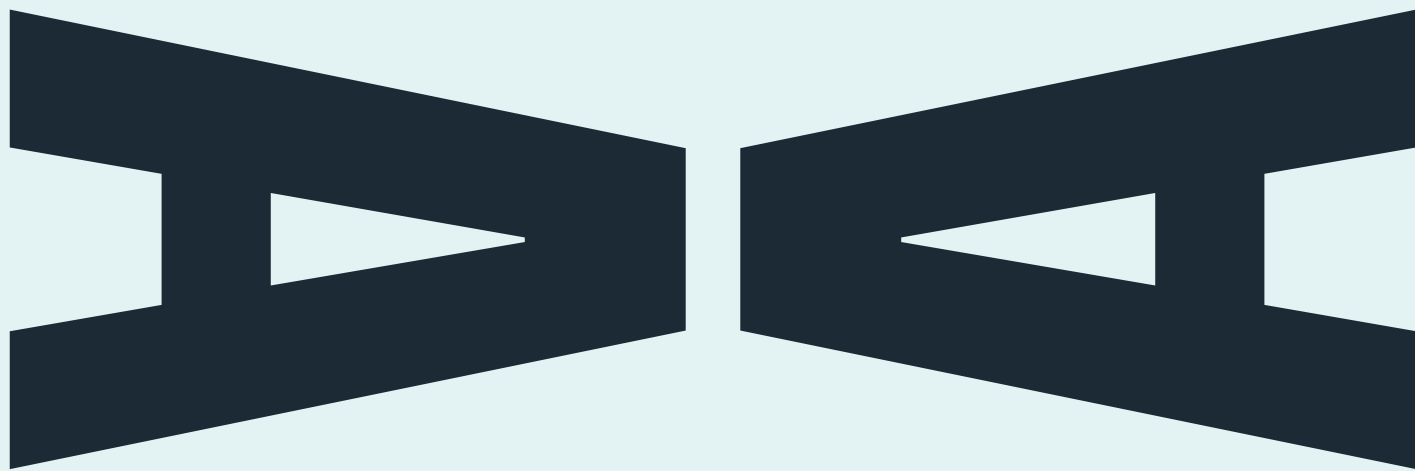




ALL EYES ON ANTARCTICA

HOLDING CCAMLR TO ITS CONSERVATION MANDATE



A REPORT FROM THE
ANTARCTIC AVENGERS



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DAVID ATTENBOROUGH
OCEAN, 2025

The trawlers have reached Antarctica, and they are here for the krill. With so few fish left in the ocean, we are now seeking other prey in the furthest corners of our world. These are some of the biggest factories on the sea. They suck hundreds of thousands of tonnes of krill into vast nets. It’s then boiled and processed for fish farms, health supplements and most recently, for pet food. All on board the ship. How can wildlife compete with this?

Some claim this is sustainable, but we may now be removing the foundation of an entire ecosystem.

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OVERVIEW

Due to the ongoing failure of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to protect marine life and ecosystems of the waters surrounding Antarctica, a total closure of the Southern Ocean to krill fishing is now unequivocally necessary. Life in the Southern Ocean exists in a fragile balance that is being jeopardised by rampant overexploitation of krill. The following report details the scientific and legal arguments for this closure.

Krill are the species upon which the entire Southern Ocean ecosystem relies. The consequences of the unsustainable extraction of krill is dire: without krill as a food source, the wildlife that calls Antarctica home will starve and whale populations around the world will suffer; without krill as a carbon sink, the global climate crisis will accelerate in dangerous and unknown ways.

This exploitation occurs in the face of multiple planetary crises and without regard for the critical role the Southern

Ocean plays in regulating the Earth's climate system and the ocean's biological pump. Further compounding the issue, the regulatory body tasked with establishing conservation measures for the Southern Ocean (CCAMLR) has been completely ineffective over the past decade.

The ocean has an incredible capacity to rebound if measures are put in place to build its resilience, this includes establishing protected areas where ecosystems and species can thrive once again.

We must take action now to safeguard the Southern Ocean; the fate of Antarctic wildlife and the health of the global ocean depend on our next steps.

We are calling the international community to reverse the course of decline and reinstate CCAMLR as the guardian of the Southern Ocean by implementing the following actions:



01

CLOSE THE SOUTHERN OCEAN TO KRILL FISHING

to protect Antarctic wildlife, and, safeguard ecosystems and global climate stability;

◀ IMAGE © ANDY MANN



02

ESTABLISH THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULA MARINE PROTECTED AREA (MPA)

removing krill fisheries within, as a minimum first step toward an ecologically representative network of MPAs in the Southern Ocean;

03

CCAMLR REFORM

to ensure the implementation of its conservation mandate to protect Antarctic wildlife;

04

ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF AT LEAST 30% OF ANTARCTICA'S HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE WATERS

as a key contribution by CCAMLR countries to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework 30x30 target.

WHO'S GUARDING THE SOUTHERN OCEAN?

FOREWORD BY DR SYLVIA EARLE

Gleaming starkly white, Antarctica, Earth's highest, driest, coldest windiest and least explored continent, appeared through a viewport of the C-130 aircraft that transported me and a group of scientists heading for the U.S. research station at McMurdo Sound in 1990. It was my first glimpse of the frozen continent and my first assignments as the Chief Scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, (NOAA). I was eager to witness not only the nature of the largely ice-covered land mass, but to hear about research underway in the surrounding ocean and what actions are being taken to safeguard this vast but vulnerable region.

Fast forward to a 2023 expedition to Antarctica when I was stunned to see waterfalls cascading down green mountain slopes, baby penguins shivering in muddy water, and of all things, a rainbow. In Antarctica? Climate is changing globally, but it is sobering to watch in real time melting of ice that has been frozen for thousands of years.

Nature-based solutions – protecting and restoring intact living ecosystems to stabilize climate are highlighted as fundamental to maintaining conditions favorable to humans. The goal of protecting at least 30 percent of the land and sea by 2030 is an ambitious but worthy milestone on the path to planetary security. Protection of polar regions is of particular importance given their magnified role in shaping Earth's climate and weather.

In 1959, nations came together and agreed on a treaty that guaranteed peaceful use of the entire Antarctic continent, but it did not take into account the surrounding sea where human interactions with wildlife have been anything but peaceful. However, two centuries of killing for commercial markets of seals, sea lions, birds, whales, various endemic fish and a species of krill, *Euphausia superba*, at last led to protective measures in 1982. That year,

the Convention on the Conservation of the Antarctic Marine Living Resources, CCAMLR, came into effect with a mandate to preserve marinelife and environmental integrity in and near Antarctica.

