

Meeting of Antarctic environmental interests

Wildlife conservation, waste removal, and enhanced protection for parts of the Antarctic environment, were among the issues discussed by the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP), at its seventh annual meeting in Cape Town in May.

The CEP was established under the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, also known as the 'Madrid Protocol'. Recent ratification of the Madrid Protocol by Canada in November 2003 and the Czech Republic in September 2004 brings the number of CEP Members to 32.

The CEP reported its activities, findings and recommendations to the concurrent 27th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) for further consideration. Report highlights included:

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(ANNEX 1) – Four draft 'comprehensive environmental evaluations' were considered for:

- Installation of a neutrino telescope at South Pole station – Project IceCube (USA);
- Development and implementation of surface traverse capabilities in Antarctica (USA);
- Construction and operation of a scientific station on James Ross Island (Czech Republic);
- Upgrading the summer station at Troll in Dronning Maud Land to a permanent station (Norway).

CONSERVATION OF ANTARCTIC FAUNA AND FLORA (ANNEX II)

– A revised Annex II text was agreed to; the legal implications of the CEP's proposed scientific and technical amendments to the Annex will be considered at the next ATCM. The Committee also discussed the need to provide environmental guidance to pilots operating in Antarctica and endorsed a set of 'Guidelines for the operation of aircraft near concentrations of birds in Antarctica'.

WASTE DISPOSAL AND WASTE MANAGEMENT (ANNEX III)

– Information papers reporting on Antarctic cleanup activities were presented by Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, following similar reports at previous meetings and indicating an encouraging trend in waste management efforts.

PREVENTION OF MARINE POLLUTION

(ANNEX IV) – A draft set of Antarctic shipping guidelines, a draft proposal concerning controls on the disposal of ash into the sea, and minimum ice-strengthening standards for fishing vessels, were reviewed.

AREA PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT (ANNEX V)

- Five management plans for Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (ASPAs) were approved, including a management plan submitted by Australia for a new ASPA surrounding Mawson's Huts at Cape Denison.
- Two management plans for Antarctic Specially Managed Areas (ASMAs) were adopted: the McMurdo Dry Valleys in Southern Victoria Land; and Cape Denison at Commonwealth Bay.
- New Historic Sites and Monuments at Cape Denison and at India Point in the Humboldt Mountains, Dronning Maud Land, were approved.
- A series of 'intersessional contact groups' were established to consider nine other draft management plans. This work will be conducted using an online discussion forum developed by Australia.

State of the Antarctic environment and environmental monitoring

A progress report was given by Australia and New Zealand on the development of an interactive electronic framework for State of the Antarctic Environment Reporting. A prototype will be presented at the next CEP meeting.

Next year

The next CEP meeting will be held in Stockholm in June 2005. It will again be chaired by Australian Antarctic Division Director Tony Press, who this year was re-elected to serve a second two-year term. Meeting papers are available from the publicly accessible document archive on the CEP website at <<http://www.cep.aq>>.

—EWAN McIVOR

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The area surrounding Mawson's Huts at Cape Denison has been approved as an Antarctic Specially Protected Area.

