

Brussels, 22/10/2020

Object : URGENT – CCAMLR Meeting 2020 – Establishment of marine protected areas in Antarctica

As Members of the European Parliament, we are writing to express our deepest concerns regarding the current deadlock in the negotiations on the establishment of three large marine protected areas (MPA) in the Southern Ocean (Antarctica) - in East Antarctica, in the Weddell Sea and in the Antarctic Peninsula within the framework of the Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). Negotiations have been ongoing for several years, and in light of the standstill situation, we are calling for the concerned parties to engage all their means towards a rapid solution.

The Ocean is one, continuous and global, its good ecological status is critical to ensure the continuity of its ecosystem services, especially as climate regulator. Indeed, the Ocean has absorbed over 90% of the heat trapped by our carbon dioxide emissions and is the world's largest active carbon sink, it has sequestered over 30% of the carbon from those emissions¹.

However, the alteration of marine and coastal ecosystems and the accelerating loss of marine biodiversity is weakening the resilience of the Ocean, especially in remote and fragile ecosystems such as the Antarctic Ocean, home to an extremely rich and diverse biodiversity, in great need of protection.

Many efforts have already been made, such as the prohibition of activities related to Antarctic mineral resources, but as the Antarctic ocean is facing more and more cumulative pressure such as marine pollution, climate change, IUU fishing, ocean acidification and increased ocean temperatures, the need to protect vulnerable marine ecosystem is even more necessary. Extending Marine Protected Areas is crucial to ensure that Antarctica ecosystems and activities such as tourism and krill fishing are properly managed and regulated.

The EU is already engaged in negotiations with the UN for the establishment of an international treaty under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, in particular to ensure a mechanism for the designation, and the management, of highly protected marine areas beyond national jurisdiction. As Members of the European Parliament, we call for the European Union to continue its leading role and support this historic step for the protection of international patrimony. We call on the EU and the CCAMLR to intensify bilateral and multilateral efforts in this regard and in particular, with countries that have expressed repeated oppositions.

Overcoming this deadlock would be an important step and a strong political signal ahead of the COP 15 in China to push for ambitious international biodiversity objectives.

Yours sincerely,

MEP Catherine Chabaud
MEP Jan-Christoph Oetjen
MEP Tonino Picula

¹ <https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-briefs/ocean-and-climate-change>, Bindoff et al., 2007; Rhein et al., 2013; Cheng et al., 2019