Marine reserves blocked for the Antarctic

AAP

An international treaty grouping charged with Antarctic ocean conservation has failed to protect key areas in the Ross Sea and on the continent's east coast, campaigners say.

They say blocking by China and Russia prevented proposed marine reserves going ahead after the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) annual meeting in Hobart this week.

The failure of the 24 member nations and the European Union to reach consensus for the fourth time called into question CCAMLR's ability to deliver on its conservation commitments, campaigners grouped in the Antarctic Ocean Alliance said late on Friday.

"It is appalling that while the majority of CCAMLR Members are more than ready to create significant marine protection in Antarctic waters, China and Russia have again blocked all efforts to negotiate a successful outcome," said Mark Epstein, Executive Director of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC).

He commended the efforts of the United States, New Zealand, Australia, the EU and France during the last four years to promote marine protection proposals in Antarctica.

Richard Page, of Greenpeace, said the question of whether CCAMLR could deliver on its conservation mandate was now in serious doubt.

"This year's failure denigrates the reputation of CCAMLR and is symptomatic of a dangerous global trend where geopolitical interests override any genuine efforts to protect
the oceans for the sake of future generations," he said in a statement.

Andrea Kavanagh from the Pew Charitable Trusts said another year of inaction meant another year that near-pristine waters with their remarkable biodiversity were open to the threat of industrial fishing.

"The proposed designations would have ensured the long-term protection of many species, including penguins, seals and whales," she said.

A joint New Zealand-US proposal was for a 1.3 million square kilometre protected zone in the Ross Sea while Australia, France and the EU proposed protection for 1.2 million square kilometres of East Antarctic waters.

CCAMLR is a treaty-based grouping tasked with overseeing conservation and sustainable exploitation of the Antarctic Ocean.

Australia will continue to push for so-called Marine Protected Areas off East Antarctica.

"While Australia is disappointed consensus was not achieved, we are pleased about the constructive nature of the discussions we have had over the last two weeks," said Dr Tony Fleming, Director of the Australian Antarctic Division.

"Australia is optimistic CCAMLR will be ready to adopt the East Antarctic MPAs when we next meet in 2015."

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