CCAMLR XVI ends today and ECO can only express extreme disappointment. It was quite clear from the beginning of this fortnight that CCAMLR was facing its biggest challenge to date. With illegal and unregulated fishing for toothfish rampant, the meeting started with grand statements of concern. By the end of this week, the meeting has been exposed for what it truly is: a congregation largely composed of resource-stippers, some more carefully disguised than others as conservationists.

Once again, we have seen the EC/Spain/Pescanova play the meeting like a fish, dressing up in flowery language an agenda which is about securing access for existing fishing fleets. Only the US has injected a strong note of conservation into the meeting, pointing out that CCAMLR has equal obligations to care for the seabirds as for the fish populations.

It has become patently obvious that many of the countries citing conservation and enforcement have as their sole motivation to ensure that "they" don't take all of "our" fish before "we" can take them ourselves.

Of course, some worthy work has been done this week. Some progress has been made, principally by SCOI, has developed some useful mechanisms to tackle illegal and unregulated fishing at the market and port access end of the fishing industry chain. That we have gone beyond simple gunboat enforcement shows a welcome increase in lateral thinking.

**Outright hypocrisy**

Much more needs to be done. ECO understands that the parent companies of the multinational fishing empires carrying out these egregious activities are mostly based in CCAMLR member nations. Until these states take seriously their moral obligations to bring these companies under control, much of what is said at these meetings is outright hypocrisy.

If CCAMLR is to retrieve its battered reputation, next year's Commission meeting will have to adopt a suite of hard-nosed measures to prevent trade in unauthorised finfish. In the meantime, Commission members will need to mount a coordinated political strategy to dissuade non-member states from collaborating with unauthorised fishers. All states, especially major fishing states like Spain and Norway, will also need to overhaul their domestic legislation so that they can ensure compliance by their own nationals wherever they may be.
This year, CCAMLR has, in effect, declared open season on albatrosses. The Commission has quite clearly shown that its priority is to protect the commercial fish stocks and the convenience of its fishermen – and bugger the birds.

The Commission has managed collectively to ignore 'unanimous' advice from the Scientific Committee this year such that we are now looking at the likely collapse of populations of several species of albatross and of white-chinned petrels if fishing seasons are not set to avoid periods of greatest risk to these species.

Rien ne va plus

France is playing an interesting game in area 58.6. It goes something like this. The (perfectly sensible) boundary change between 58.6 and 58.7 can't be made this year because France has already allocated TAC (presumably for its EEZ). The boundary change means a sufficient change in the precautionary yields for the two areas so that the post-change yield for 58.6 would be lower than that already allocated. France's longstanding practice is to allocate TACs in its own EEZs around Crozet and Kerguelen Islands independent of CCAMLR advice.

But several questions immediately come to mind. If France cares so little for CCAMLR's advice with respect to precautionary catch limits (which it obviously does, given that this pre-CCAMLR TAC setting is an annual event), why does France care this year that the domestic TAC will be higher than the yield recommended by the Scientific Committee? What will France do in future years if the yield recommended by the Scientific Committee is higher than the TAC it has already set? Perhaps the French are confident that their scientists use the same methodology (on the same data) as does the Fish Stock Assessment group? If this is the case, then perhaps French scientists are confusing the EEZ for the entire subarea? And if THIS is the case, then it sounds suspiciously to ECO like France might be in danger of allocating fish from that part of the South African EEZ that currently and inconveniently protrudes into Subarea 58.6.

Perhaps in CCAMLR these days you can have your cake and eat it too.

The argument that the only way to control the unregulated fishery is to have legal boats in situ have won the day, and birds are at greater risk than ever. To paraphrase a US President: "It's the daylight, stupid."

Chumming for birds

Opening the Southern Ocean to year-round fishing is not the only anti-bird crime committed by CCAMLR this year. Chumming, a quaint word used in some English-speaking countries, is the tossing of offal or meat scraps into the water to lure fish to your hook. By failing to prohibit the discard of offal while line setting, the Commission is legitimising the same process for seabirds.

The display in the coffee room of seabird drawings, destined for an observer's guide to seabird identification, seems sadly ironic. ECO can't help but muse that at least we'll have the pretty pictures by which to remember the birds.