¡Bienvenidos a Uruguay!

ECO is pleased to be in the beautiful city of Punta del Este for the XXXIII ATCM and thanks the hosts. Uruguay has a long history of involvement in the Antarctic, and this year marks the 30th anniversary of Uruguay’s accession to the Antarctic Treaty. There is much important work to be done at the 2010 CEP and ATCM. With the recent ATMEs on vessels and climate change, the Parties have demonstrated their commitment to tackling difficult issues, and we look forward to a productive meeting.

ATMEs – WHAT NEXT?

ECO was pleased that treaty parties convened two Antarctic Treaty Meetings of Experts (ATMEs) on ship-borne tourism and climate change since the last ATCM, which provided a chance to discuss these issues in more depth than is possible at the annual meeting.

The ATME on ship-borne tourism made progress on the sharing of search and rescue plans; incorporation of the environmental impacts of tourism into management; and the development of guidelines for dealing with large-scale oil spills.

The ATME on climate in Svolvær produced many important recommendations that ECO hopes this ATCM will seriously consider.

Overall, the ATMEs confirmed the need for Parties to discuss specific emerging issues in detail beyond the constraints of the ATCM and CEP meetings. Unfortunately, processes of change in the Antarctic do not follow the agenda of the Antarctic Treaty System, but it is encouraging to see the Antarctic Treaty Parties willing to change theirs in order to take necessary action.

NEW PRIORITIES FOR THE CEP

This year’s CEP has a typically packed agenda. ECO is certain that progress can be made in several key areas. Here we highlight some items that are beyond the usual CEP agenda:

MPAs

As the joint CCAMLR-CEP goal of creating a representative network of MPAs by 2012 approaches, ECO hopes that the ATCM will take decisive actions to help:

• Endorsement of the South Orkneys MPA by the CEP and ATCM.

• Terms of reference and dates for an early 2011 joint CEP/SC-CAMLR workshop on marine spatial protection and management.

Plans should be in place to ensure that by the end of 2010, Antarctic Treaty Parties and CCAMLR members have made substantive progress on collating relevant data for all of the 11 regions prioritized for the implementation of marine spatial protection and management (and other regions as appropriate), and have characterized each region in terms of biodiversity patterns and ecosystem processes, physical environmental features and human activities.

Climate Change

Numerous recommendations from the ATME pertain directly to the CEP and these will presumably be given due attention during the meeting. ECO wishes to quote a few in particular:

• The ATME recommends that the CEP give consideration as to means for improving climate change related data and information management to support its environmental management
responsibilities.

- The ATME recommends that the CEP consider developing a climate change response work programme.

- The ATME recommends that the CEP consider a systematic approach to protected or managed areas to:
  - protect species, or habitats identified to be of particular risk to climate change
  - accommodate areas that have potential to be environmental or climate refuges
  - set aside areas for future climate change related research and reference areas.

**WORKSHOP UNDERSCORES OUTSTANDING ROSS SEA BIODIVERSITY**

A workshop on the Ross Sea held last May as part of the annual International Marine Conservation Congress reaffirmed the view that the Ross Sea is of global significance and in urgent need of protection. Around 80 experts attended the meeting and presentations were given on a range of topics relating to the ecology of what is the best studied stretch of high-latitude ocean in the Southern Hemisphere.

One of the many things that sets the Ross Sea apart is the fact that it has remained virtually unchanged over millennia and, unlike most other ocean areas, it still retains robust populations of top predators, including numerous large fish.

Summing up what she had taken from the workshop, Sylvia Earle said: "We've gotten over the idea of commercial taking of wildlife from the land to feed large numbers of people — but we still have this 20th century approach to the Ocean that we now know doesn't work...We can't afford to lose the fish right now...they are more valuable alive — carbon based units out there in the ocean doing their thing to keep the ocean healthy and to keep us alive. We've got to back off, as we've lost 90% of the big fish. It's time to protect the last 10% everywhere, especially in the Ross Sea."

**ANNEX VI RATIFICATION**

For a time, it seemed the ball had finally gotten rolling on Annex VI ratification. Progress last year included Spain ratifying the Annex, the U.S. sending its ratification package to the Senate, New Zealand introducing a ratification bill and the UK preparing an Antarctic bill that includes Annex VI implementing legislation.

Yet the New Zealand and US packages have been before their respective bodies for months now and ratification doesn’t appear to be close. The UK bill has yet to be formally introduced in Parliament, and no hearings are scheduled in the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

ECO urges all Parties that have not ratified - the great majority - to renew their efforts towards ratification. With the IMO developing a Polar Code and instituting a ban on heavy fuel oil, there is clearly political will for increasing the safety of Antarctic shipping. Ratification of Annex is an imperative step.

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