ECO congratulates Argentina as the agreed host state for the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat.

We now look forward to Parties promptly concluding the necessary establishment and administrative arrangements so that by the conclusion of ATCM XXV we have a Secretariat in fact.

Looking Back at XXIV ATCM

At the beginning of XXIV ATCM, ECO attempted to draw attention to important issues that would be discussed by delegates. Now that the meeting is closing, ECO would like to revisit these issues with an eye towards how successfully they were addressed.

Tourism: ECO is encouraged by the willingness of several countries that supported opening the discussion on managing tourism for the next ATCM. We recognize that countries are concerned about this burgeoning industry and understand that proactive steps must be taken now.

Strategic Environmental Assessment: ECO is pleased that a number of countries are inclined to take a closer look at SEA in the Antarctic context.

Specially Protected Species: ECO congratulates Parties for promoting IUCN criteria for SPS and for agreeing to continue the work on developing legal and practical measures to address SPS. ECO remains concerned, however, that some Parties do not want all taxa to be included under Annex II.

Exchange of Information: ECO commends the 20 countries that tabled reports under Article 17 this year, which is a significant increase from the number of Parties tabling reports to the XII SATCM. ECO urges remaining countries to also meet their reporting obligations at the next ATCM. ECO understands that in the future Parties will post reports to their websites, unless another Party specifically requests that a Party distribute them to the CEP and other Parties. Although ECO applauds the amount of paper saved by this process, we question whether this is a smart arrangement given that these papers are instructive in articulating how Parties are meeting their obligations under the Protocol.
Annex V: ECO was pleased to learn that Ecuador and Russia deposited their instruments for Annex V. We were also encouraged by indications that India is not far behind and that Poland is only one bureaucratic step away from ratification.

Continuity of ATCMs: ECO commends the Russian Federation for hosting this meeting, which has facilitated progress towards parties implementing their obligations under the Protocol.

ECO notes that progress has been made on several additional issues as follows:

- Creation of an Intersessional Contact Group comprised of relevant groups to address Antarctic cumulative impact
- Apparent progress on ratification of the Protocol by Canada.
- CEP commitment to conduct a review of Protocol annexes at forthcoming ATCMs.
- SCAR Group of Specialists commitment to address Russian’s Lake Vostok proposal.
- COMNAP-SCAR work on emergency response and contingency planning.

Liability: ECO believes that the discussions here may have been useful. But the real test of whether liability has been advanced is whether there is commitment to hold intersessional meetings before ATCM XXV. This seems essential if we are to have even a restricted annex in place by the next ATCM. ECO believes some undertaking to subsequently cover other areas of liability must remain part of the package.

Adequacy of legal and practical implementation of Annexes I-V: ECO is encouraged that the majority of Parties have implemented the Protocol according to their domestic legal requirements. However, concerning practical implementation, ECO noted with interest that the three Inspection Reports tabled at this meeting reiterated concerns raised in previous reports regarding waste disposal, fuel containment and spill contingency plans, discharge of gray water and presence of non-indigenous species.

IUU fishing of Patagonian toothfish and other species: ECO is very concerned that countries are not giving this issue the urgent attention it deserves. Future ATCMs need to address this issue.

 Parties to the XXIV ATCM in St. Petersburg have demonstrated, at least in words, a sincere wish to further protect Antarctica. ECO is concerned, however, by the increasing influence of some countries to assert themselves by speaking out. ECO would like to remind Parties that Antarctica is a model for international cooperation and governance and that such “power grabs” do not have a place in the ATS. ECO holds that if more countries would set political considerations aside, Parties’ would be in a better position to turn “words” into action.

“Progress Base is established in 1988 to carry out geological-geophysical studies in one of the most prospective places in East Antarctica in terms of mineral and petroleum resources. An air transport junction is planned to be here.”

This, remarkably, was the caption (immediately below text in Cyrillic script) beneath a photograph on the poster “1991-2001”, which formed part of the panorama about the Russian Antarctic Program in the coffee room at this meeting. It was covered with a sheet of paper (ironically the logo for this ATCM) – so somebody was obviously aware of the implications.

Recall that in April there were a flurry of media reports originating in St Petersburg, picked up by the BBC’s Monitoring Service and subsequently across the world, about the return of the Russian research ship “Karpinskiy” and remarks attributed to senior...
Russian scientists that emphasized the minerals prospecting aspects of the expedition.

ECO understands that at this meeting a Russian Working Paper (No. 27) is replete with references to mineral raw material resources.

There’s an expression that if something looks like a duck, walks like a duck and squawks like a duck, it probably IS a duck.

