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Emne: Consultation response (or Høringssvar) ref 2021/9496 and 21/4952 –
MAKO
Vedlegg: Svalbard Regulation Concerns.docx

For over four decades, Lindblad Expeditions has been operating small ship expeditions to Svalbard. The archipelago has been a preferred destination in the Arctic and is a significant element of Lindblad's yearly operating schedules. During those years, over 5,000 curious, educated people have had an opportunity to travel, experience, and learn about the uniqueness of the Svalbard high arctic environment. Many of our guests have become proponents for conservation and protection of Svalbard, primarily because they were able to have firsthand experiences with the environment and wildlife. In our view, the proposed modifications and additions to regulations of tourism operations in Svalbard are an attempt to not just manage ship tourism, but to severely restrict tourism and to basically discourage expedition vessel operations. These proposed regulations would cause Lindblad Expeditions to seriously reconsider future operations in Svalbard as we would be concerned that we could not provide guests with a great experience.

About 15 years ago similar restrictive regulations were proposed. As a response to those planned regulations, the expedition travel operators formed the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) to self-manage and regulate their activities. Initially AECO's primary goal was to ensure sustainable tourism by its members in Svalbard. Lindblad Expeditions was one of the founding companies and continues to be actively involved in AECO. At that time, after debate and reconsideration of those proposed regulations, there were modifications enacted that were mutually agreed upon by all concerned entities. At some specific sites, access was closed for visitors, while three large areas of the archipelago were designated as research only areas and off limits to entry by non-research activities. At that time, some destinations where tour operators had been visiting became closed to further access. Those restrictions and regulations have been followed by AECO and its members with little impact on the expedition ship operators. However, the new additional restrictions will have extremely negative impacts to AECO members and their future operations.

Svalbard has been a focus of scientific research in the Arctic for many years, not only by the Norwegian research community but also by researchers from around the world. All of this research has provided valuable information about and understanding of the polar environment. The findings and conclusions of this research provides information that has been passed on to Svalbard visitors through guides escorting and educating them. Educated, knowledgeable, experienced, trained, and personable guides are a key component of respectful and sustainable nature tourism. Expedition ship operators are responsible for hiring qualified people as guides. Lindblad Expeditions selects and trains guides to provide the highest quality experience to their guests. In fact, some of our Svalbard guides have been working in Svalbard for over 30 years gaining a wealth of knowledge about the archipelago. Research in Svalbard has also supplied new and current information which dedicated staff guides continue to learn from.

Scientific endeavors are critical to learning about our world and understanding the rapid changes we are experiencing. But science alone and environmental research will not solve the changes taking place in Svalbard's environment. People of the world, concerned laymen and ordinary people that have experienced the Arctic, its landscapes and wildlife will be the ones that will pass on those experiences and influence others to care for unique places such as Svalbard. People need to have the opportunity to experience the Arctic in order to know how important it is to protect it. Svalbard is one of the best places for such life changing experiences. Without those experiences and those people wanting to protect Svalbard's environments, the archipelago and the world will be an entirely different place for future generations. I encourage you to reconsider the proposed regulations, work closely with the community of Longyearbyen, AECO, and tourism operators to discuss alternatives that would maintain Svalbard's integrity while at the same time valuing the vital role that visitors have in Svalbard's future.

Respectfully,

Sven Lindblad
Founder, Co-Chairman of the Board
Lindblad Expeditions

Trey Byus
Chief Expedition Officer
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Leif Skog
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Svalbard Regulation Concerns

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