



## Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition

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### ASOC PRESS ADVISORY For Immediate Release

#### **Antarctic Marine Convention Urged To Move Swiftly Towards Comprehensive Protection for Southern Ocean**

*Hobart, October 21, 2009:* On the eve of the 28<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC), an international coalition of conservation NGOs, urges CCAMLR to rise to the challenge of emerging and existing threats and take action to protect the Southern Ocean waters around Antarctica.

Recent research by Dr. Geraint Tarling of the British Antarctic Survey reveals that Antarctic krill, a keystone species in the Antarctic food web, gather together in trillions to form “super swarms” that may stretch over 1 km in length and be 30 metres deep<sup>1</sup>. Such aggregations, the scientist warns, make them more vulnerable to overfishing than previously thought.

This is just one of a number of scientific studies pointing to the increasing threats facing the Southern Ocean and our far-from-complete understanding of Antarctic ecosystems. For example, recent research on collapsing ice shelves and shrinking glaciers shows that anthropogenic climate change is already profoundly affecting the Antarctic. These problems will be exacerbated by future warming. Add to this the latest predictions about the probable ecological impacts of increasing ocean acidification in polar waters and there are major reasons for concern.

“Despite the extensive and exciting research being undertaken by scientists from CCAMLR countries, there are still massive uncertainties about how marine ecosystems function in the Southern Ocean. All this points to the utmost need for precaution. Networks of large marine protected areas and marine reserves provide the most powerful tool for building resilience against the impacts of climate change and ensuring protection when there are so many other unknowns,” said Rodolfo Werner, ASOC representative to the Scientific Committee and Science Advisor to the Pew Antarctic Krill Conservation Project.

CCAMLR has begun work to establish a comprehensive and representative network of marine protected areas by prioritizing 11 areas of the Southern Ocean, but has yet to agree on clear targets and timelines for completing this work. ASOC is calling for networks of MPAs of ecologically significant size to be established in all 11 areas by 2012. One of the eleven priority areas identified by CCAMLR is the Ross Sea, the least damaged shelf sea on the planet according to a 2008 study<sup>2</sup>.

“The Ross Sea is home to an astounding array of wildlife and is of extraordinary ecological value, equivalent to the Galapagos Islands. It constitutes a unique ‘living laboratory’, which CCAMLR should protect as a priority. That would allow scientists to continue studying the impacts of climate change unconfused by the effects of fishing,” said Richard Page, Greenpeace International. “Moreover, in a world where 90% of the large predatory fish have been removed, resulting in profound changes to marine food webs, the Ross Sea food web still retains its top predators.”

<sup>1</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth\\_news/newsid\\_8299000/8299690.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8299000/8299690.stm)

<sup>2</sup> Halpern, S., et al. 2009. A Global Map of Human Impact on Marine Ecosystems. *Science* 319: 948-952.

"CCAMLR, a Convention that was negotiated and signed in the context of the Antarctic Treaty, was for a long time at the forefront of marine protection, and it needs to be bold again if it is to meet its own conservation objectives by establishing a comprehensive and representative network of marine protected areas by 2012. What better way could there be to mark this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the signing of the Antarctic Treaty than to agree on a three-year plan to save the Southern Ocean," said Rob Nicoll of the World Wildlife Fund.

"CCAMLR also needs to take steps to better regulate fishing for krill, the base of the marine food chain," said Gerald Leape, Director of the Pew Antarctic Krill Conservation Project and head of the ASOC delegation. "This year we are urging agreement on spreading krill catch limits geographically to increase the availability of krill to key predators." Krill fishing is concentrated in coastal areas around the Antarctic Peninsula and Southern Ocean islands where penguins, seals and whales forage. These animals depend on this small crustacean for their survival and are already showing the effects of reduced krill abundance in some areas as a result of climate change.

Another key issue is illegal fishing in the Southern Ocean, mainly for toothfish (sold in many countries as Chilean sea bass). "ASOC urges governments to raise the stakes against illegal operators by stepping up enforcement activities. CCAMLR Members should especially support the prompt entry into force of the newly negotiated U.N. global treaty on minimum standards for port state measures against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing," said Jim Barnes, ASOC Executive Director.

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