ECO has noticed over the years that CCAMLR talks about science quite a bit. CCAMLR Members are always asking questions such as is there enough science, should we do more research in this or that subarea, how do we interpret the science, and so on. ECO finds it very inspiring to see an organization so committed to basing its decisions on science. But ECO has noticed another trend as well.

It seems that for some Members there are two types of science: regular science and science relevant for CCAMLR decisions. How is CCAMLR science different, you ask? Well, to be honest Members may not have even noticed because it’s very subtle. Here’s a great example: It is said that if CCAMLR manages fisheries using its scientific knowledge, there is no need for no-take areas, even in MPAs. Yet a recent analysis of global MPA performance by Edgar et al. published in the Nature concluded that no-take, well-enforced, old, large and isolated MPAs had dramatically better conservation benefits than MPAs without those features.

ECO has also heard that some Members want MPAs to be smaller and to automatically end after a certain time, characteristics which additionally would make the MPAs less likely to live up to their conservation and scientific goals. It is puzzling that the science-loving Members of CCAMLR wouldn’t want to follow the science as they discuss MPA proposals. Then it became obvious: CCAMLR science must know better than Edgar and his 24 scientific collaborators from a variety of research institutions from all over the world who performed one of the most comprehensive analyses of MPAs to date.

CCAMLR Members must also know better than New Zealand scientists who have observed the impacts of fifty years of no-take marine reserves in New Zealand waters. One such scientist, Bill Ballentine, noted in Biological Conservation:

The scientific benefits of marine reserves proved so numerous that it became clear that marine reserves are as important to science as clean apparatus is to chemistry, and for the same reason. They are the controls for the uncontrolled experiment that is happening due to fishing and other human activities.”

But CCAMLR Members don’t need to listen to the advice of non-CCAMLR scientists. Indeed, some Members have suggested that science is harmed if fishing does not take place in an area! These papers represent just a small sample of the scientific literature highlighting the benefits of well-designed and strictly protected MPAs.

On a related note, the CAML Convention clearly states that conservation must come first, and that any harvesting shall meet a number of conditions towards preventing or minimizing harm to Southern Ocean ecosystems. Discussions at CCAMLR meetings in recent years appear to have taken the contrary view – that CCAMLR requires that fishing proceed, while conservation must wait until it is proven that it won’t affect fishing! So in addition to dismissing outside science, CCAMLR ignores its own Convention.

So, despite scientific publications saying that marine protection is a worthy goal that can accomplish everything from biodiversity conservation to climate resilience, and despite a Convention that prioritizes Conservation, CCAMLR substitutes its own judgment. ECO suggests that if CCAMLR Members revere science as much as they claim, they should try to pay more attention to what scientists have said about MPAs and marine reserves. If they are not willing to do this, it can only be concluded that perhaps science isn’t their true concern.

SYMPOSIA AND PERFORMANCE REVIEWS AND INTERSESSIONAL CONTACT GROUPS, OH MY!

A promising movement has been brewing within CCAMLR. Its manifestations are the recent holding of the second CCAMLR Symposium in Chile, the proposal for a second performance review, and various other proposals at this CCAMLR meeting to enhance institutional effectiveness and ensure that CCAMLR meets the requirements specified in the Convention. ECO admits that at times we can be quite critical of CCAMLR, and can therefore agree that there is room
for improvement.

Still, these efforts, while individually worthwhile all seem a bit separate, which is worrisome. CCAMLR Members have scrambled to keep pace with MPA proposals, feedback management, VMS updates, and so on. ECO wonders if they have time to take on new projects, even ones that would ultimately help CCAMLR do its work better. Some of the recommendations from the first performance review still have not been implemented, for example.

ECO urges this CCAMLR meeting to take concrete steps to consider all relevant initiatives for improving CCAMLR, including the development of a plan for how they might do that. This should include how to integrate the various initiatives into a strategic approach that allows the discussion of more than one fundamental or urgent issue at any time.

WHY MPAS MOVEMENT BREAK

Speaking of recent science, ECO has been alarmed by news stories this past year about the health hazards associated with very sedentary behaviour. What’s ok for glass sponges is harmful for humans. Some scientists have gone so far as to suggest that sitting for longer than an hour at a time can take ten years off your life, which is especially shocking since it is longer than some Members would like to see CCAMLR MPAs last! To avoid such health hazards during this meeting and to ensure all of our dear delegates get to see the fruits of the long MPAs planning process, ECO recommends that every half hour we have a group movement break. We have even written a song to the tune of YMCA by the Village People to get you moving. You can fight amongst yourselves who gets to be the cowboy and the construction worker, etc., but we know of some penguins who have the police role covered!

Lyrics for Why MPAs:
CCAMLR, there’s something you can do
We say, CCAMLR, for the deep ocean blue
You can do it, show what leaders you are
It is time you set a new bar

CCAMLR, it’s now 2015
We say, CCAMLR, do you know what we mean?
We say, CCAMLR, it’s now getting obscene --
It is time to take some action
Refrain: There’s no need to ask -- why MPAs?
There’s no need to ask -- why MPAs?

They have everything for sea life to enjoy,
The ocean’s something we just can’t destroy
(Refrain)

Algae so fresh and green, krill can have a good meal,
Seals can do whatever they feel
(Refrain)