Antarctic Ocean Legacy: A Vision for Circumpolar Protection
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Information Paper submitted by ASOC

Summary

This Information Paper summarises the report “Antarctic Ocean Legacy: A Vision for Circumpolar Protection” published by the Antarctic Ocean Alliance (AOA), of which the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC) is a member. The Alliance is calling for the creation of a network of marine protected areas and no-take marine reserves in the Southern Ocean. Appendix 1 contains the full report. ASOC invites CEP Members to consider this report, which is relevant to the CEP’s work on marine spatial protection.

Introduction

The Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition is a member of the Antarctic Ocean Alliance (AOA), an alliance of leading environmental and conservation organizations and philanthropists calling for the creation of a network of marine protected areas and no-take marine reserves in the Southern Ocean\(^1\). With such a network in place, key Southern Ocean habitats and wildlife would be protected from human interference.

This Information Paper summarises the report “Antarctic Ocean Legacy: A Vision for Circumpolar Protection” published by the Alliance on 21 May 2012.

Appendix 1 contains the full report.

A vision for circumpolar protection: executive summary

In October 2011, the Antarctic Ocean Alliance (AOA) proposed the creation of a network of marine protected areas (MPAs) and no-take marine reserves in 19 specific areas in the Southern Ocean around Antarctica\(^2\). We now seek to more fully elaborate this vision with particular reference to the ecological values of the chosen areas.

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), the body that manages the marine living resources of the Southern Ocean, has set a target date of 2012 for establishing an initial network of Antarctic MPAs. This report identifies areas for consideration as MPAs and no-take marine reserves, and describes the rationale for the 19 designations.

This Report starts with an introduction to the region, followed by threats – most notably climate change and resource extraction, and then outlines opportunities for progressive management in the Southern Ocean. It goes on to describe the geography, oceanography, and ecology of the 19 areas identified, ending with the case for protection. The Report ends with conclusions and recommendations that outline the scale and scope of potential for marine protection at the time of writing.

\(^1\) The Antarctic Ocean Alliance partner organisations include the Blue Marine Foundation (UK), Greenpeace, Mission Blue (US), Oceans 5 (US), WWF, The Last Ocean (NZ), Forest and Bird (NZ), ECO (NZ), Deepwave (Germany), Humane Society International, Korean Federation for Environmental Movement (KFEM), Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and associate partners the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Greenovation Hub (China), Oceana, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Ocean Planet (Australia), the International Programme on the State of the Ocean (IPSO), and other groups worldwide. The AOA is funded by a generous grant from Oceans Five (www.oceans5.org). AOA’s website www.antarcticoocean.org contains additional information about the Antarctic Ocean Alliance, its membership, its public campaign and its proposals for marine protected areas and marine reserves.

The Antarctic Ocean Alliance acknowledges that the international process to establish the proposed network for marine protection will take several years. For the past seven years, CCAMLR Members and scientists have made progress on developing plans for MPAs and no-take marine reserves in the Southern Ocean. AOA offers this report as a contribution to that ongoing effort with the hope of helping CCAMLR meet their 2012 goal. AOA’s intention is to work with CCAMLR Members and their scientific bodies to develop appropriate protection for these unique and valuable ecosystems. This report does not make definitive proposals in all areas, but it does in some.

In this report, AOA has selected areas that collectively capture a wide and representative range of habitats and ecosystems. These include seafloor and pelagic ecoregions, different environmental types, rare and unusual biological features, and areas that are critical for ecosystem and species protection. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s World Parks Congress recommends that at least 20-30% of all marine habitats should be included in networks of marine reserves. In line with the scientific values of the Antarctic Treaty, and in accordance with the precautionary principle of CCAMLR, the Alliance’s research has identified over 40% of the Southern Ocean that warrants protection in a network of large-scale, no-take marine reserves and MPAs.

CCAMLR Members have an unprecedented opportunity to establish the world’s largest network of MPAs and no-take marine reserves in the oceans around Antarctica as a legacy for future generations. With such a network in place, key Southern Ocean habitats and wildlife would be protected from human interference. The Alliance believes that with visionary political leadership, CCAMLR can embrace this opportunity.

Closing remarks

ASOC invites CEP Members to consider this report, which is relevant to the CEP’s work on marine spatial protection. While much of the discussion on Marine Protected Areas concerns CCAMLR processes, many of the objectives of this proposal are relevant to the work of the CEP, which – with the mandate of the 1991 environmental Protocol – is developing a network of Protected Areas in the Antarctic Treaty Area. The CEP has considered a substantial number of documents on Marine Protected Areas, including several documents submitted by ASOC, and is involved in on-going collaboration with CCAMLR on this issue.

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4 See XXXIV ATCM SP06, Summary of the work of the CEP on Marine Protected Areas.