

US backs Antarctic reserve amid calls for fishing ban

March 19 2013, by Jo Biddle



Undated image provided by the Antarctic Ocean Alliance on November 1, 2011 shows Antarctic ice bergs. The US and New Zealand have drawn up a proposal for a marine sanctuary covering 1.6 million sq km for Antarctica's Ross Sea, which would become the world's largest reserve.

Hailing the waters of Antarctica as a living laboratory, the United States has joined Australia and New Zealand in appealing for the creation of marine sanctuaries in the most remote and pristine part of the world.

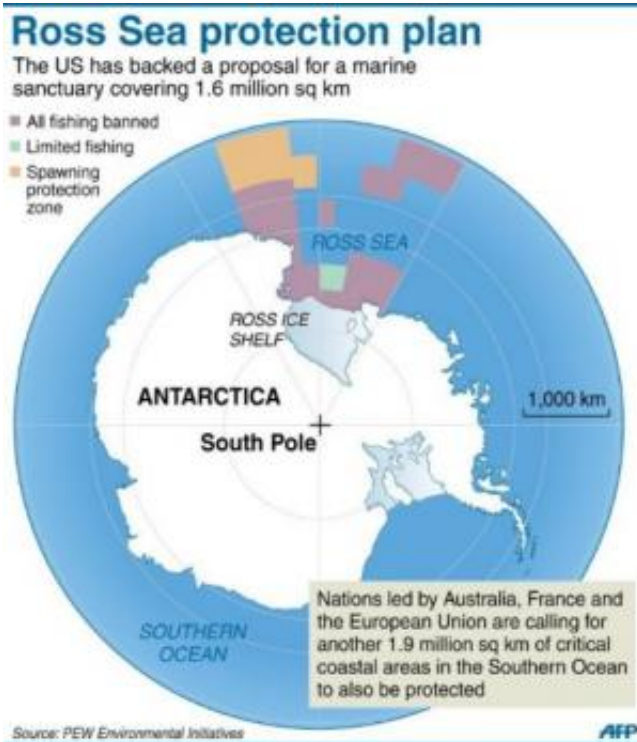
The United States and New Zealand have drawn up a proposal for a marine sanctuary covering 1.6 million square kilometers (640,000 square miles) of the Ross Sea, which would be the world's largest reserve.

Nations led by Australia, France and the European Union also want to protect 1.9 million square kilometers of critical [coastal area](#) in the East Antarctic.

But the proposals were blocked when talks in November at the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)—comprising 24 countries and the European Union—ended without resolution amid concerns from Russia and China.

Now the nations in favour are boosting their efforts to get the two sanctuaries approved at a special meeting of the group in Germany in July.

"Antarctica is a collection of superlatives. It's the highest, coldest, the windiest, the driest, the most pristine and the most remote place on Earth," US Secretary of State [John Kerry](#) said Monday at a gathering organized by the Pew Charitable Trusts.



Graphic showing a 1.6 million square kilometer marine protection plan for Antarctica's Ross Sea, backed by the United States.

"And it has beguiled humankind for centuries as people have sought to understand it," he added, arguing that the waters of the [Southern Ocean](#), home to 16,000 species, are a "living laboratory."

Kerry told the gathering at the National Geographic Society he believed the world can "work together to ensure that Antarctica remains a place devoted to peace and devoted to expanding human understanding of this fragile planet."

"This is one of the last places we could do this, and I think we owe it to ourselves to make it happen."

But [conservationists](#) argue the proposals do not go far enough to protect

marine life—notably the Antarctic toothfish, which is fished in huge quantities and served as Chilean sea bass on restaurant tables around the world.

The Ross Sea proposal, while creating a reserve to protect Adelie and emperor penguins, as well as killer whales and Weddell seals, would still allow some 3,000 tonnes of toothfish to be commercially caught each year.



Image provided by the Antarctic Ocean Alliance on November 1, 2011 shows a diver taking photos of a seal in Antarctic waters. The US has joined forces with Australia and New Zealand to call for marine sanctuaries in Antarctica.

"We wanted New Zealand to come up with a much stronger proposal, and they just didn't, and they dug their heels in, and basically the US had to go for New Zealand's proposal," documentary film-maker Peter Young said.

"It doesn't matter how sustainable this quota is, we shouldn't be in the last place. We don't take buffalo from Yellowstone. We don't take kiwi from the forests in New Zealand. We should not fish from the Ross Sea."

The Pew trust, which organized Monday's event, is also calling for the Ross Sea zone "to be designated a no-fishing area so that the integrity of the entire ecosystem can be maintained."

Young's film "The Last Ocean," about the Ross Sea, was screened at the event attended by Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr and former New Zealand prime minister Mike Moore.

Kerry told the audience how as a child growing up around Cape Cod in Massachusetts he was taught early on about the wonders of the seas and how to find mussels and clams. "I am a child of the ocean in many ways," he said.

"The Ross Seas is a natural laboratory, and we disrespect it at our peril, as we do the rest of the ocean."

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