The Path To Credibility

CCAMLR this week faces the most serious test of its credibility in its short history. It must institute conservation and other measures which demonstrate beyond doubt that it intends to fulfil the principles outlined in Article II.

Data Collection

Data collection presents a Catch-22 situation. The Commission is being prevented from acting by Soviet claims that there is insufficient data on which to make accurate scientific judgments on conservation measures. At the same time, the Soviet Union has itself not been forthcoming with detailed data it holds for 1969-82 catches.

The Commission is hamstrung until this data is provided. That the Soviets can only promise to make "serious attempts" to find the appropriate vessel log books is, in ECO's view, unacceptable. The Commission must make it absolutely clear to the Soviet Union that it holds the key to the success, or failure, of one of the most significant fishing agreements ever negotiated.

Fish stock assessment

Now is the time for action on Antarctic finfish stock. There is already clear evidence of a very serious problem.

ECO urges a total ban on all finfishing within the Convention area, the ban should be reviewable only when sufficient data has been supplied, and research undertaken to enable total allowable catches and national quotas to be set. This means no data, no catch.

Krill Resources

Overfishing problems now face the finfishery. Similar problems with the krill fishery would be far more serious. That the Commission has been powerless to prevent the decline of finfish stocks is self-evident; it is far from certain that it will have the ability to regulate the krill fishery before it reaches a similar situation.

ECO suggests that the only way to guarantee the future of the krill resource is to set a total allowable catch limit at present reported catch levels. Commercial fishing conducted within those limits should be subject to research controls so that the requirements of ecosystem management are met.

Squid

Although there is as yet no significant squid catch, insufficient is known about the resource to determine the effects of large catches.

Accordingly, ECO believes that total allowable catches should be established, and national quotas set, in advance of any expansion of this fishery. Developments could thus be clearly monitored, and possible difficulties identified as soon as they arise.

Ecosystem Monitoring

ECO believes that all research and commercial activities within the Convention area should be brought within a comprehensive ecosystem monitoring programme. The scale of such a task is so great that a concerted effort is needed to include all areas where fishing or research activities take place, not just a few selected sites already subject to research. This needs commitment and money.
Incidental Mortality: WHAT PROGRESS?

Last year, the Commission considered a United States paper on the assessment and avoidance of incidental mortality of Antarctic marine living resources. The paper summarised evidence which has accumulated over recent years, that fish, birds, turtles and marine mammals became entangled in discarded fishing gear and other marine debris, and are killed or injured. The problem has become acute in some heavily-fished areas, notably the North Pacific, where the incidental mortality of fur seals and Dall's porpoise alone is thought to exceed 20,000 animals each year. Nearer to the CCAMLR area, there have been reports of a growing incidental mortality of New Zealand sea lions in the squid fishery around the sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands.

Members agreed last year to assess the possible sources, fates and effects of marine debris in the Convention area. The studies were to include: surveys of beaches and of seal and penguin colonies for discarded fishing gear and marine debris; distribution of information concerning sightings of debris and fouling of propellers or rudders, and determination of regulations governing the use and disposal or loss of fishing gear for vessels engaged in fishing in the Antarctic.

The Commission agreed that each member would ensure that their nationals working within the Convention area were aware of international and national laws governing the disposal at sea of netting and other potentially hazardous substances. Furthermore, it was agreed that measures taken by members to assess and avoid incidental mortality would be reputed to CCAMLR for distribution to Commission members.

It appears, however, that not all states have complied with this decision. ECO understands that only a few states have supplied information to the Secretariat for circulation at this year's meeting.

Seals in other areas are frequently observed to follow trawlers and feed on scraps. Human-generated debris, such as netting and plastic scraps has been observed to be increasing dramatically on the isolated sub-Antarctic islands of New Zealand over the past 10 years. It is reasonable to suppose that the enormous increase in fishing effort which has taken place in the past 15 years in the CCAMLR area will have introduced considerable amounts of non-biodegradable material into the Southern Ocean. Fishing operations within foraging range of seal or penguin colonies may pose a particular entanglement hazard.

The response of member nations to last year's Commission directive is therefore disappointing. ECO urges delegates to this meeting to do their best to ensure that the required information is forthcoming next year.

To ensure that fishing vessel skippers are discouraged from jettisoning net scraps the Commission should ensure that all nets, floats and other entanglement hazards are clearly marked so that any debris dumped at sea can be traced if retrieved. Pelagic drift nets have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of sea birds and marine mammals in other oceans. ECO calls again for a ban on the deployment of these nets in the Southern Ocean.
PRIORITY IS MONITORING NOT RESEARCH

CCAMLR will not be viewed as a success unless a system of ecosystem monitoring can be fully implemented. Trends in the discussion of the idea at this year's meeting, therefore, raise some serious concerns.

