

Antarctic Treaty signatories make marine protection progress

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Brazilian Environment Minister Izabella Teixeira (foreground on screens) delivers a speech during the opening session of the XXXVII Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM), in Brasilia, on April 28, 2014

Antarctic Treaty signatories made progress towards future protection of the icy continent's marine life, NGO officials said.

Authorities at the treaty's annual meeting, in Brasilia this year, "sent a strong message of support" to the commission overseeing Antarctic

wildlife protection, said Mark Epstein, director of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition.

Member countries strongly urged "designating [marine protected areas](#) in the Southern Ocean," he added.

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources was launched in 1982 to try to conserve [marine life](#) there amid rising commercial interest in Antarctic krill resources, a main component of the ecosystem.

Progress on the issue had been at a standstill since 2012. The commission, based in Hobart, Australia, has held three meetings since then and has been unable to get Russia and Ukraine on board.

"The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting has breathed new life into the marine protected areas process after the last two years of challenges and disappointments," said the Antarctic Ocean Alliance's Steve Campbell, whose group includes large players such as the WWF and Greenpeace.

Waters off Antarctica had long been largely protected, but as fishing advances into the area, many species and ecosystems face previously unknown threats.

The Antarctic Treaty establishes that the continent will not be militarized, can be used for scientific research and should be free of territorial claims.

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