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XV ANTARCTIC TREATY CONSULTATIVE MEETING

WAKE UP DELEGATES!

ECO is appalled at the way the XVth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting is progressing. The focus of the meeting is supposed to be on protection of the environment. That is certainly how it has been billed to the international community. Although the agenda does not contain an item on CRAMRA and the issue of a liability protocol, that is the topic that is dominating discussions. Countries seem unable to forget old CRAMRA, picking at this festering sore rather than concentrating on urgent environmental protection issues.

ECO is surprised at the way that many delegations are allowing this to happen. We do not accept that further discussion of CRAMRA can, by any stretch of the imagination, be described as designed for environmental protection. Those very countries which are insisting that the liability protocol be discussed are the same ones saying that they want CRAMRA in place so that options to mine in the future are kept open. Environmental concerns? ECO thinks not.

The meeting has made very little progress since the UK, USA and NZ, in particular, have refused to leave CRAMRA alone, and now there are only a few hours left to ensure that the Special Meeting in 1990 has adequate terms of reference. Wake up, delegates. It is long past time for those countries which truly want to protect the Antarctic environment to come out of the closet and say NO! to those countries that insist on tying the negotiation of a liability protocol for CRAMRA to discussions of protection for the environment.

Did you really think that nice words about the need for environmental protection in the opening statements would satisfy the environmental community? You have the future to answer to!

WHAT ABOUT THE BAHIA PARAISO?

Isn’t it ironic also that delegates are not discussing in any context an action plan to clean up the Bahia Paraiso? Here we have a vessel that caused enormous damage earlier this year, which continues to leak fuel oil, harming wildlife and scientific research, and everyone very politely tiptoes around the subject.

We thought the hallmark of the ATS is cooperation. ECO urges that a group of interested countries use some of the remaining time here to develop an Action Plan to deal with this environmental emergency. The Plan should specify how the remaining oil will be pumped out of the vessel and the ship then salvaged. This will no doubt be expensive. Estimates from a Dutch salvage company apparently range from $15 million to $50 million. But surely money is available from various sources, including the U.S. Navy’s international contingency fund. How can you put a price on the environment?
CURIOSITIES

It is truly amazing that the proposal for a Secretariat once again has bitten the dust. If the governments cannot organise a consensus for such a modest initiative, how can their verbal commitments to "perfect" the ATS deal with environmental imperatives be taken seriously?

After so many years of discussion about the need to develop some institutional mechanisms for the Antarctic Treaty, this is a depressing result. It is obvious that a Secretariat is needed simply for the preparation and running of meetings, to say nothing of the many other useful jobs to be done.

ECO can only guess at the thinking that has led Argentina, GDR, and India to such a conclusion, but we urge these countries to reconsider. It is not too late to say YES!

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Make Antarctica a Park

The Antarctic is remarkable for reasons beyond its harsh climate and pristine wilderness and beauty. It is one outpost on earth where there are no national boundaries, where visitors can go anywhere without visas or passports and where a variety of nations work side by side in the interest of scientific research. But it no longer is protected by its sheer isolation from worldly problems. The ice-capped continent is facing new economic and environmental pressures that threaten to upset the idyllic fashion in which the region has been administered peacefully by the international community since the early 1960s. Even tourism, with its attendant litter, has come to the continent and the South Pole.

The United States should reassess its position and seriously consider the proposals for a comprehensive new convention making the Antarctic an international park or global ecological commons.

— *Los Angeles Times.*