

Input from the local working groups to the regulatory work relating to Svalbard

Input has been collected from local working groups in Longyearbyen in connection with the general knowledge acquisition in the assignment. These working groups have been established in connection with the management plan work and have been made up of representatives for various interests: the trade and industry working group, the public administration and the NGOs working group, as well as a research and education working group. The groups have been presented with the Ministry of Climate and Environment's mission letter, which points out possible regulations and the groups are also asked specific questions to gather information for use in the process. In addition to the responses from the working groups, separate input has also been received from AECO Spitzbergen Adventures, Svalbard Adventures and Eirik Grønningssæter. All the input has been reviewed and evaluated. Some of the main features of the input are:

General input

Professionally justified restrictions and measures will receive support to a greater extent than measures based only on precaution. Active use of guidelines as administrative tools should be used rather than prohibition and closure of areas. This also applies to other instruments such as steering tourism over to organised tourism, setting certification requirements and increased training of guides, the requirement that guides must be permanent residents of Longyearbyen, and licences related to "approved" tour operators.

A restriction of traffic and activity in some areas will lead to a greater strain on other areas. This must be included in the assessments so that the desired result is achieved. Management Area 10 is the most important area for the year-round businesses in Longyearbyen and should be retained. Restrictions could lead to the loss of businesses and jobs.

Consideration for permanent residents

The work must consider that strict, general restrictions could impact the quality of life and living conditions for many permanent residents in Longyearbyen and thus could weaken the foundations for a stable family community.

Tourism at sea

The input considers whether the highlighted challenges can be addressed in the existing regulations through the increased use of site-specific guidelines, among other things. Unlike acts and regulations, these can be given detailed content and can be amended quickly when needed. The closure of natural areas in connection with landing should only be used when other means do not work and other means such as a certified guide requirement, organisation and other methods must be attempted first.

The introduction of a prohibition against icebreaking, speed restrictions, regulation of the number of boats or people in specific areas can be accepted if these are professionally justified. However,

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regulation of the number of boats or people could be difficult to administer.

The use of tender vessels reduces the need for landing, reduces the “pressure” on land and hence any risk of environmental disturbance. Therefore, access to use these should not be reduced. This is also important to avoid heavy traffic, e.g., in Isfjorden.

Maritime regulations should remain an area regulated by the maritime authorities and should not be complicated through more regulations and authorities.

Motor traffic on land

The input is negative for snowmobile trails, as these have already been established naturally, will require extensive marking of trails, and could reduce the safety of those using them. Visitor access should be organised and areas that are out of bounds for snowmobiles are important.

Camping activities

Clearer and more understandable regulations are needed. Applications should be mandatory for activities of a certain duration and the regulations must leave room for flexibility.

Research

New regulations must be predictable, and it must be possible to facilitate, maintain and implement research and education as today. Research, education and monitoring the polar regions is important to understand global changes in the environment and the effects of these. The regulations must be designed so that they do not preclude the use of recent technology to reduce the environmental footprint compared with the current technology, e.g., within access and research. It should also be considered to include requirements in the regulations, e.g., on electrification within a given number of years.

Polar bears

Today, the protection of polar bears has been sufficiently considered and incidents, where the bears are disturbed, are very rare. A specific minimum safe distance is considered very difficult to achieve as these are highly mobile animals.

Dog sledding

It is fine with a clarification of where this can take place, but sufficient, traffic-safe areas must be designated for this purpose.