World's biggest marine reserves proposed for Antarctica

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A proposal for almost 3 million square kilometres of marine reserves being discussed at the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) annual meeting in Hobart. The reserves are in the Ross Sea and East Antarctica and would see fishing stop in some areas but continue in others.

Felicity Ogilvie
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Transcript

DAVID MARK: The international body that regulates commercial fishing in Antarctica is meeting in Hobart to decide whether to create the world's biggest marine reserves.

But exactly what is going on inside the meeting is a mystery.

Felicity Ogilvie reports.

FELICITY OGILVIE: Behind closed doors in Hobart, international scientists and policy makers are deciding whether to create the world's largest marine reserves.

Outside the meeting of the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, or CCAMLR, environmental activists are protesting, urging CCAMLR to protect Antarctica's oceans.

Photographer John Weller spoke at the rally.

JOHN WELLER: The Ross Sea and East Antarctica both are just incredibly special places. And not just in the context of Antarctica, but in the context of the global ocean. And I think that it's an incredibly important move for these countries to get together and even to discuss these MPAs (Marine Protected Areas).

FELICITY OGILVIE: The Ross Sea proposal is being put forward by the US and New Zealand. It will protect 1.3 million square kilometres of ocean.

Meanwhile Australia, the European Union and France want another marine reserve to be established in East Antarctica. It's 1.6 million square kilometres in size.

The executive secretary of CCAMLR, Andrew Wright, says it's likely that both proposals will be amended.

ANDREW WRIGHT: There's no formal changes being adopted in the commission at the moment, they're still under negotiation.
Coalition, Jim Barnes, is allowed to watch the negotiations. But he can't say what's going on behind the closed doors.

JIM BARNES: Everybody who comes, whether they're a government or an NGO (non-governmental organisation) or an expert, has to adhere to the rules of secrecy, which are a hallmark of CCAMLR.

FELICITY OGILVIE: Both the East Antarctic and Ross Sea marine reserves would be like a patchwork where each reserve contains zones within the reserves.

Some areas of the reserves would be off limits to fishing while it would be allowed in other parts.

CCAMLR doesn't have the power to stop whaling in Antarctica because that is controlled by the International Whaling Commission.

FELICITY OGILVIE: Australia's Environment Minister, Greg Hunt, is in Hobart today launching a strategic plan for Australia's presence in Antarctica.

Mr Hunt will meet CCAMLR representatives tonight, and says he wants them to consider an option of protecting the marine reserves in stages.

GREG HUNT: Our ultimate vision is very clear, both the Ross Shelf and East Antarctica to be covered a network of marine protected areas. But sometimes that was presented as the only path, to go from ze to 100 per cent. I think the most likely way forward, and that's what I'll be outlining tonight, is a staged approach. I think that's the best chance of success, whether it's now or whether it's in the next year.

FELICITY OGILVIE: This CCAMLR meeting and the negotiations end this Friday.

DAVID MARK: Felicity Ogilvie.