

Russia, China block move for new Antarctic marine reserves

June 24 2023, by Pedro SCHWARZE



Passers-by take photos of an ice sculpture representing a krill in Santiago on June 19, 2023 as the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources met to discuss three new proposed marine protected areas.

Members of a multinational group on Antarctic conservation failed to agree Friday on a roadmap for the creation of three new marine

protected areas—a goal that has proven elusive for years.

"No agreement was reached. It was not possible to obtain... a road map" for protected areas in the seas around Antarctica, Cesar Cardenas, a member of the Chilean Antarctic Institute and part of the Chilean delegation, told AFP.

Cardenas said Russia and China resisted new protected areas.

The bid to create the sanctuaries around Antarctica to counter [climate change](#) and protect fragile ocean ecosystems would safeguard nearly four million more square kilometers (1.5 million more square miles) of [ocean](#) from human activities.

The areas are home to penguins, seals, toothfish, whales and huge numbers of krill—a staple food for many species.

Members of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) met to discuss plans for three new marine protected areas (MPAs): in East Antarctica, the Weddell Sea and the Antarctic Peninsula.

There are two in Antarctica now: around the South Orkney Islands, comprising an area of 94,000 square kilometers, created in 2009, and one of 2 million square kilometers in the Ross Sea region, established in 2016.

Activists voiced disappointment at the lack of action.

"Unfortunately this special meeting ended as the previous six annual meetings have done: with two countries blocking the will of the other 25 CCAMLR members to move towards a network of Southern Ocean MPAs," Andrea Kavanagh of the nonprofit Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy

said in a statement.

Beijing and Moscow have been key in blocking the expansion scheme since it was first floated by Australia, France and the EU in 2010 before being scaled down in 2017 in an attempt to win greater support.

Antarctica is particularly threatened by global warming.

"One of the biggest threats to this area is climate change, which is causing sea ice to decrease significantly. The presence of sea ice is essential to the life cycle of Antarctic krill," said Rodolfo Werner, scientific and political adviser to the Southern Ocean and Antarctic Coalition (ASOC).

"The creation of marine protected areas is very important, because above all it protects the biodiversity... by removing the stress of fishing in these areas," he added.

Studies have shown that the melting of western Antarctica's biggest glaciers, which contain enough water to raise the oceans by several meters, appears irreversible.

The CCAMLR, which regulates fisheries, is comprised of 26 [member countries](#) plus the EU. They include the United States, Russia, China, the UK, France, India, Japan, host Chile, Brazil and South Africa.

The CCAMLR will again address the topic of marine reserves at a meeting in October in Hobart, Australia.

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Citation: Russia, China block move for new Antarctic marine reserves (2023, June 24) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-06-russia-china-block-antarctic-marine.html>

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