It sounds awfully border-line in relation to the Protocol’s Article 7 prohibition on minerals resource activity apart from scientific research.

ECO understands that Russia has said that it is only conducting scientific research – and we welcome that clarification. But, we also wonder why such a pivotal issue in the Protocol would only be raised at this meeting by Australia and ASOC.

The Subdivision of Antarctica – The Sum of the Parts Doesn’t Necessarily Add Up To the Whole

ECO is concerned that this meeting draws to a close without any discussion on the potential for damage to the integrity and sustainability of the Antarctic Treaty System given the continuing struggle of CCAMLR to deal with the issue of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Since the inception of CCAMLR, Parties have developed a “split brain” approach to discussing activities that occur north or south of an arbitrary boundary – namely, 60 degrees.

This boundary was chosen as the boundary of the Antarctic Treaty for political reasons. It is the dividing line for activities that must comply with the Protocol – and therefore fall under the competence of the Consultative Meetings, and those left to the competency of CCAMLR.

If CCAMLR had picked up the gauntlet and demonstrated its competence at protecting the marine ecosystem in the waters bounded by 60 degrees and the Antarctic Convergence, ECO would be less apprehensive. However, the CCAMLR regime has thus far shown itself to be incapable of adequately responding to IUU fishing in the CCAMLR region. ECO submits that as long as adequate protection is not afforded to dependent and associated ecosystems, Antarctica’s environment will never be afforded the protections contemplated in the series of documents and conventions that in total make up the Antarctic Treaty System. Is the Antarctic Treaty now prepared to change the political situation, thereby protecting the marine ecosystem?

ECO believes that the Antarctic regime needs to evolve to deal with the region as a whole. The inability of Parties to agree to establish marine protected areas goes to the heart of this issue. Protecting the terrestrial environment does not provide adequate protection for marine-dependent fauna.

We remind Parties that their responsibilities as guardians of this region must be to ensure the protection and sustainability of the Southern Ocean ecosystem – which means that they must look at Antarctica as a whole – that is the sum total of its marine and terrestrial environments, rather than subdividing it by an artificial boundary.

ECO challenges Parties to think about ways in which they could cooperate to maximize the protection of the Antarctic marine environment. For instance, Antarctic Treaty Parties could immediately begin sharing and synthesizing satellite data from military and intelligence sources to identify precisely the vessels being used in illegal fishing activities. An updated list of such vessels could then be made regularly available to all Parties, who could take measures to prosecute the offenders in national courts, to seize the vessels and fish at port or at sea etc. Cooperative enforcement actions in the
Southern Ocean and enhanced information sharing would surely bring Parties closer to their goal of protection.

Parties need to demonstrate their commitment to their stated intention of protecting the Antarctic environment, not just give fine speeches annually at these meetings. For surely as discussions have been progressing at this ATCM, the IUU fisheries continue in the Southern Ocean, and will continue to do so as long as Parties have failed in their responsibility for the management of this region.

As ECO has said in the past, the credibility of the Antarctic Treaty System is at stake. The public at large sees no distinction between this meeting and the meetings of CCAMLR. And if this meeting stays silent on the issue of illegal fishing – and the decimation of magnificent seabirds – then surely the public will assume that delegates care little for the fate of the Southern Ocean ecosystem, or worse. ECO knows that this is not the case – but the taxpayers will begin to wonder why their representatives are giving such short shrift to an issue of such magnitude.

Climate Change: No Time to Waste!

Antarctic Treaty Parties are all aware of the imperative need to address the range of human activities that are causing global warming. Recent reports from scientists on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) could not be more clear about these realities. The insurance industry is being very clear in alerting us to the costs associated with the phenomenon. As is so often the case, precautionary and preventive action will end up costing far less than trying to address the problem after it is “too late”. Unfortunately, on this point there remain some politicians who are choosing inaction. There should be no politicians left on the planet unaware of the issues.

At the same time as our ATCM here in St. Petersburg, colleagues are trying to finalize the rules for the Kyoto Protocol in Bonn. It is an understatement to say that those negotiations are in jeopardy because of the self-serving choices of a few countries. At the very moment when global leadership is required to deal with these threats, leadership is lacking from the largest emitter of greenhouse gases. This is very sad.

What is the special responsibility of Antarctic Treaty Parties in this context? Well, first of all much of the key science is based in Antarctica. Our scientists know the facts perhaps better than anyone, both from the globally significant research being done in the Antarctic, as well as impacts visible on the ground.

