OBAMA ADMINISTRATION URGES DELEGATES TO TAKE BOLD ACTION TO SAVE ANTARCTICA

CLINTON: “ANTARCTICA A PRIORITY FOR THIS ADMINISTRATION”

Secretary Clinton's remarks on April 6th forcefully outlined the Obama Administration's interest in protecting the Antarctic.

She urged all countries to move quickly to ratify Annex VI on liability. While praising the Antarctic Treaty as a "blueprint" for international cooperation, the Secretary called for new cooperation to extend coverage of marine pollution rules "in a manner that more accurately reflects the boundaries of the Antarctic ecosystem". She called for strengthening environmental regulations both to protect tourists and the environment.

The Secretary's address urged governments to use research gleaned from polar science to help advance progress at the Copenhagen 2009 climate talks. "We have no time to lose in tackling this crisis", she noted.

Delegates to ATCM have the opportunity to assure in the coming years that the Antarctic Treaty continues to be "an example of smart power at its best."

A FIRST DATE FOR CEP AND SC-CAMLR: HOPING FOR A SECOND

For the first time since it began operating in 1998 the CEP has conducted a joint workshop with SC-CAMLR to discuss issues relevant to both Committees. This is in itself an important step forward. ECO thanks the United States for a very well organised workshop and participants for enthusiastic involvement.

One key participant described the workshop as a “first date”, in which those involved get to know each other and to see whether they can get along and do useful things together. In this case, both parties speak a mutually intelligible language revolving around the well-being of the Antarctic marine ecosystem. Although both organizations have different mandates, they have a common interest and share legal responsibility for the health of the Antarctic marine environment. While CCAMLR has pre-eminence in the conservation of marine living resources in Antarctica, which includes rational use, Parties to the Environmental Protocol have a clear responsibility to look after the Antarctic environment, which encompasses the marine environment and its living resources.
Judging from the report produced after the workshop, once the ice was broken, the Committees became comfortable with each other and the discussion was fruitful. The issues discussed included climate change, biodiversity, and non-native species in the marine environment; species requiring special protection; spatial marine management and protected areas; and environmental monitoring. For each of the key issues, the workshop identified areas of common interest and mechanisms for cooperation. It is apparent that some issues that had usually been discussed separately by each Committee, such as environmental monitoring, benefited from a joint discussion. For instance, both fishing and tourism have the potential to impact land-based top predators, and it makes sense that these two factors are considered during monitoring. The workshop agreed that monitoring is a useful priority for a future joint meeting between the Committees.

ECO hopes that this workshop will be the first of many steps towards ensuring greater integration of the various components of the Antarctic Treaty System. If so, this will result in more effective protection of the Antarctic environment and its ecosystems. Hopefully, the CEP and SC-CAMLR will have another date soon.

**MPAs: A TIMELY IDEA**

ECO is encouraged by discussions at this year’s CEP with respect to Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). The initiative to hold the joint CEP / SC-CAMLR workshop in order to increase collaboration, cooperation, and coordination between the two bodies is already bearing fruit. There was strong support for the useful MPA papers on the table.

ECO congratulates the ATCPs on the progress made for conserving marine biodiversity at this year’s meeting. All ATCPs should now be emboldened to accept the invitations of their fellows to collaborate on maintaining the momentum.

For 50 years now, ATCPs have been devoting their efforts and time to develop myriad ways to protect Antarctica from human excesses and impacts. With respect to the valuable tool of MPAs, there are good prospects that these efforts will be finally showing results soon.

Although there is a massive amount of work yet to be done, the way forward seems clear. ECO encourages parties to take it upon themselves to progress work towards site selection of MPAs and their ecosystem based management to ensure comprehensive long-term conservation in the waters within the Treaty area. These should include but not be limited to those areas prioritized at CCAMLR XXVII. Sufficient information is available and a range of tools are at our disposal to establish a network of Antarctic MPAs by 2012. Let’s do it!