The Southern Ocean around the Antarctic continent, defined as the waters south of 60 degrees, is technically a global commons, owned by no one but benefitting all. There, a few companies in a few countries are currently authorized through terms paradoxically allowed by CCAMLR to take thousands of tons of krill based on the belief, without evidence, that the level of taking is "sustainable."

Rather, the evidence is clear that industrial killing of wildlife, terrestrial and aquatic, has already diminished about half of Earth's fabric of life, disrupting planetary processes that shape the habitability of Earth, including climate through direct and indirect impacts on carbon capture and carbon release into the atmosphere. Whether clearcutting ancient forests in the Amazon, "clearcutting" sharks, squid and tunas from the High Seas or krill from Antarctica, in a few decades we have shredded the living systems that underpin the habitability of the planet.

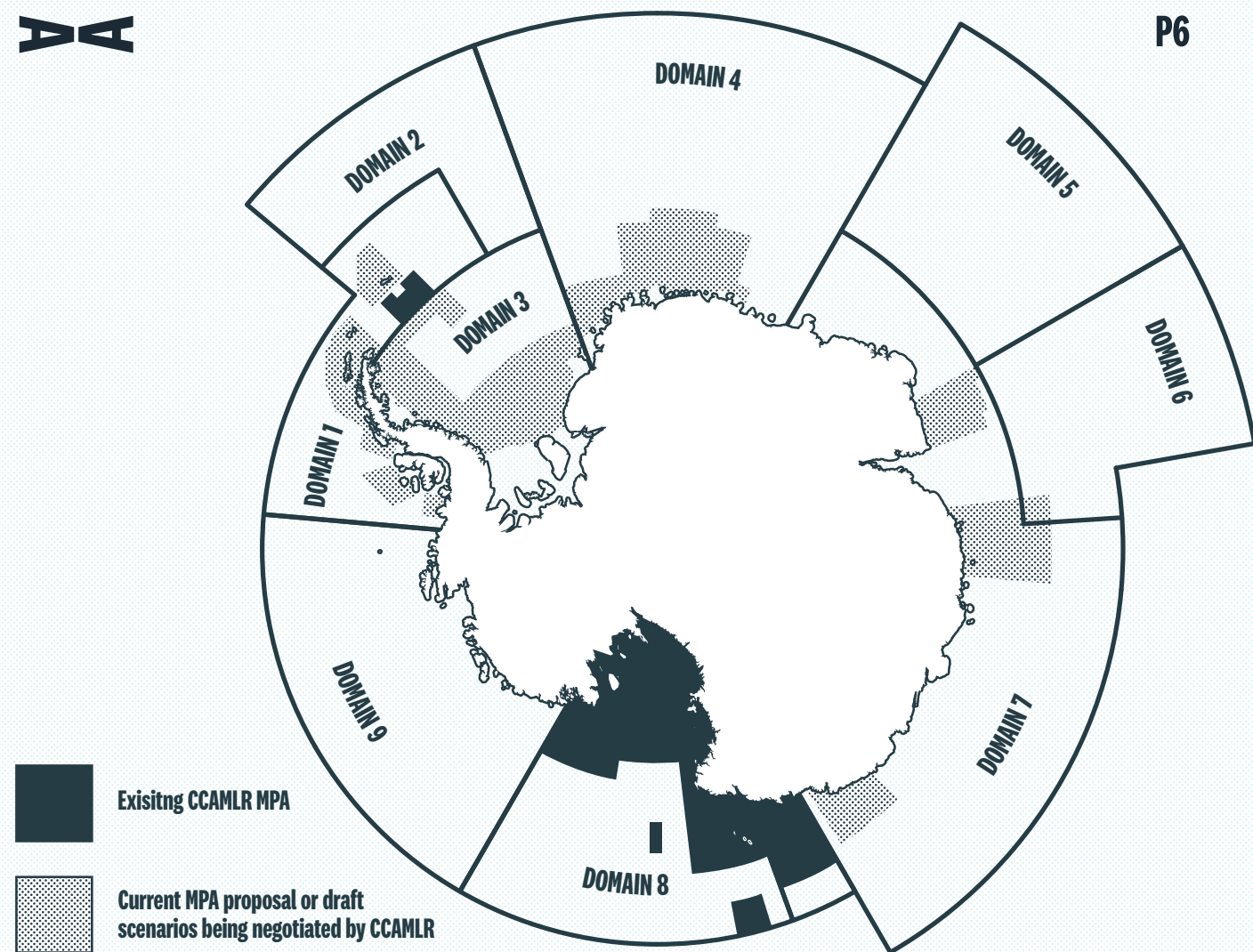
In the Southern Ocean, for eight consecutive years, CCAMLR, though

entrusted with protecting the region's marine life and ecosystems, has failed to stop the exploitation of krill. It has stood by, enabling a few countries to ramp up pillage of the Southern Ocean, allowing the key source of sustenance for whales, seals, birds, fish and numerous other animals to be crushed for oil, cosmetics, and for feed for farmed salmon.

It is time to close the Southern Ocean to the extraction of all forms of wildlife once and for all, to treat ocean life with respect, dignity and care comparable to 21st century attitudes about whales, seals and penguins.

Bravo to the authors of this volume for their insights, their eloquence, and their clear calls for action.

There is time, but not a lot, to listen up, to rethink and reboot policies that shape our behavior regarding our relationship with the Southern Ocean and the wild world beyond. Whales, birds, fish, krill – and humans – will surely benefit.



OUR ANTARCTICA: A GLOBAL COMMONS UNDER THREAT

The Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) is “responsible for conserving and managing the entire Southern Ocean ecosystem.” Once upon a time, the organization did just that. It provided a voice for the waters surrounding a continent owned by no one, a land teeming with life, yet without bold representation.

Since CCAMLR’s inception, the Convention has established two marine protected areas (MPAs), one near the South Orkney Islands in 2009 and another in the Ross Sea in 2016. These protected areas were an important step forward for safeguarding Antarctic wildlife and demonstrated the power of multilateralism to accomplish conservation goals. However, for the past eight years, action to safeguard Antarctic ecosystems within CCAMLR has ground to a halt. Coupled with growing fishing interests, whose exploitation rates have exponentially grown in the past several years, the lack of conservation action is jeopardizing the health of Antarctic ecosystems and wildlife, which are already impacted by the compounding effects of the climate crisis.