Hope seems to be held out for the concept of using 'indicator species' in ecosystem monitoring. Such indicators are attractive because they are often logistically easier to monitor than the trends they are supposed to indicate. Although logistics must always be a major consideration in any activity in Antarctica, it is unacceptable that this factor should outweigh the need for scientific rigour. The establishment and operation of an effective monitoring network must be credible in the eyes of the fishing nations if ecosystem management is to be successfully implemented. It is, after all, the fishing nations which have argued most stridently for scientific rigour in other areas of the regime.

To establish a particular species as an 'indicator species' would require detailed study over many years; sufficient to render the concept worthless from a practical management viewpoint. Consideration of these ideas should be dropped now before too many nations and scientists become committed to them.

Present attempts to establish ecosystem monitoring by tinkering with existing national research programmes are scientifically unsound. National strategic objectives and scientists' personal research interests determine the direction of existing research.

The need for ecosystem monitoring to be scientifically credible must come before the needs of national research programmes. CCAMLR must accordingly step back and design a tailor-made research and monitoring programme of its own, to fit its own special needs. It should then attempt to influence states' national research programmes. It may also be necessary to recruit extra resources to enable its needs to be met.

However an ecosystem monitoring network is established, it will be expensive. All delegates should impress upon their governments now the necessity for more funds to be made available if CCAMLR is to be properly be implemented. CCAMLR must also consider how these costs should most fairly be divided between the fishing states and other CCAMLR members so that a suitable budget can be adopted in 1987.

SEISMIC SURVEY DAMAGE UNESTIMATED?

The effects of seismic surveys on all forms of marine life must soon be addressed by CCAMLR. Increasing numbers of seismic surveys are being conducted in response to a developing interest in Antarctic mineral resources.

Recent reports reflect an ignorance of the effects to watch for rather than an absence of environmental damage. A panel discussion held by the National Marine Fisheries Service of the United States in April this year noted a range of possible effects which should be studied. The discussion covered fish, squid, crustaceans and sea urchins, all of which have relevance for the Antarctic area.

The possible effects considered ranged from death, reproductive dysfunction and loss of external appendages to abnormal swimming and vertical migration behaviour. Other possibilities included premature moulting, disorientation, destruction of hearing and balance organs and the inability of individuals to spawn, feed or protect themselves. It is clear that these possible effects may be far more extensive than previously envisaged.

In view of the results of this panel discussion, investigations of possible effects of seismic survey programmes should include more than looking for floating penguin carcases. Present conclusions, that little or no damage results from seismic survey work, must be judged as premature. In anticipation of a rapid increase in intensive seismic survey work following the possible adoption of an Antarctic minerals regime, serious research programmes must be implemented to ascertain the true situation.
Seaborne Observers

The Commission must independently verify the data that is provided by fishing states. A programme of international observers should be established, funded entirely from a levy on quotas.

Observer status

The Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition and Greenpeace, as formal observers, could both make a substantial contribution to the workings of the Commission. Their inclusion would improve the image of the Commission as an organisation seriously concerned with conservation. ECO urges that both organisations be accepted as observers by the Commission.

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CCAMLR stands as a model for other fishing agreements. In the global context, therefore, it is most important that CCAMLR be properly implemented. If this cannot be done soon, it may be too late for the resources it is designed to protect.

SOME DATA OBSERVATIONS:

Given the chronic problems fishing states have in supplying adequate data on time, they clearly need assistance.

Since the fishing nations seem to take exception to having their operations observed under the inspection scheme provided for under Article XXIV, such an arrangement presents the best available opportunity to improve supply of vital data.

The Convention provides the ideal basis to solve this data collection and supply problem through Article XV. This would allow the Scientific Committee to establish and maintain a pool of experts experienced in data collection and the requirements of CCAMLR, to assist all commercial fishing vessels with the collection of data for the Committee.

The free exchange of information and openness to inspection at all times are basic principles of the Antarctic Treaty and it would be a great pity if intransigent fishing states destroyed this spirit of co-operation.

BUDGET $C

The whole question of fishing states contributions to CCAMLR's budget was put on ice for the first five years.

Presently, CCAMLR's budget arrangements are rather unusual, in that each member must contribute about $50,000 per year until 1987. Thereafter, the budget will be determined according to the amounts harvested by each member plus "an equal sharing among all nations of the Commission".

The exact funding formula is the responsibility of the Commission, and must be decided by consensus. ECO expects to see a lively debate next year, and hopes every delegation will be prepared with a position on funding.

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