has also been the busiest year on record for expeditions, with 11 in total involving 86 participants. With the centenary this month of Shackleton's crossing of South Georgia it is of note that 8 of the 11 expeditions followed the 'Shackleton Traverse' route.

¹ Note that this does not include 3 visits from *Le Boreal*, which would have increased passenger numbers by approximately 600.

2. Administration

2.1 Visit Applications

A new GSGSSI tourism database is now being used to manage all visits and applications. This allows us to manage the application process electronically and enables all our staff (including Government Officers at KEP) to access individual visit application information on line (including application documentation).

With a view to more efficiently dealing with applications we would request that each individual application is submitted on a separate application form. For the coming season we will also be introducing separate visit application forms for cruise ships and yachts (yachts defined as vessels with a load line length $\leq 24\text{m}$). This change recognises that there are different aspects to these respective operations, which need to be considered independently during the application process.

During the 2015-16 season a number of visit applications were submitted extremely late. The deadline for cruise ships applications (more than 10 persons) is 60 days before a visit. While we have waived the late processing fee for applications received within this timeframe over the past season, we intend to apply the £100 fee from 2016-17 for all applications received within 30 days of an intended visit to take account of the additional administration costs.

The 2016/17 visit application forms will be posted on the GSGSSI website by June 2016.

2.2 Yacht Assessment

Given ever increasing numbers of yachts applying to visit SGSSI, a separate visit application form will in future apply to yachts. This is intended to help GSGSSI better access yacht applications to ensure relevant experience and adequate levels of preparation necessary for visiting SGSSI.

To assist GSGSSI in this process, expressions of interest are sought from yacht Masters with extensive SGSSI experience, who would like to be considered by GSGSSI to review any visit applications, which GSGSSI has specific concerns about.

(Please contact Richard McKee ops@gov.gs by 1 July 2016)

2.3 Visitor Fees

Visitor fees have been held at the same rate since July 2014. From July 2016 GSGSSI proposes to raise the basic rate of visitor fee (for visits of up to 72 hours) by £5. The fee for additional days will not be increased. The new fees will remain fixed for a minimum of 2 years.

2016/17 Season visitor fee structure:

Visits of up to 72 hours: £125

Visits more than 72 hours: additional £20 per day (or part thereof), up to a maximum of £200 (Covering a maximum period of up to one calendar month)

A number of invoices remain unpaid from the last season. Members are reminded that invoices must be paid within 30 days. From next season interest will be charged on late payments.

2.4 SSI Visits & Pairing requirements

Recognising the remote nature of South Georgia (with no airborne SAR support capability) and the even more remote nature of the South Sandwich Islands and, following recent maritime incidents in the region, SGSSI is reviewing the pairing requirements for:

- i) cruise ships and yachts visiting the South Sandwich Islands
- ii) cruise ships and yachts visiting South Georgia at the start and end of the season.

Further consultation is required to establish what form this should take, but all vessels falling into these categories will be required to demonstrate that they have made adequate arrangements for support from a comparable sized vessel (or larger) in their planning.

Comments from members are invited.

(Please contact Richard McKee ops@gov.gs by 1 July 2016)

2.5 Category 2 vessel access

IAATO category 2 vessels are currently limited to landing passengers at 5 approved landing sites (Grytviken, Fortuna Bay (Whistle Cove Kings), Moltke Harbour, Salisbury Plain, St Andrews Bay & Stromness).

When implemented, this policy was intended to reflect:

- Sites which were best suited to a high turnover of passengers
- An assumption that Category 2 vessels are likely to require more sea room to manoeuvre.

GSGSSI is conscious that this policy was established some years ago and since then there have been changes within the industry. As part of the ongoing review of visitor activities GSGSSI will be consulting with IAATO members on this policy in the coming months, including to ascertain whether any other sites should be considered for Category 2 vessel landings.

2.6 Biosecurity handbook

A biosecurity handbook which draws together biosecurity policy that cover all elements of operations on South Georgia will replace the biosecurity Annex in the information for visitors. The handbook is divided into sections providing easy reference to the elements of the process that apply to visitors during landings and those which apply to the vessel directly. The handbook will be available on the website and will be updated annually to reflect best practice.