This dynamic has been particularly detrimental for a species upon which the entire ecosystem rests: a tiny crustacean called krill. Krill is the primary food for the majority of species in the region, from penguins to blue whales. Additionally, as a function of their life-cycle, krill act as a major carbon sink, contributing to global climate resilience.

This species is critical to the healthy functioning of Earth’s planetary systems, yet unsustainable krill extraction is growing. Continued extraction of this key species from the Southern Ocean will impact the Antarctic ecosystem and further disrupt an already precarious global climate system.

And to what end? Krill is extracted for the benefit of a few companies in several countries for use in aquaculture feed, pet food, and krill oil supplements, non-essential services at a great cost to all.

This unsustainable extraction continues under the umbrella of a broken political system. Political hurdles have stymied discussions of compromise at CCAMLR for years. Not only is conservation progress not advancing, but the Convention is moving backwards. At the most recent CCAMLR meeting in 2024,

area-specific regulations on existing krill catch limits were removed due to lack of consensus by CCAMLR’s 27 member states. These regulations were meant to ensure fishing effort was more widely dispersed and not concentrated in biodiversity hotspots. However, the 2024 CCAMLR outcome has resulted in a situation where a handful of fishing countries are now able to take the entire krill quota from where the krill are most highly concentrated. These areas are the primary feeding grounds for krill predators and dependent species such as penguins, whales, and seals. Therefore, this outcome, has in effect authorized the enhanced exploitation of krill within biodiversity strongholds of Antarctic waters, putting all Antarctic wildlife at grave risk.

This report delves into these dynamics, examining the dangers facing krill populations and the Southern Ocean ecosystem, and how climate change is intensifying these impacts. The following report demonstrates that CCAMLR is failing in its core mission to protect the fragile ecosystem of Antarctica’s Southern Ocean, in a time when action has never been more urgent.

THE HISTORIC EXPLOITATION OF THE SOUTHERN OCEAN

The Southern Ocean connects the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans to allow the worldwide distribution of heat, dissolved gases and nutrients, and is vitally important in driving global ocean circulation and climate regulation.¹ The Southern Ocean drives a significant drawdown of atmospheric heat and carbon and provides nutrients to support the ocean's biodiversity.²



Yet for centuries, the wildlife comprising this complex and unique ecosystem has been over-exploited, overhunted and overfished by humans. This historic over-exploitation has resulted in the decline of iconic species like the great whales, penguins and seals. When populations of species drop precipitously, genetic diversity declines which makes populations more vulnerable to changes in their environment and outside threats like disease, changes in prey availability and the impacts of major stressors like climate change. Despite significant global efforts to rebuild populations of whales and other Antarctic species, many remain in a fragile state. The legacy of overexploitation means that these species are still recovering and remain highly vulnerable.

The Antarctic fur seal was the first species to be exploited in the Southern Ocean ecosystem. Beginning in the late 1700s,³ intensive hunting nearly drove the species to extinction in the region by the mid-19th century.

The pursuit and exploitation of whales followed with the arrival of industrial vessels in the 1900s;

an estimated 2 million large whales were caught between 1904 and the 1960s, reducing their populations by more than

65%⁴

Antarctic blue whale populations were depleted from around 256,000 individuals in the 1920s to 395 in the 1970s.⁵

To this day, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) considers the species Critically Endangered.

With the arrival of commercial fisheries, several fish species were decimated during the 1960s and 1970s, including the marbled rock cod. Despite over 25 years of protection, their populations remain only a fraction of pre-fishing levels.⁶

This slow recovery is typical of species adapted to the extreme cold: long-lived and slow-growing, they require far more time to rebound, highlighting their inherent vulnerability.

Today, significant declines in Antarctic penguin colonies have been attributed to the impacts of krill fisheries and climate-driven retreating sea ice.

During the last 30 years in some parts of Antarctica, adélie and chinstrap populations have declined by over

50%

and in other areas up to

68%^{7,8,9}

Similarly, in the last 15 years, the only breeding population of Antarctic fur seals South of the Antarctic Polar Front has experienced a catastrophic population decline of

91%¹⁰

In South Georgia, a global stronghold for Antarctic fur seal colonies, climate shifts have affected female longevity, juvenile and adult survival, fecundity and pup birth weight, among other impacts.¹¹

The consequences of wildlife exploitation in the Southern Ocean reverberate through the ecosystem many years later. Trophic chains in the region are particularly short and direct, meaning a reduction in populations or loss of a species has rapid and critical consequences across the entire food web. The ecosystem's fragility is further exacerbated by climate change, demonstrating the devastating long-term consequences of regional wildlife extraction.

◀ IMAGE © SEA SHEPHERD GLOBAL

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A CRITICAL SPECIES FOR WILDLIFE AND CLIMATE STABILITY

Antarctic krill are ocean crustaceans, up to 65 mm long, that can form dense swarms.¹² These crustaceans are pivotal in sustaining regional biodiversity; krill can contribute between 70% and 96% of the calories consumed by seabirds and marine mammals, including penguins, whales, seals, fur seals and other wildlife.

Krill also help to sequester carbon into the deep ocean, transform essential nutrients, and stimulate primary productivity.¹³

It's estimated that krill around the Antarctic Peninsula and Scotia Sea alone store ~23 megatonnes of carbon annually, which is retained for at least 100 years in the deep ocean.¹⁴

Climate change-driven declines in winter sea ice coverage have a

significant impact on krill populations, which feed on algae living on the underside of ice.¹⁵ Some projections estimate that by the year 2100, the current Antarctic krill biomass could decline from anywhere between 50% to near extinction.¹⁶

Declines in sea ice also increase the growth of salps -filter-feeding organisms (tunicates) that form extensive blooms in warmer springs, which outcompete krill for food. This could certainly result in the complete

collapse of the Antarctic ecosystem as we know it.

In addition, krill abundance (and sea ice coverage) directly impacts the number of humpback whale pregnancies as the whales feed on krill and put on fat to support the pregnancy. Some scientists

have documented that humpback whale population are already limited by krill availability.¹⁷

Furthermore, the continued long-term warming trend in the region will have profound effects on the dominance of krill and salp populations and, by implication,

krill-dependent predators and the fate of newly fixed carbon.^{18,19,20}

The odds are stacked against krill, yet retaining healthy populations of this species is fundamental for continuing to support Antarctic wildlife. Action must be taken to preserve this vital species.

