

IAATO Statement to Coincide with Release of Liberian *MV Explorer* Report

IAATO Initial Statement on Liberian Flag State Report On the 2007 Sinking of the *MV Explorer* in Antarctic Waters

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE...

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The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) welcomes the final report from The Republic of Liberia, Bureau of Maritime Affairs on the sinking of the *MV Explorer*.

Antarctic Treaty governments, the travel industry and other maritime organizations have for some time awaited the official report, which analyzes the causes and circumstances surrounding the November 23, 2007 sinking of the 100-passenger expedition vessel, near the coast of the Antarctic Peninsula. Liberia is the maritime flag state under which the *MV Explorer* was registered, and was responsible for investigating the incident and compiling the official document.

“Now that the final report has at last been made public, IAATO’s vessel operators and Marine Committee will be closely scrutinizing the document” said Steve Wellmeier, Executive Director of IAATO. “We are confident that within the text of the report, its conclusions and recommendations, there are valuable lessons to be learned that will allow us to build on industry best practice and IAATO’s commitment to safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to Antarctica. To that end we look forward to discussions both within the industry and with governments through organizations such as the IMO and including Flag States and Classification Societies”

In the 16-month interim between the incident and the official report’s release, IAATO and its members have used available information in numerous forums, meetings and working groups to study -- as far as was possible in the absence of the final report -- the ensuing response and rescue. The *MV Explorer*’s entire complement of 91 passengers, 54 crew and nine staff were evacuated safely to lifeboats and Zodiac landing craft, and rescued by two other IAATO vessels which arrived on the scene four hours later. The *MV Explorer* was owned and operated by GAP Adventures of Toronto, Canada, an IAATO member.

Internal discussions have prompted a review of the IAATO Emergency Contingency Plan, which worked effectively in the case of the *MV Explorer*. In addition, emergency contact lists have been improved association-wide; IAATO members agreed to a single

web-based satellite tracking system to enhance search and rescue; coordination and communication have been streamlined with the five relevant MRCCs (Marine Rescue Coordination Centers) and COMNAP (Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs); and other mitigation measures have been developed for implementation by IAATO vessel operators.

“We understand and share the concern that has arisen from this and other recent ship-related incidents in Antarctica,” noted Wellmeier. “However, the overall safety record and environmental stewardship of ship-based tourism over the past 40 years is very good. We will study the report carefully, and particularly with a view of assessing where procedures may have failed and what steps the Association can take to enhance, and if required develop further, mitigation measure which should be implemented. We anticipate there will be important discussions that will follow.”

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IAATO is a member organization founded in 1991 to advocate, promote and practice safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic. IAATO currently has 108 members worldwide. Members work together to develop, adopt and implement operational standards that mitigate potential environmental impacts. Numerous operating procedures and guidelines have been adopted over the last 18 years that have proven to be successful methods for avoiding impacts, including site-specific guidelines, site selection criteria, passengers-to-staff ratios, limiting numbers of passengers ashore, boot-washing guidelines and the prevention of the transmission of alien organisms, wilderness etiquette, garbage policy, ship scheduling and vessel communications procedures, emergency medical evacuation procedures, emergency contingency plans, reporting procedures, marine wildlife watching guides, station visitation policies and more.

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