Claire Christian (34), Mark Epstein's successor, is Chair of The Antarctic Wildlife Research Fund and Acting Executive Director of ASOC - The Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition.

What does The Antarctic Wildlife Research Fund (AWR) mean to you?

AWR is an important initiative because it is supporting critical scientific work in one of the most rapidly changing areas on the planet. It also represents a joint effort of industry, environmental organizations, and scientists, and it is a very positive development that all of these groups can work together even though we have different perspectives.

How is the AWR important for ASOC?

ASOC believes that increasing scientific understanding of Antarctic ecosystems is vital to their continued protection, and we are pleased to be able to work with AWR to accomplish this important goal. ASOC also believes that Antarctica is the world's last great wilderness, and we are encouraged that there is a growing commitment from industry to help keep it that way.
What do you find the most interesting about Antarctica?

_Antarctica is interesting because despite its harsh conditions, it still supports a diverse abundance of life. There are very few places left on earth where you can see the kind of aggregations of wildlife that we see in the Antarctic. And it is also interesting because it is so mysterious. Even with decades of scientific research, there's so much we don't know._

Your favourite Antarctic animal?

_It's probably not a common choice, but I'd say _Labidiaster annulatus_, an Antarctic starfish. These starfish are almost 2 feet across, with fifty arms, and they can catch live prey such as krill out of the water. Starfish aren't usually so intimidating!_

If you were world leader for a day, what changes would you implement?

_First I'd make the precautionary approach mandatory when making decisions that affect the environment. Too often we ask for proof that the environment is being harmed before limiting human activities, rather than requiring proof that it won't be harmed. We have experienced the negative consequences of that attitude for long enough. I find it absurd that we debate how much air pollution is acceptable when breathing is so fundamental for supporting life and so many children have respiratory problems, for example. We have to rethink our decisionmaking processes._

_I'd also mandate equal rights for women and allocate funding to send every child in the world to school. It's appalling to me that so many women around the world cannot exercise their basic human rights. And all children deserve an education. The world will never prosper unless we provide equal opportunities and justice for all and protect the planet._

Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?

_If time travel becomes a possibility, I would want to have dinner with Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to the U.S. Congress in 1968. She was also the first black person to run for president, and in her campaign she used the slogan "Unbought and Unbossed", which is possibly the best campaign slogan of all time. I think of her as a practical idealist, someone_
who could get results, but who never compromised her values. Her enormous courage and determination are inspirational.

What would you serve, and what would you talk about?

I always like to find out if my dinner guests have any preferences, so it's tough to say without knowing what she likes. I do make an excellent crème brûlée, however! But in terms of conversation, I would want to hear her stories about being in Congress and running for office, and her insights on today's politics. And lots of practical advice on how to advocate effectively for the issues you care about. Shirley Chisholm's memoir is decades old but still has many insights that resonate today. Her advice would be very valuable.

Ice floating in the Southern Ocean near Cierva Cove, south of Chavdar Peninsula along the west coast of Graham Land, Antarctica. Photo: Rodolfo Werner