In this time of increasing environmental problems and the urgent need for human society to come to terms with the reality of their impacts on global ecosystems, the Antarctic Treaty nations have taken a significant step forward with the Madrid Protocol. However, unless that initiative is carried through with a committed attitude to the implementation of the principles contained in the Protocol, the public will remember the promise of Madrid as nothing more than another item in a long list of unpaid debts that humankind has racked up against the environment.

The Protocol established the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP). We haven't heard a thing about it since. The CEP is essential to the effective working of the Protocol. ECO is concerned that the formation of the CEP will be left until after the Protocol enters into force. What's the hold up? The Treaty States have committed themselves to voluntary implementation already. Why not establish an interim CEP to help expedite ratification. Such a body could pick up where this meeting leaves off by assisting Treaty Parties with implementing legislation, providing guidance to tour operators with regards to their responsibilities under the protocol, beginning to develop draft management plans as well as a number of other important tasks. If this meeting can't get the job done, give it to someone who can.

In order to maintain the momentum of the past 18 months, it is vital that the Antarctic Treaty Nations establish a Secretariat. You were able to conclude a landmark international agreement, yet now seem unable to agree to the most basic of institutional arrangements. Until a Secretariat is established, communications and exchange of information will continue to be slow, inefficient, and ineffective. Surely you can work this one out?
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Central to the underpinning of the Protocol, the EIA procedures seem to be the Protocol’s best kept secret. If the present body cannot standardise and clarify EIA procedures, then the interim CEP needs to address this as a matter of urgency. In an era of multiple uses of a single area, increased overall activity and a new recognition of the importance of environmental protection, this is not the time to allow such an important initiative to go unused.

MANAGEMENT PLANS

One of the most useful aspects of the Protocol is the consolidation of the Protected Areas scheme into a single Annex. This is another fundamental element for the protection of the Antarctic environment. We need to move forward on developing management plans for existing protected areas. Get on with it!

CONSISTENT SHIP STANDARDS

Given the increasing numbers and types of vessels engaging in a widening range of activities in the Antarctic, and the fact that Government vessels constitute the majority of vessels lost over the past decade, the provision for sovereign immunity represents a major gap in the regulations. This provision highlights one of the major weaknesses of the Protocol for Environmental Protection - that of setting double standards and causing a distinction between Treaty Party activities and all other activities. Isn’t any government embarrassed about this?

INSPECTORATE

The primary role of an independent Inspectorate would be to monitor governmental and non-governmental compliance with the Protocol and annexes. Lack of compliance has long plagued the Treaty system. Additionally, the informational needs of the CEP demand an on-site presence in the Antarctic to allow for informed advice. Got something to hide?

LIABILITY

Liability regime is also crucial to assuring comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment. The Parties committed themselves to negotiate it in the Protocol, but there has been no movement in that direction. Work on a liability annex should be commenced at the earliest possible opportunity. ECO urges that the principle of absolute and unlimited liability for damage to the environment should be a cornerstone of an annex. Let's get moving! Surely one ATCP is willing to speak up and offer to host the first negotiating session.