3. Strategy 2016-20

GSGSSI wishes to thank IAATO members for their input into the SGSSI Strategy for 2016-2020. The strategy document can be downloaded from the GSGSSI website <http://www.gov.gs/information/south-georgia-strategy/>

GSGSSI remains committed to working closely with IAATO and the progression of the key objectives for visitor management:

- 4.1 Adopt a collaborative, precautionary approach to visitor management to ensure all visitor groups, regardless of their purpose, continue to enjoy safe, responsible visits conducted to the highest standards of environmental stewardship.

- 4.2 Recognising the important contribution tourism makes to the Territory, maintain our management policy to only permit cruise ships operated by members of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) to visit approved visitor sites outside of Grytviken.
- 4.3 Review and develop visitor management policy to provide for the sustainable use of the environment while protecting it for the benefit of all, including to integrate it into the new system of terrestrial protected areas.
- 4.4 Work with stakeholders to promote education and outreach of our key shared messages and understand the views of visitors to better support the sustainable management of the Territory and enhance the future visitor experience.
- 4.5 Develop new tourism legislation that is fit for purpose and ensure there is a complete and effective legal framework and efficient administrative process to underpin all visits to the Territory.

3.1 Visitor Activity Review and Workshop

To achieve these strategy objectives, GSGSSI has embarked on a review of all visitor activities (including Government and Scientists), working closely with IAATO. This review will establish baseline data on the current extent of visitor activities with the aim of developing a monitoring plan, which will determine visitor impacts and act as an early warning system for future change.

This will be covered in much greater depth at the separate work shop, but the intention is to work closely with our stakeholders in a collaborative approach to create an evidence base for future decisions on visitor management and protected areas on South Georgia, developing effective monitoring systems capable of detecting pressure on the terrestrial environment and ecosystems .

(See separate agenda for the Workshop)

3.2 Legal Review (& Future Permitting Structure)

Work on GSGSSI's legislative review is progressing on a number of fronts and this includes visitor and immigration. While this should make little practical difference to the current visit application process, the aim is to modernise and improve GSGSSI's legislation. A public consultation on the draft legislation will be held in the coming months.

In parallel with this, work is progressing on the Regulated Activity Permit (RAP) structure (under the Wildlife and Protected Areas Ordinance 2011). In previous years science, media / film projects, expeditions and other regulated activities have all been administered separately. These are now all gradually being administered under one permitting structure to make this process less complicated and reduce the number of individual permits required.

More information may be found at the following page of the GSGSSI website:

<http://www.gov.gs/visitors/regulated-activity-permit/>

3 categories of RAP have been developed, which reflect the nature and complexity of the project proposed, along with a sliding scale administrative fee structure. This will range from £50 - £400 - £1000 depending on the complexity of the application, though the

majority of applications will fall under the £50 category, which is a reduction on the current fee of £100 for science permits.

RAP Categories range from basic studies at an approved landing sites (not involving wildlife disturbance) through to projects involving animal handling or the instillation of temporary devices and finally much more complex projects involving expeditions or the installation of semi- permanent instruments & handling of IUCN threatened species.

A RAP is not required for activities that would normally be undertaken during the normal visitor landing and in accordance with visit permit conditions, such as:

- Journalists, travel writers, bloggers
- observational studies of animal behaviour or census
- vegetation surveys

Recognising the contribution to the Territory made by high quality productions (supported by IAATO vessels) operators are advised that from the 2016-17 season, GSGSSI will no longer charge a daily media fee for commercial film and photographic projects.

Any project wishing to undertake a Regulated Activity from a cruise ship must submit a letter of support from the operator before GSGSSI will give it consideration. For Category 2 projects (including which involve animal handling) the deadline for applications to GSGSSI is 30 June. Operators should stand ready to issue support letters to projects they wish to work with and be reassured that GSGSSI would not issue a permit to anyone who had not first engaged with them and agreed logistic support.

UAVs may only be used for approved dedicated science and media projects. Depending on the nature of the project, this may be a category 1 or category 2 permit. Detailed mitigation measures including controls on the experience of the pilot, specifications of the UAV and suitability of local weather conditions must be met.

If any members require further information they should contact the GSGSSI Environment Officer Dr Jennifer Lee: env@gov.gs

4. Medical Review

Following last year's initial findings of the Medical Review (recommended by HM Coroner following a fatal accident inquest in 2013), World Extreme Medicine is now completing the final stages of the review process.

