Are the French planning nuclear tests in the Antarctic?

This is the question being asked after the French Minister of Defence refused to confirm or deny that there are plans to move the nuclear test site to Kerguelen Island.

M. Bourge made a major diplomatic visit to the nuclear test site following a series of internationally embarassing accidents. One accident in French Polynesia resulted in the death of a French nuclear worker and injury to another. Decontamination took over two weeks.

Another accident there occured when a nuclear device stuck part way down a shaft and is alleged to have caused a tidal wave that resulted in widespread destruction on neighbouring islands.

It is clear that the French want to continue with further research and development of a Gaulist version of a neutron bomb. Unfortunately for the French the present nuclear test sites are not suitable for such a powerful blast.

Obviously the time is close at hand when the geology of the present site can no longer cope with continued nuclear explosions.

The political climate is also changing. Tahitians are becoming more aware of "radiation sickness" and feel hostile to a continued series of explosions.

These problems would be neatly avoided by a move to the Kerguelen Islands. Kerguelens have no indigenous people to react adversely to continued test programs which the French want to accelerate. In fact the Kerguelens are 6000 km. from the nearest human neighbours.

This Conference has implications for the next convention to be written: one on the conservation/exploitation of the non-living resources, such as oil and metals.

Some nations are obviously viewing this convention as the trial run for a convention on non-living resources. They, like the USA for example, have little financial interest in living resources but do want access to non-living resources. There is a temptation to have an exploitative convention for living resources so as to use this as a precedent for an equally exploitative non-living resources convention.

To save the Antarctic from eventual environmental destruction caused through exploiting the non-living resources, we need to stand firm on the front line: living resources.
P.M. ignores letter

In a letter to the Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, interested organisations throughout Australia have combined to voice their concern over the Washington draft of the Convention of Antarctic Living Marine Resources.

The letter drafted by the Marine Action Centre Australia (MAC), has to date met with no reply from the Prime Minister. Signed by twenty-five conservation and environment organisations the letter outlined the major complaints of the environmental community.

The letter urged the Australian Government to nominate the Australian Antarctic Territories for inclusion in the World Heritage list.

The organisations involved called for a public inquiry would allow all interested parties to have their views aired.

MAC now asks the Prime Minister to give his urgent reply to the letter, which represents thousands of Australians.

The people of the world are represented nowadays at international conferences by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Only the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) which represents both Governments and NGOs has been accredited to the Conference.

To ensure a balanced participation in this Conference the Antarctic & Southern Ocean Coalition and other NGOs should be granted observer status.
A voice for Antarctic life

The Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC) representing almost 90 conservation organisations from around the world, has presented to the 13 Antarctic Treaty Nations, plus East and West Germany, a set of proposed amendments to the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.

Recommended changes are evident throughout all the Convention Articles, and the most critical of those changes can be reflected as follows:

1. The 'Conservation Principles' shown in Article 2.3 (a) of the Convention should be clarified so as to ensure that the harvest of prey species (ie: krill) is not so great that it results in a serious reduction to the predators that depend upon krill. The current language is far too ambiguous and does not safeguard the entire ecosystem components.

2. Membership of the Convention is severely and unacceptably restrictive. Only those states that are engaged in research or fishing activities in Antarctica will be permitted to accede, and must be unanimously received by the Commission. They will also be bound by the rules of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty. Membership should be opened to all interested states who should receive full voting rights.

3. Voting in the Commission is to be by consensus, coupled with an objection clause. The 90 day objection period has of course an infamous history with the International Whaling Commission (IWC), proving to be a large loophole readily used by exploitative nations. Russia and Japan used this clause to avoid keeping the quota of whales killed to the number set by IWC and in fact in some cases killed twice the number allowed.

4. Interim measures have not been agreed upon, or even discussed fully. Interim measures should be implemented if the period between signing and ratification is not to result in serious over-exploitation. Such measures should take the form as presented by the recent Southern Ocean Convention Workshop on Management of Antarctic Marine Living Organization.

5. The question of allocation of national catch and effort quotas has been avoided to date. Article 8 must be amended to ensure that this allocation occurs. The issue should be tackled now if the Convention is to have any real teeth.

6. Article 8 should also require the full publication and dissemination of all reports from the Scientific Committee and the Commission. Such dissemination as currently written falls far short of the necessary criteria. The secrecy of the IWC should not be repeated by the Commission to be set up by the Convention. One of the anti-whaling organizations tried to get a copy of IWC documents from the Department of Primary Industry and was told that the Australian Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the IWC might be the only person from whom it could get a copy. No libraries apparently had copies. The State Library of NSW, one of the largest in Australia, had a copy for 1971 only. It said it had made several requests for IWC documents but had no success.

7. Enforcement and observer provisions are totally inadequate. Comprehensive systems of inspection and observer schemes need to be implemented under the Convention. There should be no schemes of inspectors being appointed by negotiations between individual parties. In the IWC Japan and USSR swopped inspectors.

8. The Scientific Committee has limited authority within the Commission. Its supply of adequate funding is not assured. Budget arrangements must be specified so as to guarantee that it can live up to its obligations under the Convention, while the Commission itself should be required to explain the decisions it has made.
Dear Senator Carrick,

We note your statement in the Senate of April 28 on the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.

We note, in particular, your claim that "a number of influential conservation groups have recently stated that the present text represents a new and desirable approach to management of ocean resources."

Since twenty five conservation groups, including ourselves, wrote to you on 24 March 1980, regarding this matter, we are alarmed that the "conservation groups" you mentioned could be those who signed the letter to you.

If that is so, then your statement is a misrepresentation of our point of view. We disapprove of the convention's basis, namely "exploitation" rather than "conservation" (one has only to read the text to see that the emphasis is on "exploitation" as opposed to conservation).

If we had written the convention, it would be a very different document.

However, of course, the convention was drafted by others and so reflects their priorities - and not ours. We have been obliged, therefore, to work on your terms, discussing your draft convention, and trying to inject a conservation dimension into a convention which is basically regulating exploitation.

We should therefore be most grateful if you would please stop claiming that we believe that the convention represents a new and desirable approach to management of ocean resources. If we did, we would not have proposed so many amendments to it. The scope and size of these amendments alone indicate our worries about the convention.

Yours sincerely

Keith Suter
PEASO (Protect the Ecology of Antarctica & the Southern Ocean)

* Senator Carrick was speaking on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr Peacock MP).