Russia blocks global efforts for Antarctic marine protection

Wednesday, 17 July 2013, 8:58 am
Press Release: Antarctic Ocean Alliance

For Immediate Release

Russian delegation blocks global efforts for Antarctic marine protection

“Extraordinary missed opportunity” -- AOA

BREMERHAVEN, 16 July 2013 – The Antarctic Ocean Alliance (AOA) today called the Russian delegation’s blocking of proposals for the two largest ocean sanctuaries in the world in pristine Antarctic waters, “the loss of an extraordinary opportunity to protect the global marine environment for future generations.”

This week’s special meeting of the 25 Members of the Commission for the Conservation on Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) concluded today in Bremerhaven with no results. All of the CCAMLR Member states, including those that had concerns about the two proposals, took part in negotiations that could have achieved a result at the CCAMLR meeting, however, the Russian delegation, with support from the Ukraine, raised legal issues as to whether CCAMLR has the authority to establish marine protected areas (MPAs). “After two years of preparation, including this meeting, which Russia requested to settle the scientific case for the Ross Sea and East Antarctic proposals, we leave with nothing,” said Steve Campbell, Director of the AOA from the Bremerhaven meeting, Germany.

“All Members, except Russia, came to this meeting to negotiate in good faith.” “The actions of the Russian delegation have stalled progress on protecting the Ross Sea and East Antarctica, and have put international cooperation and goodwill at risk, two key ingredients needed for global marine conservation,” said Andrea Kavanagh at The Pew Charitable Trusts.

“It is imperative that countries send their representatives back to the table in Hobart three months from now to find consensus to protect marine life in Antarctic waters and safeguard some of the most pristine ocean areas on Earth.”

The two proposals CCAMLR failed to pass were a joint US--New Zealand proposal to designate a Ross Sea MPA of 2.3 million square kilometres, including a "fully protected" area of 1.6 million square kilometres; and a proposal from Australia, France and the European Union that would designate a cluster of seven marine protected areas in East Antarctica, covering about 1.63 million square kilometres.

"ASOC salutes those CCAMLR Members that tried so hard to find common ground to establish these
Antarctic MPAs,” said Jim Barnes, Executive Director of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC).

“But we are distraught that one county is blocking CCAMLR from meeting its MPA commitments and to see such bad faith here in Bremerhaven.

We look forward to Russia finding constructive ways to participate in establishing MPAs at the next meeting this October.”

-1 Quote from Steve Campbell, AOA.

-2 CCAMLR Members includes 24 countries and the European Union.

-3 CCAMLR established its first high---seas MPA around the South Orkney Islands in 2009.

More than 1.3 million people around the world have joined the global call for Antarctic marine protection with thousands taking action through online petitions and emails from around the world.

"All of the world's oceans – including those around Antarctica – are under increasing pressure that makes the protection of near pristine areas such as the Ross Sea and East Antarctica ever more urgent,” said Richard Page, Greenpeace Oceans campaigner.

“Considerable effort and some rigorous scientific work have been put in by many CCAMLR Members to get this far.

The Russian delegation must now work in good faith and make sure the proposals go forward at the next CCAMLR meeting to ensure a lasting legacy for future generations."

The Southern Ocean is critical for scientific research, both for studying how intact marine ecosystems function and for determining the impacts of global climate change.

“I am incredibly disappointed that CCAMLR missed this opportunity to protect the home of more than 10,000 species including seabirds, whales and most of the world’s penguins,” said Bob Zuur, Manager, WWF Antarctic and Southern Ocean Initiative.

“Antarctica’s ocean is one of the most vulnerable on Earth.

We urge CCAMLR to create these critical protected areas at its next meeting in October.” The Antarctic Ocean Alliance partners will attend the next CCAMLR meeting in Hobart, in October this year to press CCAMLR to deliver on its conservation commitments and to extend Southern Ocean protection to these and other important habitats.

The AOA has identified over 40% of the Southern Ocean in 19 habitats that warrant protection in a network of large---scale MPAs and no---take marine reserves based on combining existing marine protected areas, areas identified within previous conservation and planning analyses and including additional key environmental habitats.

ENDS