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THE DESTRUCTIVE KRILL FISHING INDUSTRY

The largest krill fishery in the world is found in the Southern Ocean, where the species is harvested for use in health supplements (krill oil), as a component in pet food, and amid the reduction of wild fish populations and a rise in fish farming – as a component in fish feed.²⁰

While only a few countries actively fish for krill in the region, the industry has grown rapidly in the past two decades. Norway is by far the dominant fishing presence in the Southern Ocean and in 2023, was responsible for 67.2% of the total catch. This was followed by China (17.1%), South Korea (8.4%), Chile (4.4%) and Ukraine (2.8%).²¹

The Norwegian company, Aker BioMarine, is responsible for the majority of krill catch, and is a key driver in the industry’s expansion.²² As of 2024, its spin-off enterprise, the Aker QRILL Company, is responsible for the krill extraction and production of its krill-based products.²³

Many have raised concerns about the future sustainability of krill fishing, especially given the cumulative pressure of climate change.^{24,25} A decline in krill abundance, particularly in the West Antarctic region, has been reported, as

has a retreat of winter sea ice coverage and declines in several krill-dependent predators.^{26,27}

A maximum of 620,000 tonnes of the annual krill catch was previously set as a precautionary trigger catch level (meaning once this level of catch was reached, fishing activity was suspended in that area). However, in 2024, continued obstruction at the annual CCAMLR meeting led to the expiration of the spatial dispersal limits that distributed the catch over four zones.

The removal of dispersal limits is incredibly damaging as the wildlife of the Southern Ocean feed in discrete areas, where they have evolved to travel to specific feeding grounds with a particular caloric intake. Studies indicate that even relatively low krill extraction in areas that overlap with key feeding grounds can have significant detrimental impacts on wildlife.²⁸

The method of krill fishing itself is destructive and indiscriminate; industrial krill fishing trawlers use modern suction equipment to draw up huge amounts of krill in a short period of time.²⁹ Unlike traditional fish trawling vessels, these systems do not pause throughout the day and can fish for extended periods.³⁰

There is little to no consideration for wildlife feeding upon the krill; scientists have reported krill fishing operations consistently within fur seal and penguin foraging areas.^{31,32} These animals undertake foraging trips to these areas from adjacent colonies to return with

milk or food for their offspring. If krill is hard to find, fur seal pups and penguin chicks suffer the consequences with starvation and death frequently the result. Krill trawling has already been evidenced to cause declines in penguin populations.³³ Observers have witnessed vessels trawling for krill directly through hundred-strong pods of fin whales in the Southern Ocean.³⁴ In 2021, three dead juvenile humpback whales were reported by Aker BioMarine, one in 2022, and two in 2024.^{35,36} In March 2025, the Antarctic Endeavour, a vessel sailing under the Chilean flag was reported by the fisherman onboard to have caught and subsequently killed a humpback, and

a criminal complaint was filed against the vessel’s owner.^{37,38} These deaths reported by the industry may represent only a fraction of the true scale of whale mortality linked with krill fishing.

A growing market for krill products means whales, penguins and other species that depend on krill for their survival face increasing competition from an industry that is benefiting few. The more krill that is extracted from the Southern Ocean, the harder it will be for wild species to survive.

▼ IMAGE © SEA SHEPHERD GLOBAL



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KRILL FISHING'S IMPACT ON WHALES

BY DR LUCIA MORILLO
Scientist on board
the M/Y Allankay,
Sea Shepherd Global

OBSERVATIONS FROM ANTARCTICA

For the third year in a row, Sea Shepherd has launched the Antarctica Defense campaign, documenting krill fishing in the Southern Ocean. This effort grants scientists and media rare access to one of the most remote places on Earth — the last true wilderness.

In April 2025, ten krill supertrawlers were operating in a concentrated area around the Antarctic Peninsula. These factory ships can stay at sea for up to 11 months straight, enabled by krill and fuel transshipments. The result is a nearly continuous fishing operation.

After decades of exploitation, Antarctic whale populations, including Southern right whales, which were once on the verge of extinction in the region, are slowly recovering. Areas that were silent after years of whaling are once again seeing whales return to their historical feeding ground. But this recovery now overlaps with the expanding krill fishery, and even in the vast Southern Ocean, whale foraging and fishing zones often collide.

During our one-month mission, whales were mostly observed in areas where fishing vessels were active. All ships had interactions with whales — often swimming alongside or in front of them. But what we saw next was unexpected. We observed humpback whales following the nets for hours, diving around them and displaying behaviours we couldn't fully explain. Were they feeding around the nets? Have they learned to associate vessels with food?

More research will be required, but if this signals a long-term behavioural shift, this could have major consequences. We are witnessing wild animals altering their foraging in one of the last intact

ecosystems on Earth. The long-term effects remain uncertain, but risks are already visible. We saw the same individual following one supertrawler on multiple days — a sign of learned, reinforced behaviour.

The Scientific Committee of CCAMLR has raised concerns about this, noting that current marine mammal exclusion devices are not designed for humpback whales — the species most often seen near nets. This year, during our campaign near the South Orkney Islands, a juvenile humpback became entangled and died — a tragic reminder of the danger these interactions pose. Even a single whale's loss matters, as these giants help regulate the Southern Ocean's nutrient cycle and food web.

As whales return and fishing intensifies, we must ask hard questions about coexistence and the future of the Antarctic ecosystem.

THE WHALES ARE COMING BACK. AND WE'LL KEEP DEFENDING THEM.

◀ IMAGE © SEA SHEPHERD GLOBAL





A HEALTHY PLANET DEPENDS ON A HEALTHY SOUTHERN OCEAN

▲ IMAGE © ANDY MANN
▶ IMAGE © ANDY MANN



Despite its location at the end of the world, the Southern Ocean is instrumental in climate regulation for the entire planet. The Antarctic Circumpolar Current is the strongest current on the planet; it plays an essential role in the climate system's uptake of heat and carbon dioxide.³⁹

The current is responsible for connecting the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans, enabling the movement of water, nutrients and heat around the world. It protects the region from warming and contributes to the Antarctic continent's stability.

However, the melting of ice shelves driven by climate change is having a significant impact on the Antarctic Circumpolar Current. Recent scientific projections in a business-as-usual global emissions scenario predict the current could decline in strength by approximately 20% by 2050.⁴⁰ This would have extensive consequences, including limiting the ocean's ability to absorb heat and carbon. These consequences would not be restricted to Antarctic waters, but would be felt across the planet.

