Welcome to Warsaw

ECO is very pleased to be in Warsaw, and thanks our gracious hosts for their excellent preparation and assistance with this meeting. The XXV ATCM and CEP V begin with both positive and negative issues to report concerning the environment in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

ECO congratulates India for finally ratifying Annex V, permitting this key conservation tool to enter into force. Annex V, used wisely, will allow Parties to commit themselves to the protection of the more sensitive and historic areas in Antarctica and help contain the negative effects of commercialism on science.

Significant progress has occurred since St. Petersburg:

1. A continued proactive discussion on a Management Plan for Deception Island. This heavily visited Island will act as a test case for the management of continued tourism growth and of the effects this may have on the environment and on science. Even at such a heavily visited area, there has not been enough research on the long term impacts of mass tourism. ECO anticipates that the Management Plan will provide for continuing study. We also note that the primary lesson of this Management Plan is the benefit of cooperation by so many stakeholders. While the direct plan may, or may not, be applicable to other parts of the Antarctic Treaty Area, the ability of a diverse group of stakeholders to develop a management plan addressing diverse concerns and needs is an excellent sign for future cooperation.

2. Continued growth in the number of Parties meeting the requirements of Art. 17 reporting. ECO hopes to see complete compliance with this requirement here in Warsaw.

3. The number of Specially Protected Areas and Specially Managed Areas to be discussed at this meeting is heartening. Now that Annex V is in effect, ECO expects that all Parties will use this invaluable tool.

4. With the designation of Buenos Aires as the host for a Secretariat, ECO hopes this meeting will produce at least an interim system to allow it to function. After waiting so many years for an agreement on a Secretariat, it would be a shame if Parties allow this opportunity to enhance Protocol implementation to wither on the vine.

Unfortunately, not all news has been positive.

1. We note that India has still not ratified all the recommendations from past meetings, and Canada has yet to ratify the Protocol. This inaction, combined with lack of action from other states, is keeping the Treaty System as a whole from fully implementing the Protocol.

2. Growth in the number of environmental assessments has not been matched by the use of more detailed assessments for longer-term activities. Most EIAs remain at the IEE level. ECO believes, and the Protocol clearly states, that longer term, more permanent activities require a more detailed analysis. ECO supports the use of additional tools such as Strategic Environmental Assessment in order to get the “big picture” about developments in Antarctica. The use of Strategic Environmental Assessment tools would allow Parties to more effectively use the EIA process to assist in decision making. We call upon all Parties to fulfil their EIA requirements, and to set a global “best” standard for environmental decision-making.

3. Waste disposal remains a concern. ECO recalls the shortage of acceptable waste management systems reported at St. Petersburg, and hopes that this meeting will produce evidence of progress towards universal implementation of strong waste management systems. As waste management is often the most easily identified environmental problem, ECO questions the commitment of Parties still lacking waste management systems to the spirit and letter of the Protocol.

4. Liability discussions have not progressed substantially since XXIV ATCM. ECO hopes that this meeting can provide a working text for approval in Madrid next summer.
5. Tourism continues to be a strong growth industry. ECO notes with dismay the lack of adequate attention being paid to the longer-term environmental consequences of the growth in visitation and expects that discussions at this meeting will begin to address this. The latest estimates call for more than 15,000 persons to set foot on Antarctica in the 2005-6 season. This is a continual increase of 1000 persons each season. Are Parties prepared to address the environmental impact of growth before the influence of monetary gain cripples the ATS? ECO challenges the Parties to establish a sane regulatory system before the cumulative damage becomes more than ‘minor or transitory.’

ECO notes several pressing issues that are not on the table at this meeting. However, given the importance and immediacy of these issues, we call upon all Parties to address them, first here in Warsaw, and then at home:

1. Illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing continues apace in the Southern Ocean. Thus, despite the best efforts of many to curtail this out-of-control pirate fishing, depletion of Patagonian and Antarctic Toothfish is reaching crisis proportions in many places. ECO notes the failure of CCAMLR to address this problem, and urges the ATS Parties to work together to prevent the illegal depletion of shared resources. This is a question of the credibility of the entire Antarctic Treaty System, whose members have many tools at their disposal to help stop the illegal fishing.

2. Although many Parties have expressed a clear commitment to deal with climate change, as indicated by their ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, that commitment is regrettably not shared by all. ECO laments the decisions by the United States and Australia not to ratify the Protocol, and encourages all Parties to reflect on the dangers that climate change poses to Antarctica as they take steps to address this pressing issue.

ECO is aware that not all of these problems lie solely at the feet of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties, nor can they all be solved at this meeting, but we encourage all Parties to address these issues immediately, both here in Warsaw and within their own programs. Let’s get to work – and make sure that the ATCM achieves tangible results in protecting the Antarctic environment.

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**LESSONS FROM JOHANNESBURG**

Don’t let self-interest hijack global stewardship!

As deliberations begin in Warsaw, ECO reminds Parties that Antarctica is the earth’s ecological powerhouse - the cold engine driving important global systems and the largest wilderness area left on the planet. The ATS, through its various treaty instruments, has undertaken to be the global steward of this huge and vital part of our shared planet. Decisions made here are not taken in the interests of any one country, but in the interests of future generations and the planet as a whole.

ECO has come to Warsaw directly from the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. Having managed to get through the door to the Sandton Convention Centre, ECO found it very difficult to access decision makers cloistered in closed-door meetings for much of the Summit’s duration. By the end of the Summit, ECO found it necessary to walk out of the Johannesburg process frustrated at the ‘lowest common denominator’ decisions being made, the blatant collusion between some governments and big business, the lack of transparency and the obstacles to public involvement. ECO is certain that the atmosphere at ATCM XXV will be considerably different and looks forward to actively engaging with delegates.

While many of the conclusions in the “Johannesburg Commitment” leave much to be desired, the call to ‘cease destructive fishing practices and establish marine protected areas and networks by 2012’ is one of the more far-reaching promises, which should be actively pursued by the ATS. Through the Environmental Protocol, Parties have had the foresight to put the legal mechanisms in place for the establishment of Marine Protected Areas in the Antarctic region. With the recent entry into force of Annex V, the time has come to act decisively and declare the marine area south of 60 degrees south latitude as a Marine Protected Area. Only with this type of decisive action can the ATS show the rest of the world that there is one area of the planet that is not for sale. ECO expects the ATS Parties to demonstrate the global environmental leadership promised in the Protocol, and sadly lacking in Johannesburg.

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**ECO Congratulates ASOC on 25 years of activism on behalf of the Antarctic Environment!**

**ECO**

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