

Win for wildlife as krill fishing restricted in Antarctica

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Antarctica is home to penguins, seals, whales and other marine life with krill a staple food for many species

Five major krill fishing firms Tuesday agreed to halt operations across

huge swathes of the Antarctic to help protect wildlife in a move hailed as "bold and progressive" by conservationists.

The vast frozen continent is home to penguins, seals, whales and other marine life with krill a staple food for many species.

But a combination of climate change and industrial-scale fishing has been hitting populations of the small crustacean, with potentially disastrous impacts on larger predators.

Now the five companies that make up the Association of Responsible Krill Harvesting (ARK)—from Norway, Chile, South Korea and China—have agreed to stop fishing in sensitive coastal areas.

They also threw their support behind a planned network of [marine protected areas](#) (MPAs) throughout the Southern Ocean, including in places where they currently operate.

"Our members agree that the industry must develop sustainably to ensure long-term viability of the krill stocks and the predators that depend on it," ARK said in a statement.

"Today, we are moving forward with a pioneer initiative, implementing voluntary restricted zones for the krill fishery in the Antarctic Peninsula."

The shrimp-like crustacean, which is rich in protein, is primarily used in the aquaculture industry although its oil is a popular nutritional supplement.

ARK represent 85 percent of the Antarctic krill fishing industry and conservationists said it was a significant move.

"This is a bold and progressive response from these krill fishing companies, and we hope to see the remainder of the krill industry follow suit," said Greenpeace spokesman Phil Vine.

"The momentum for protection of the Antarctic's waters and wildlife is snowballing."

Plans were set out in 2009 to establish a series of MPAs in the Southern Ocean allowing [marine life](#) to migrate between areas for breeding and foraging.

But progress has been slow by members of the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)—a treaty tasked with overseeing protection and sustainable exploitation in the area.

While a massive US and New Zealand-backed MPA around the Ross Sea—covering an area roughly the size of Britain, Germany and France combined—was agreed in 2016, an Australia and France-led push to create a second protected area in East Antarctica failed last year.

Russia and China were widely seen as the stumbling blocks—worried about compliance issues and fishing rights.

Consensus is needed from all 24 member countries and the European Union.

They meet again in Hobart in October when a third, German-backed plan to protect the Weddell Sea, which extends from the southeast of South America over some 2.8 million square kilometres (1.1 million square miles), will also be on the agenda.

Andrea Kavanagh, head of The Pew Charitable Trusts' Antarctic and Southern Ocean work, said she hoped CCAMLR could build on the [krill](#)

decision.

"Governments should follow industry's lead and support MPAs," she said.

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