Antarctica acts as another important climate stabilizer through the open-ocean biological carbon pump process, an important form of long-term atmospheric carbon dioxide sequestration. This process stores carbon in the deep-sea over long timescales through the transport of organic matter fixed by phytoplankton.⁴¹ In Antarctica, krill is a key player in this ecological process, where its rapidly sinking organic matter overwhelmingly influences Southern Ocean carbon levels during the growth season.⁴²

This carbon sequestration process is so important that some studies suggest that without the open-ocean biological carbon pump, there would be

50%

more CO₂ in the atmosphere.

However for this equation to work, all contributors to the ecological integrity must be acknowledged, and krill are not the only participants. Historical evidence has revealed that during the industrial whaling period, estimated carbon sequestration via the biological carbon pump was reduced by over 90%.^{43,44,45}

Studies have indicated that Antarctica's whales are also crucial in recycling nutrients, particularly iron.^{46,47} Iron is the limiting micronutrient in the Southern Ocean; its presence results in blooms of the phytoplankton that krill feed upon.^{48,49} During the austral summer and autumn, several whale species,

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SAFEGUARDING BIODIVERSITY

Almost all Antarctic wildlife depends on krill, which can contribute between 70% and 96% of the calories consumed by seabirds and marine mammals in the region, including penguins, whales, seals, and fur seals. Even wildlife that doesn't feed on krill may eat another species that does, thus krill is pivotal in sustaining both regional biodiversity and supporting wildlife that migrates around the world.

CLIMATE REGULATION

The Southern Ocean is crucial to global climate regulation and climate change mitigation, through the absorption of carbon dioxide, largely via regional ocean mixing. In addition, krill also sequester vast amounts of carbon, and the populations around the Antarctic Peninsula alone are estimated to store ~23 megatonnes of carbon annually in the deep ocean, through defecation and shedding of their exoskeletons.

including blue, fin, sei, humpback, sperm, southern right and minke whales, migrate to Antarctica to feed on the krill and other prey, releasing readily available micronutrients by way of iron-rich feces.⁵⁰

This cycle is critical to the Southern Ocean food web. After the large-scale hunting of whales, krill populations did not increase despite having fewer predators.⁵¹ Instead,

krill numbers declined significantly.⁵² Scientists think this decline could have been a result of the decline in whale populations and their contribution to fertilizing the Southern Ocean.⁵³

The complexity and interconnectedness of the ecosystem mean disruptions trigger unforeseen and lasting changes in the food web. Protecting krill populations, and supporting great whale populations

may increase the overall productivity of the Southern Ocean.^{54,55} And a healthier Southern Ocean means a healthier planet.

Antarctic marine ecosystems are diverse and complex in their ecological interactions, rapid restructuring of pelagic ecosystems as a result of anthropogenic activities like fishing, may cause large biogeochemical feedbacks that alter primary productivity and

GLOBAL CLIMATE IMPACTS

Climate change and the protection of the Southern Ocean are inextricably linked. Safeguarding Antarctica helps mitigate the impacts of climate change through carbon sequestration, the reflection of the sun's rays from ice sheets, and driving ocean currents. Conversely, climate change has an extreme effect on the region, leading to ice melting, freshwater mixing, and disruptions to Antarctica's ecosystem.

OCEAN CURRENT REGULATION

The currents around Antarctica are some of the world's strongest and connect the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans. This enables the movement of water, nutrients, and heat around the world, protecting the region from warming. The cold, dense water drives the global ocean currents that we are reliant on and helps regulate Earth's climate through the distribution of cold currents.

THREATS

Parts of Antarctica are warming faster than anywhere else on the planet, with devastating environmental impacts. Meanwhile, increasing tourism, pollution, and fishing pressures are exacerbating the challenges faced by an already fragile ecosystem, the impacts of which are largely unknown.

carbon sequestration processes in the ocean.^{56,57}

It is time to relieve Antarctica from at least one stressor, krill fishing, while establishing robust MPAs and allowing for its recovery.

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HANDS OFF OUR WHALES!

BY LORD FAKAFANUA
Speaker of Parliament of
the Kingdom of Tonga

Lord Fakafanua is a dedicated advocate for ocean stewardship and Pacific regional unity. Since his election to Parliament of the Kingdom of Tonga in 2009, he has been a leading voice on issues including climate resilience and ocean conservation.

In Tonga, whales are vital to our culture. Every year they migrate up from the Antarctic to escape the winter and give birth to their calves. Centuries ago, they guided our ancestors in their voyaging canoes toward land. Today, they continue to inspire us, as well as visitors from around the world who travel to see these majestic creatures in their winter breeding grounds.

But while Tonga is a safe haven for whales, in Antarctica, fishing vessels are depleting the food sources that keep whales—and most life in the Southern Ocean—alive. And they are doing so at an unprecedented rate, snatching krill from the mouths of our global whales in order to profit just a few individuals. The effects of this practice are devastating.

CCAMLR is failing to protect the Southern Ocean from this exploitation. Particularly in this climate crisis, the inaction of CCAMLR and its members is unsustainable and inequitable. We don't have time to waste.

The South Pacific may be far from Antarctica, but what happens there affects us all. I'm calling for a total closure of fishing in the Southern Ocean. For our whales, and for our planet.

WHALE WATCH

This map illustrates the migratory routes of whales during the summer months, highlighting the destinations they travel to after departing the icy waters of Antarctica.

AFRICA

- **Angola, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon and Namibia:** Humpback
- **Kenya, Mozambique and Tanzania:** Humpback
- **Madagascar:** Humpback and Blue
- **Mauritius:** Humpback
- **Seychelles:** Humpback
- **South Africa:** Blue, Humpback and Southern Right

CENTRAL & LATIN AMERICA

- **Argentina and Uruguay:** Southern Right
- **Brazil:** Humpback
- **Chile:** Blue, Humpback and Fin
- **Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and Peru:** Humpback

OCEANIA

- **Australia:** Humpbacks, Blue and Southern Right
- **Indonesia:** Humpback and Blue
- **New Zealand:** Humpbacks, Blue and Southern Right
- **Pacific Islands:** Fin, Minke, Humpback and Southern Right
 - American Samoa
 - Cook Islands
 - Fiji
 - French Polynesia
 - New Caledonia
 - Niue
 - Pitcairn
 - Samoa
 - Tonga
 - Vanuatu



THE CCAMLR MANDATE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE SOUTHERN OCEAN

CCAMLR was established in 1982 in response to the rapid expansion of krill fisheries, amid concerns of repeating the mistakes of past Antarctic wildlife exploitation. The Convention's Article II states, "the objective of this Convention is the conservation of Antarctic marine living resources." Thus, its primary objective is to protect Antarctica's marine fauna and flora.



