

New Zealand re-examines ambitious Antarctic plans

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This NASA Aqua satellite image shows a view of the Western Ross Sea and Ice Shelf in Antarctica, on October 16, 2012. New Zealand said on Thursday it may revise its plans to create the world's largest ocean sanctuary off Antarctica after they were blocked by Russia earlier this year, amid concerns the proposal may be scaled-back.

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Russia earlier this year, amid concerns the proposal may be scaled-back.

The plan for a 1.6 million square kilometre (640,000 square mile) fishing-free haven in the Ross Sea, supported by the US, was knocked back after Moscow raised objections at an international meeting in July.

New Zealand Prime Minister John Key said revising the plan was probably the only way to get it approved at the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), the multi-national organisation which oversees [conservation efforts](#) in the Southern Ocean.

"If we are going to get change we're probably going to have to make some alterations, but it's a work in progress," Key told reporters at the Pacific Islands Forum in the Marshall Islands.

"We always knew there was going to be resistance from other parties who either have fishing interests there or believe that they would have fishing interests."

Key said the amended proposal was yet to be finalised. However Fairfax Media, citing "diplomatic insiders", said there were fears the protected area could be slashed by up to 40 percent and allow fishing in an area where endangered species breed.

The Antarctic Ocean Alliance (AOA), a coalition of environmental groups, urged New Zealand and the United States to "hold the line" and resist pressure to scale-back the proposal.

"(We) would be deeply concerned that the US and New Zealand could be giving away too much, leaving us with a protected area that reduces protection for the Ross Sea," AOA spokesman Steve Campbell said.

"That would mean missing the opportunity to protect some of the most critical and unique [marine ecosystems](#) while they are still intact."

He said the Ross Sea, a deep bay on Antarctica's Pacific side, was one of the most pristine [marine environments](#) on the planet.

Another proposal to protect a 1.9 million square kilometre sanctuary in seas off east Antarctica—backed by Australia, France and the EU—also failed at the July CCAMLR meeting in Germany.

New Zealand will reportedly release its revised Ross Sea plan on Friday, ahead of the next CCAMLR meeting in Hobart, Australia, from October 23.

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