

PAME II-2013

Agenda item 4.10- Sustainable Arctic Tourism

Discussion Paper on Addressing Arctic Cruise Ship Operations

Issue Overview

The Arctic Council and its Working Groups have generally limited efforts to address the risks and opportunities associated with Arctic cruise ship operations to stakeholder outreach and information exchange. While these efforts have indeed proven valuable (particularly within the PAME Working Group), up until recently little dedicated attention has been given to the development of a stand-alone initiative or concrete deliverable specific to this relatively fast growing industry and targeted towards a broader audience.

Accordingly, an opportunity exists for the Arctic Council to distil information to develop 'best practices' (or an appropriate alternative) as part of an effort to enhance, *inter alia*, safety, environmental protection and sustainable development as related to Arctic cruise ship operations. Further, the Arctic Council - as the premiere intergovernmental forum addressing issues related to Arctic sustainability and environmental protection - is well placed to produce an initiative both comprehensive and circum-Arctic in scope.

Such an initiative will be pursued according to Canada's Arctic Council Chairmanship and as a component of a larger Sustainable Arctic Tourism initiative overseen by PAME (and other relevant working groups and partners) designed to address the diversity of issues and concerns associated with Arctic cruise ship operations.

Background and Context

Recognizing "the extreme challenges associated with rescue operations in the remote and cold Arctic region", the 2009 Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) recommended that cruise ship operators "develop, implement and share their own best practices for operating in such conditions, including consideration of measures such as timing voyages so that other ships are within rescue distance in case of emergency".

Further, the 2013 Arctic Ocean Review (AOR) Phase II noted that "the Arctic states should encourage and support a range of best practices by the cruise ship industry when operating in remote and cold Arctic waters" and that "the Arctic Council Working Groups (PAME and EPPR)

and the cruise ship industry should explore forming closer links and maintaining a continuing dialogue related to issues of safety, environmental protection and response.”

The AOR also recognized the dynamic change currently underway in the Arctic marine environment and recommended that “Arctic states should explore the possibility of developing voluntary guidelines and, if appropriate, best practices in implementing such guidelines for sustainable tourism” and that acknowledgement be paid to the “role the cruise industry plays in facilitating tourism in the region and the impacts of this industry on Arctic peoples, ecosystems and the environment...”.

Providing more context to the discussion, the Arctic Council recognizes the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as the global body responsible for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution from ships - responsibilities that are applicable to cruise ship operations. Nevertheless, while cruise ships will be subject to the safety and environmental conditions set out in the mandatory Polar Code currently under discussion, certain elements of their operation are either likely to fall outside the scope of the IMO or are not currently addressed by an IMO instrument including, for example, wildlife interactions, ship to shore interfacing, and relations with communities. It is therefore envisioned that this initiative could also provide a voluntary complement to official guidance issued by the IMO.

Proposal

Pursuant to a larger Sustainable Arctic Tourism Initiative organized through PAME and co-led by Canada and the United States, this project proposes to develop voluntary ‘best practices’ (again, nomenclature to be determined) for cruise ships operating within the circumpolar Arctic region that take into consideration existing industry standards and recommendations. The initiative will seek to benefit from existing best practice guidelines developed by the likes of AECO, IAATO and the WWF and will be designed to fill gaps and supplement existing IMO measures.

Drawing from themes contained within the Sustainable Arctic Tourism Initiative proposal, the Project is expected to involve a combination of the following:

- Collect and assess existing information regarding trends in Arctic cruise ship operation to determine priority areas that require additional oversight;
- Prepare an inventory of existing laws, codes, policies, guidelines and best practices pertaining to Arctic cruise ship operations;
- convene a minimum of two workshops to facilitate the gathering and sharing of information;

- Identify fundamental best practices of Arctic cruise ship operations, based on an evaluation of the inventory and in consultation with relevant stakeholders; and
- Publish these findings in the form of a ‘best practice’ document (or alternative) to be endorsed by Arctic Ministers and promoted for adoption and/or implementation by key Arctic actors.

Timeframe

It is proposed that two dedicated workshops be held in 2014 to assist with the generation of content for inclusion in the initiative. “Intercessional work” (led by a project coordinator(s) and representatives from PAME with input from other relevant partners as required) would address the oversight of the project plan over the course of the remainder of Canada’s Arctic Council Chairmanship period.

If anticipated for adoption by the 2015 Ministerial meeting a final deliverable should be expected by early 2015.

Coordination and Partnerships

The nature of this initiative necessitates engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders including Arctic states, Permanent Participants, industry and industry associations, and northern communities.

At PAME I 2013 the Executive Director of the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) indicated that the Association would be interested in cooperating with PAME on developing “best practices” or “lessons learned”. AECO also identified the possibility of partnering with the Arctic Council to expand their cruise ship database (inclusive of technical data and various statistics) to a broader circumpolar audience (currently limited to Svalbard and Greenland).

The WWF is also very involved with tourism efforts in the Arctic (having worked with AECO on its Guidelines) and also provided support at PAME I 2013 for this initiative.

Framing Questions for Discussion at PAME II-2013

- Determine targeted audience for the initiative (i.e. industry, Arctic state government);
- Determine the desired scope and parameters of applicability (i.e. geographical extent, types of vessels to consider, the degree to which terrestrial and cultural components should be addressed, etc);

- Determine exact nature of deliverables (i.e. organization of workshops, development of 'best practices' with supporting literature, etc);
- Determine timelines and overall project plan taking into consideration an anticipated 2015 completion date;
- Determine organizational structure, coordination and partnerships (i.e. steering committee, intercessional group, experts group, etc);
- Determine language and terminology (i.e. best practices vs. guidelines, etc).