▲ IMAGE © MAX BELLO

▼ IMAGE © MAX BELLO



Decisions on matters of substance, including the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs), require the consensus of CCAMLR's 27 member countries. This impacts the Convention's deliverables against its conservation mandate and is a contentious issue in the administration.⁵⁷

In 2002, CCAMLR committed to establishing a representative network of MPAs.⁵⁸ The Convention area was divided into nine domains to ensure species and environmental representation.⁵⁹ Despite this commitment over 20 years ago, only two MPAs have received consensus for establishment: the South Orkney Islands Southern Shelf MPA in 2009, covering 94,000 km², and the Ross Sea MPA in 2016, covering 2.09 million km². While these MPAs were an important step towards establishing a network of MPAs in the Southern Ocean, since their establishment, there has been no progress on this front in almost a decade.

The Southern Ocean Research Partnership (SORP) was established by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 2009 as a collaborative approach to cetacean research in Antarctic and sub-Antarctic waters. The objective is to maximise conservation-oriented outcomes for cetaceans in the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic region through understanding the post-exploitation status, health, dynamics and environmental linkages of their populations, and the threats they face. Alongside CCAMLR, this programme unites 12 of the Convention's countries in an important multilateral research programme considering many of the important environmental factors facing the conservation of whales in the Southern Ocean.

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IS CCAMLR IMPLEMENTING ITS MANDATE?

Major milestones in the Convention's greater than 40-year history include the establishment of the two MPAs and initiatives to address illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. However, in recent years, while the Convention has implemented various fisheries management activities, the delivery of its conservation mandate has been disputed.⁶⁰

Performance reviews conducted by the organization found the permissiveness in the exploitation of Antarctic marine resources, particularly of krill, and the lack of effective implementation of conservation measures has weakened CCAMLR's ability to fulfil its mandate.⁶¹

As demonstrated, krill is a fundamental component of the Antarctic ecosystem's trophic network. Regions such as the Antarctic Peninsula are important refuges for the species and is under increasing pressure from climate change and fishing. Yet, krill fishing activities have increased in this area, moving further south as sea ice diminishes. CCAMLR's implementation of the Krill Fishery Management Approach (KFMA), which aims to distribute precautionary catch limits across space and time, has failed to prevent this expansion.

Continued krill extraction in critical areas undermines the resilience of the ecosystem and fails to uphold the conservation mandate outlined in Article II.

As such, extractive krill fishing persists without a robust protective framework or effective implementation of conservation measures and is absent from a clear strategy for the sustainable management of krill and the protection of dependent species.

Destabilization of the trophic network through the depletion of krill populations also affects whales, many of which migrate to breed from the Antarctic to countries where they have cultural and economic significance, such as Tonga⁶² and some of which appear to be recovering, such as humpback and fin whales.^{63,64} For CCAMLR to fulfil its conservation mandate, the Convention must take action to protect krill and krill habitat.

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THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULA MPA PROPOSAL

DOMAIN 1

The Domain 1 MPA proposal covers the Western Antarctic Peninsula and the southern Scotia Arc. The proposal has been under development since 2012, and in 2017 was formally submitted by Argentina and Chile. The region is particularly vulnerable to climate change and has high levels of human activity, including fishing, tourism and scientific programs. It is also a key habitat for Antarctic krill, fish, birds and marine mammal species.

The MPA's objective is to protect critical habitats for wildlife including whales, penguins, fur seals and many species of seabirds. A general protection zone prohibits commercial krill fishing, and other zones allow it under specific regulations.

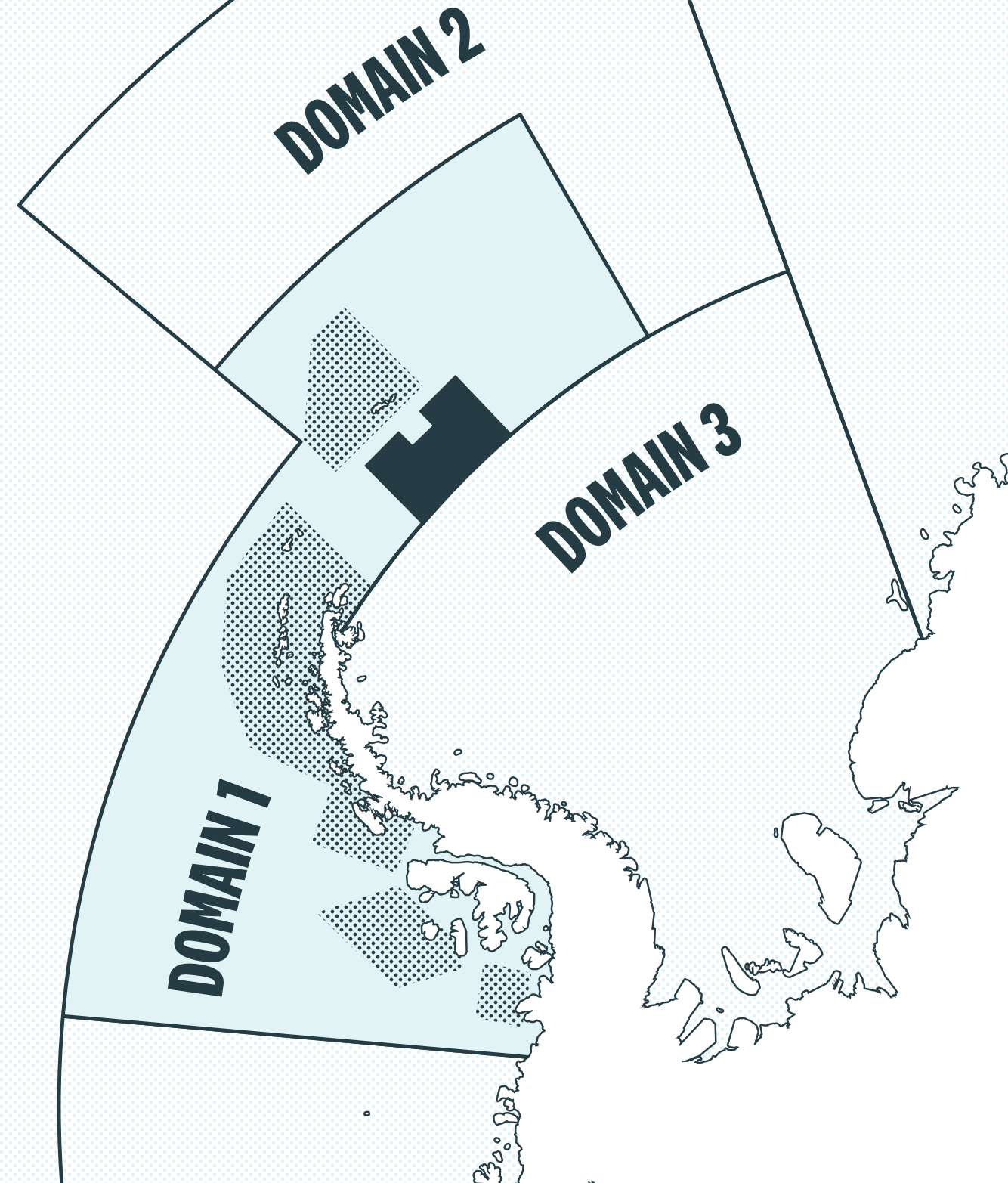
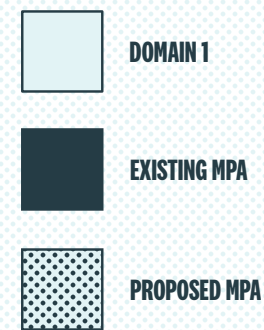
In addition, Domain 1 overlaps with the Western Antarctic Peninsula and Islands Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA), as a discrete area of habitat identified by a task team of experts under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which is important to marine mammal species, including Antarctic minke whales, killer whales, Antarctic fur seals and the Southern elephant seal.

