ANTARCTICA preservation plans supported by the EU have once again been scuppered by Russia and China as the two powers attempt to stamp their authority on the region, anticipating gradual openings into a wealth of natural resources.

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) has been accused of "going backwards" as its attempts to agree a sanctuary for threatened species has once again been halted by Russian and Chinese defiance. The organisation hosted talks in Tasmania last weekend, but they stalled for the eighth year in a row. The sanctuary proposal lead by France, the EU and Australia would create the largest of its kind in the world, protecting penguins and whales living in the region.
The plan to set up the sanctuary had the backing of 22 out of the 25 member countries but failed to pass because it required the support of all members.

The scheme would have banned commercial fishing there, allowing wildlife, fish and marine ecosystems to recover from human exploitation.

The Washington-based Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, a collective of environmental organisations in 40 countries, demanded action to protect waters surrounding Antarctica.
Claire Christian, its executive director, said that some countries had arrived at the Hobart meeting with no mandate to take action.

She said: “We urgently need global leadership.

“The science is settled. It is only political will preventing the creation of new marine protections in the world’s last great wilderness.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping have other ideas for the region, with Antarctic waters representing lucrative fishing opportunities that have occurred on an industrial scale in recent years.

China began fishing in the Southern Ocean in 2016 while the Kremlin has expressed an interest in returning to the waters.

Xi Jinping's rivalry with Australia has culminated in the Antarctica dispute, with Canberra opposing Beijing plans to take control of the Dome A region, seen as a prime location for space observation due to the clear skies for visibility and elevation.