Dr. Christophe Barbraud and Dr. Henri Weimerskirch from the National Center for Scientific Research in France reported in Nature that warming seas and declining sea ice are linked to a 50% drop in numbers of one Emperor Penguin colony that has been well-studied for the last 50 years.

Dr. Wayne Trivelpiece, director of seabird research for the US Antarctic Marine Living Resources Program, and his colleagues have found that as seas have warmed, sea-ice formation in winter has become uncertain. Since the middle 1970s the annual formation of pack ice no longer has extended reliably North of the South Shetland Islands. Indeed, on average that range is being reached now in only 2 of every 8 years. Since the pack ice contains the storehouse of diatoms that is the critical food source for krill, virtually entire generations of krill can die when the pack ice fails to form normally. Then the only krill left alive are those surviving from the last winter when there was sufficient pack ice. The result: krill have declined significantly, as have Adelie penguins -- dependant on krill for their principal sustenance.

Dr. Trivelpiece notes that since the pack ice has not formed fully for the past six years –
about the lifespan of most krill, the last of the aging krill might not have a chance to reproduce. That could cause a crash in krill populations, threatening the Adelies and many other species that depend on krill. “We’re really out on the wire right now,” he remarks. “If we don’t get ice this winter or next, the whole house of cards will come down.”

ECO urges all delegates to this ATCM to take whatever steps are necessary to finalize a good Kyoto Protocol, ratify it and bring the agreement into force. We all know it is only a small first step in terms of what the IPCC tells us is really needed to avoid dangerous climate change. Actions, not weasel words of avoidance, are needed, and they are needed now. Note to a superpower and a few of its friends: It’s never too late to say you’re sorry and get on with the job!

**Growthmania?**

Growth for profit, more growth for more consumption, growth for growth’s sake—growthmania—is central to the current economic paradigm. It is seriously threatening global sustainability. ECO sees the same paradigm inadvertently entering into Antarctic circles.

It has long been recognized that the concept of sustainability encompasses both the notion of minimization of impacts as well as that of *scale*. Optimisation of the ways humans interact with the environment is a necessary but not sufficient approach to meet conservation goals. In Antarctica the notion of sustainability may be equated with the conservation of the entire region—its continental, coastal and marine environments, its wilderness and aesthetic values. Long-term Antarctic conservation goals are meaningless without an appropriate scale for the level of human activities that take place in the Antarctic region.

The Protocol offers a means to address how activities should be conducted in Antarctica, so as to have an acceptable low environmental impact. But it does not necessarily deal effectively with other aspects of human activities, such as what, where or why. ECO argues that most activities, no matter how important or desirable, can have negative impacts on the Antarctic environment if they grow too fast or reach too high a level.

What exactly constitutes excessive growth is a somewhat subjective matter. In some cases it is plainly obvious to most people when an activity is growing too fast. The indicators include—people starting to talk about these activities, documents appearing at ATCMs and other fora, and the activities discussion of activities in academic circles. Of course, at some point the impacts of excessive growth become obviously detectable.

Mass and adventure tourism, which have been abundantly covered elsewhere, are examples of activities that are currently growing at a fast pace. The expansion of research stations is potentially another area of excessive growth. Indeed, if the research station construction boom of the mid- to late-1980s were to be repeated again there would be many more questions asked than twenty years ago as to why exactly a new station is required.

ECO argues that if the ATS’ commitment to science and environmental protection requires growth, it is of the qualitative sort - better science, enhancement of environmental values, further cooperation opportunities – rather than merely quantitative growth with its associated problems.

It is in this context that ECO learns with some surprise of the Czech proposal to establish a new research station on King George Island. ECO obviously welcomes the willingness of the Czech Republic to ratify the Protocol and eventually become a Consultative Party by conducting serious, high quality long-term scientific research in Antarctica.
But, is the choice of location useful when there are already so many research stations on that island? What additional high quality research can a new station on this overcrowded (and surely not *that* interesting) island provide? Many of the existing stations are inadequately resourced and/or underused. Is it not more sensible to cooperatively use the existing facilities rather than building new facilities? Joint use would seem to be a sensible approach.

How the case of the proposed Czech station is eventually resolved will be an important precedent for the future.

Although there have been cases of creative multi-national (e.g. Cape Roberts) and bi-national cooperation (e.g. Argentina-Germany, Chile-Germany, France-Italy, UK-Ukraine), isn’t it ironic that we have managed to agree, and to start building, a *multinational* research station in *space* before any such station in Antarctica?

ECO does not believe it is environmentally, scientifically or economically justifiable for us to continue the patterns whereby every new operating state has to build its own new station in Antarctica. The responsibility for avoiding this resides with all existing Parties – not just each newcomer.