China has raised scientific concerns regarding the proposal, and since 2017, the proposal has undergone significant revisions to address concerns from China and others. Despite a trilateral meeting between Argentina, Chile and China taking place in 2022, an extraordinary meeting in 2023 dedicated solely to this MPA and a harmonisation symposium in Korea in 2024, the proposal was again blocked by China and Russia at the annual 2024 CCAMLR meeting.

This obstruction came despite the proposal comprising the most substantial scientific, technical and political credentials for approval and after modification to allow greater flexibility.⁶⁵

Countries with krill fisheries have demonstrated they are not motivated to find a long-term conservation solution for the Antarctic Peninsula, and are reluctant to make any move that may impact the profits of the krill fishing industry.

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▲ IMAGE © SEA SHEPHERD GLOBAL

A STALEMATE IN CCAMLR

Since the establishment of the Ross Sea MPA in 2016, the remaining MPA proposals have not advanced. This is primarily due to objections from China and Russia, and at times by Norway and the Republic of Korea. China and Russia formally blocked consensus on new MPA proposals during the 2022, 2023 and 2024 annual CCAMLR meetings.

At the 2024 CCAMLR meeting, China, supported by Russia, used its veto rights to prevent the renewal of an agreement restricting krill fishing and also blocked the establishment of four MPAs.⁶⁶ As a result, no krill fishing limits are in effect that ensure dispersal, allowing fishing of the entire quota to be concentrated in smaller, critical regions.

2010	Ross Sea Region MPA ^a	Consensus cannot be reached
2011	East Antarctic MPA ^b Ross Sea MPA ^c	Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached
2012	Ross Sea MPA ^d	Consensus cannot be reached
2013	Ross Sea MPA ^e	Consensus cannot be reached
2014	Ross Sea MPA proposal East Antarctica MPA ^f	Consensus cannot be reached
2015	Ross Sea MPA East Antarctica MPA Weddell Sea MPA	Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached
2016	Ross Sea MPA	Consensus reached: MPA established
2017	East Antarctic MPA revised proposal Antarctic Peninsula MPA ^g	Consensus cannot be reached
2018	Weddell Sea MPA proposal East Antarctica MPA Antarctic Peninsula MPA formal proposal ^h	Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached
2019	Weddell Sea MPA proposal Antarctic Peninsula MPA ⁱ	Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached
2020	East Antarctica MPA proposal Weddell Sea MPA proposal Antarctic Peninsula MPA proposal	Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached
2021	East Antarctica MPA proposal Weddell Sea MPA proposal Antarctic Peninsula MPA proposal	Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached
2022	East Antarctica MPA proposal Weddell Sea MPA proposal Antarctic Peninsula Arc MPA proposal	Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached
2023	East Antarctica MPA proposal Weddell Sea MPA proposal Antarctic Peninsula MPA proposal	Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached Consensus cannot be reached
2024	Antarctic Peninsula MPA proposal	Consensus cannot be reached

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a. Proposed by the USA1
b. Proposed by Australia, France, and the EU, initially covering 1.9 million km2
c. Proposed separately by New Zealand and the USA
d. Jointly proposed by New Zealand and the USA
e. A revised proposal was resubmitted by New Zealand and the USA
f. Proposal was revised, reducing it to 1 million km2
g. Preliminary proposal submitted by Argentina and Chile
h. Submitted by Argentina and Chile
i. Revised proposal submitted by Argentina and Chile

CONSENSUS CANNOT BE REACHED

PUTTING CCAMLR BACK ON TRACK

CCAMLR was once a leading example in ocean conservation.⁶⁷ It is time to bring accountability back to CCAMLR to deliver on its conservation mandate.

The Convention must base decisions on the best scientific evidence available and in line with an ecosystem approach.

Recognizing mounting evidence of declining populations of Antarctic wildlife, it is clear CCAMLR is failing to implement its conservation mandate: an end to krill fishing in the Antarctic is necessary to secure ecosystem integrity.

Proactive action would replenish krill populations by relieving the fishery stress that is exacerbated by climate change. Not only would this help stabilize the Southern Ocean ecosystem, but it would also increase the carbon-sink capacity of this ecosystem.

The effects of vast krill extraction in the Southern Ocean have yet to be understood.

Thus, the combination of the threat of fishing and the fragility of the ecosystem to climate change demands much stronger protection⁶⁸ than CCAMLR is providing.

One of the most crucial weaknesses of CCAMLR's oversight is its lack of consideration of whale populations to pre-whaling levels and the compounded impacts of climate change on krill populations.^{69,70}

The lack of progress within CCAMLR stands in contrast to major international developments of the same period. This includes the adoption of the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the 2022 World Trade Organisation Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the 2023 High Seas Treaty. These significant advances in global ocean governance underscore CCAMLR's disconnect from broader multilateral momentum.

Establishing an ecologically representative network of MPAs would align CCAMLR with international ambition and contribute to global climate and biodiversity targets.

A major point of contention within the CCAMLR Convention is its requirement for consensus on all substantive decisions. This effectively grants every member veto power, leaving the system rigid and often unable to adapt or respond to urgent conservation needs.



