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MPAs: THE TIME IS NOW

C IS FOR CONSERVATION

Hailed as the poster-child of marine conservation, CCAMLR's use of the precautionary and ecosystem approaches sets it apart as an organisation with a broader remit than that of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations.

As CCAMLR members consider proposals for marine protected areas (MPAs) in East Antarctica and the Ross Sea over the coming days, they should be mindful that the objective of the Convention expressed in Article II is the conservation of Antarctic marine living resources, where conservation includes rational use. CCAMLR obliges its Members to ensure a healthy balance between its fundamental conservation goal and 'rational use'. Rational use is not clearly defined in the Convention, but is increasingly being restrictively interpreted as fishing. In broader interpretations, rational use may refer to an array of rational, non-fishing actions including monitoring for the impacts of fishing or environmental change, oceanographic and ecosystems research or expressly for the purposes of protection.

As discussions progress towards establishing a network of MPAs in line with conservation measure 91-04, ASOC urges contracting parties to act in accordance with the Convention. The designation of MPAs this year is an opportunity to ensure that the founding cornerstone – the conservation objective – is solidly at the heart of CCAMLR. Creating MPAs for the Ross Sea and East Antarctica is the essential next step for the Commission.

The Convention's preamble draws the attention of CCAMLR Members to the need to be conscious of the urgency of ensuring the conservation of Antarctic marine living resources. That is as true today as it was when the Convention came into force. CCAMLR's commitment to establish marine protection in the Antarctic marine environment is a unique opportunity to refocus on conservation and to protect key habitats while they are in a near-pristine state, relative to other oceans of the world. If not taken up now, this opportunity may well not be available to us again in the future.

HOW LONG IS A PIECE OF STRING...

The current MPA proposals before the Commission are based on the robust synthesis of decades of science conducted by a range of CCAMLR Members. Inputs to these proposals include the full range of tools available to CCAMLR scientists including direct sampling and observation on land, in the water column and on the seafloor, long term remotely sensed data, species tracking studies, collaborative multi-nation multi-year surveys and long term monitoring programs. These syntheses have been presented to CCAMLR working groups, workshops and meetings of the scientific committee over the previous several years. CCAMLR and its Scientific Committee have had ample opportunity to examine the science behind the current MPA proposals in depth and provide advice to proponents. More science will inevitably occur in the future that will further our understanding of the regions where MPAs have been proposed, however CCAMLR makes its decisions on the information available to it in accordance with the precautionary and ecosystem approaches. Nevertheless the Scientific Committee's advice has been unequivocal. The Scientific Committee agreed that it could provide no further advice and therefore the proposals before the Commission this year are based on the best available science, and that the decision on designating the proposed MPAs rests solely with the Commission.

HOW LONG TO SING THIS SONG

CCAMLR adopts many types of conservation measures for different purposes and intended to deliver different outcomes, but all directed towards achieving the objectives of the Convention. In some cases, it makes perfect sense to limit the amount of time to which a conservation measure applies, i.e. annual catch limits. In others, periodic review is warranted. If CCAMLR reaches agreement on protecting areas based on the collective understanding of what makes them ecologically important and in line with CCAMLR's precautionary approach to management, then such designations should not have a time limit placed on the protection afforded by an MPA designation. However, regular periodic reviews of MPAs to determine if the objectives for which the MPAs were designated are being met should be carried out. Such reviews can provide advice as to whether an

adjustment to the boundaries of the MPA or provisions of the management plan are warranted.

Limiting the time of designation of MPAs is not in line with the IUCN criteria for what determines an MPA.

IS IT A WEDGE OR A BOX?

We all know the main difference between the US and NZ on the Ross Sea is 'the wedge.' The United States signalled last year that they wanted to protect the wedge in a Ross Sea marine reserve while New Zealand says they want to keep it open for fisheries research. ECO thinks the solution to this is quite simple: parties could carry out research inside the marine reserve that is allowed.

Surely these two countries with a solid record of research in the Ross Sea Region can work this one out, but to help New Zealand and US out we've got some tips:

The average catch in area K (the wedge) is 559 tonnes since 2007, the start of the three year research experiment for the fishery. At 1 tag per tonne (which is the current required tagging rate in the Ross Sea), this is around 560 tags per year.

If parties allowed 50 tonnes for a research survey in area K at just over 11 tags per tonne (near the tagging level achieved by a Russian vessel last year), 560 tags would get into the water. The actual removed biomass would be less than 50 tonnes because of the number of fish returned to the water. In comparison the recent pre-recruit tagging survey carried out by New Zealand caught 30.9 tonnes and released 169 tagged fish at 5.47 tags/tonne while retaining over 2500 fish.

What's more, in some years no fishing has occurred in the wedge at all and this hasn't invalidated stock assessments. In 2008/09 SSRU 88.1M was closed and this had no impact on the stock assessment in spite of previous fishing there. So even though research fishing could be carried out inside the wedge if it's part of a marine reserve, that may not even be necessary to achieve a well-managed fishery in the Ross Sea region.

EAST ANTARCTICA

ECO believes that the proposal for East Antarctic protection are based on a solid foundation of sophisticated bioregionalization analysis that has been endorsed by Scientific Committee working groups and the Scientific Committee. The East Antarctic is a vast and diverse area, home to many penguins, seabirds and seals, as well as many unique benthic bioregions. After reading the evidence ECO is firmly convinced that the region has many habitats that must be included in any Southern Ocean system of MPAs, if such a system is to be truly representative.

CCAMLR GAINS GLOBAL ATTENTION

This year, dozens of media outlets from Al Jazeera, the BBC, The Hindu newspaper in India, Huffington Post, TV3 in New Zealand along with the NZ Herald and

Radio NZ, the Hong Kong Standard, dozens of media outlets have brought to the public's attention what is at stake at this year's meeting: how CCAMLR will decide to protect the Southern Ocean. Here in Hobart Australia's ABC, The Australian and local newspaper The Mercury have all followed proceedings closely.

Headlines such as "Nations Have Historic Opportunity to Protect Antarctic Waters" and "Discussions to try to reach historic agreement on Antarctica," show broad international interest in this year's CCAMLR outcomes.

The Antarctic Ocean Alliance and other organisations working independently on the issue have seen more than 1 million people from all over the world sign up in support of large-scale marine protection of Antarctica's key marine habitats. The number of "likes" for the new CCAMLR Facebook site went from below 1,000 last week to almost 11,348 today. Many members of the public left comments on Facebook showing support and encouragement for CCAMLR's work on MPAs and for a strong conservation outcome in a range of languages. On Twitter, thousands of similar calls for action have been posted in Russian, Korean, Spanish, French, Chinese and English.

At the close of the Commission meeting, all eyes will turn their attention to the outcomes at CCAMLR. CCAMLR Members are justifiably proud of their record on conservation. Now is the time to demonstrate their leadership to the world.



Fragile under-ice habitats seek additional protection due to increasing instability of domicile. Potential partners must make written agreement. Details of protection not important as long as protector is strong.

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