

Antarctic Treaty Parties meet in Warsaw

Poland hosted the 25th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) in Warsaw from 10 to 20 September. The 2002 meeting addressed a number of improvements to the Treaty's operations.

Apart from the annual meeting of the Committee for Environmental Protection, the Parties also addressed establishment of the permanent secretariat to the Treaty, further negotiations on a regime on liability for environmental damage, and management of Antarctic tourism. In addition, the Parties commenced a review of past recommendations of Treaty meetings and considered ways to improve the efficiency of the annual meetings.

To improve the way it handles its work, the meeting moved away from the established twin working group arrangements and established four groups to deal with Secretariat, Liability, Legal and Institutional Matters, and Operational Matters.

The ATCM was attended by representatives of all 27 Consultative Parties, and most of the 18 acceding states. This year there were 253 delegates including the observer and expert bodies. The meeting dealt with 50 working papers, and 111 information papers.

The volume of documents and the size of the delegations indicated the amount of business confronting the Treaty Parties. The working sessions of the meeting were provided with simultaneous interpretation into the four official languages of the Treaty (English, Spanish, French and Russian) and all working papers were translated.

The US, as depositary state, circulated a long anticipated update of the Antarctic Treaty handbook, which will greatly assist understanding of the scope of the Treaty system's obligations.

The Australian delegation was led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with other delegation members from the Australian Antarctic Division, the Tasmanian Office of Antarctic Affairs and the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition.

Next year's meeting will be in Spain, followed by South Africa and Sweden in subsequent years. ■

ANDREW JACKSON,
MANAGER, ANTARCTIC TREATY AND
GOVERNMENT, AAD



The Australian delegation to ATCM XXV. From left: Tom Maggs (AAD), Professor Michael Stoddart (AAD), Constance Johnson (DFAT), Dr Tony Press (Director AAD), Richard Rowe (Head of Delegation), Quentin Hanich (ASOC), Simon Smalley (AAD), Ben Galbraith (Tasmanian Government).

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Andrew Jackson
Andrew Jackson*