The draft recommendations and report for GSGSSI are due to be completed shortly, for consultation until the end of June. It is GSGSSI's intention to then consult IAATO members with a view to finalising the review process by early July. It is GSGSSI's hope that any resulting recommendations will be adopted voluntarily by members, though ultimately any recommendations may become mandatory under GSGSSI visit permit conditions.

Members are reminded of the importance of appropriate planning for the region in order to be medically self-sufficient. Medical support from KEP was provided on 8 occasions during the course of the season.

5. Incidents Arising

5.1 Biosecurity breaches

For the most part biosecurity measures are being implemented efficiently, however there were 2 particular incidents involving cruise ships when the Government Officers identified serious breaches in the mandatory application of boot washing (involving large groups of passengers). It was of note that one group had recently returned from a gentoo colony which had experienced unusually high numbers of dead chicks. All staff must remain attentive to biosecurity measures and inspections at all times.

A second biosecurity breach identified was the discard of food scraps in February in the vicinity of Salisbury Plain and Drygalski Fjord. Given the timelines and movement of vessels in both areas at the time, it is highly likely that a cruise ship was responsible in both instances.

GSGSSI appreciates greatly the vigilance and feedback from the IAATO EL and reminds all vessel operators and ELs that such actions are unacceptable. Vessel Masters and Visit Permit Holders must comply with MARPOL and the conditions of the SGSSI visit permit at all times. All visiting ELs should engage with their vessel Masters to ensure that the correct food waste management procedures are being followed by all members of the crew on their vessel.

5.2 Fur seal bites

There were 2 incidents reported of visitors being bitten by fur seals, one minor and the other far more serious. GSGSSI awaits the outcome of IAATO review into the main incident and whether any guideline recommendations (such a visitor 'buddy systems') will be adopted by members.

5.3 Incident reporting

GSGSSI wishes to thank IAATO members for reporting incidents arising including the landing by the owners of a private yacht at a closed site. (A formal warning was subsequently issued to the vessel, with future access restrictions)

6. Incident Training

6.1 KEP training

A series of preliminary training exercises in recent months culminated in a Major Incident Exercise, supported by HMS CLYDE, which was held at King Edward Point on 17 March.

The main objectives were to test the Government's incident plan and the ability of the KEP station team, with limited capacity, to receive and implement the medical triage of survivors being landed ashore following a major incident on a vessel. Overseen by the Government Officers, the exercise was principally intended to be a learning experience for all involved and this was also an opportunity to engage staff in the Falkland Islands and review the Government's major incident stores at Grytviken and KEP.

6.2 LE BOREAL lessons

GSGSSI is acutely aware that the fire on LE BOREAL could easily have happened in South Georgia waters and GSGSSI has been actively engaged in the post incident review process in the Falkland Islands. A Falkland Islands Government report is due to be

published on the incident, which will provide an opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned.

7. Heritage

7.1 Heritage Legislation

GSGSSI has an ambitious agenda for the management and protection of heritage at Grytviken and other sites in the Territory, and our desire to improve accessibility and outreach. As a first stage, this will involve the development of a long-term management plan for Grytviken and a formal listing process in the coming months to identify key sites and artefacts. This will be underpinned by new legislation.

7.2 Works and projects

Conservation work for the coming season, with financial support from the Norwegian Government, will focus on the main store at Grytviken and the ongoing upkeep of the museum buildings.

GSGSSI is also considering an approach made to restore the former catcher *Dias (Viola)* in her original home port of Hull (UK) to form the centrepiece of an exhibition to highlight the city's maritime heritage, whilst commemorating the vessel's naval role in the First World War. The Government's Heritage Advisory Panel has been engaged to provide advice to the Government on this matter and discussions are continuing with the interested parties.

To mark the centenary of Shackleton's epic crossing of South Georgia in 1916, GSGSSI was very pleased to open the 'Enduring Eye ' Hurley Exhibition in the former slop chest, in January. This includes original lantern slides on loan from the Royal Geographical Society. This exhibition will continue until the end of next season. Alongside this GSGSSI also launched the whaling station interactive multimedia kiosk, which now enables visitors to explore the former whaling station using LIDAR laser imagery, whilst also viewing archive footage. The kiosk's design team recently received a Royal Television Society award.

Richard McKee
Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands
ops@gov.gs