◀ IMAGE © MAX BELLO

The veto power that some members have exercised at their discretion and without limitations has prevented progress and weakened CCAMLR's governance.

While countries advocating for conservation measures must fund research and develop detailed protocols to support their proposals, those opposing them are not required to present counter-evidence or scientific arguments — they can simply block progress through political opposition. CCAMLR requires a comprehensive

review to develop tangible actions enabling the Convention to implement its conservation mandate. This may include a reformation of its decision-making process, which would likely take several years to deliver. Despite this timeframe, it is imperative to revitalise CCAMLR's actions in alignment with its founding objective and mandates, which were adopted by consensus.

CCAMLR has demonstrated an ability to reach meaningful agreements via consensus in the past. These decisions were made possible due to the commitment of Member States to fulfil the Convention's objectives. This commitment must now be renewed and strengthened to ensure CCAMLR's

effectiveness into the future, aligning with existing global environmental commitments. Antarctica and its surrounding waters exert tremendous environmental influence on the planet, and their conservation is a responsibility of the Member States.

CCAMLR was once seen as an innovative leader in marine conservation; it's time to reinstate that leadership and protect one of the world's last remaining pristine ecosystems.



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ACTION

The need for ambitious Antarctic protection has reached an existential level. The Antarctic region is warming at a rate faster than anywhere else on the planet, and the health of its ecosystem has far-reaching consequences, impacting global climate regulation and global ocean currents.

Not only are the species that inhabit the Southern Ocean reliant on the integrity of its ecosystem, but so is the wildlife that migrates hundreds of thousands of miles to and from the region.

Krill are an integral part of the Southern Ocean, and the species must be protected to prevent the collapse of one of the last pristine natural frontiers on the planet.

To ensure Antarctic ecosystem integrity and our planet's health, the international community must:

01

CLOSE THE SOUTHERN OCEAN TO KRILL FISHING

to protect Antarctic wildlife, and, safeguard ecosystems and global climate stability;

02

AGREE TO ESTABLISH THE ANTARCTICA PENINSULA MPA

(Domain 1) eradicating the krill fisheries within, as a minimum step forward towards the establishment of an ecologically representative network of MPAs in the Southern Ocean;

03

CCAMLR REFORM

to ensure the implementation of its conservation mandate to protect Antarctic wildlife;

04

ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF AT LEAST 30% OF ANTARCTICA'S HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE WATERS

as a key contribution by CCAMLR countries to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework 30x30 target.

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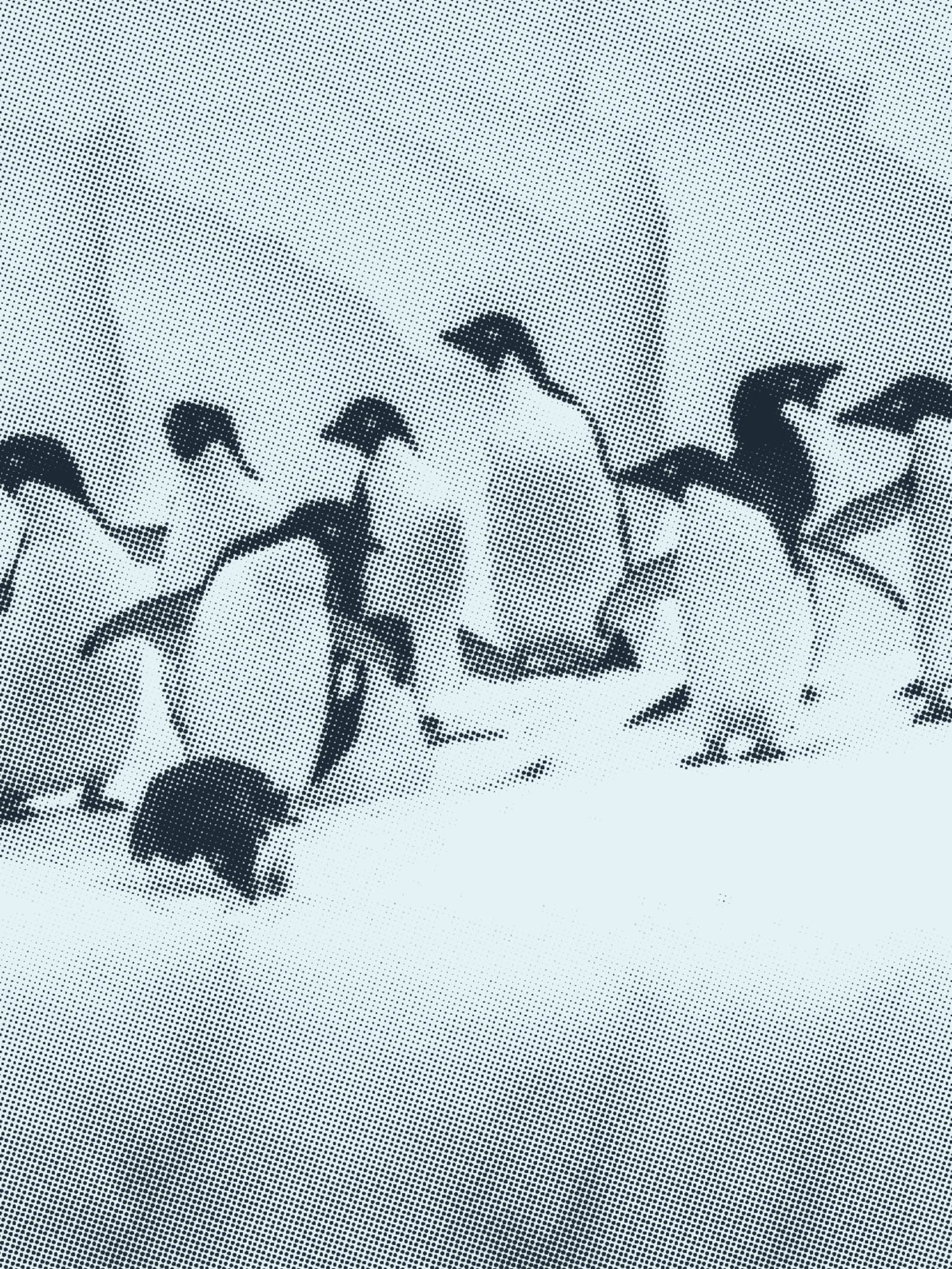
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**THE FATE OF ANTARCTICA AND OUR WORLD, HANGS IN
THE BALANCE. RUTHLESS EXPLOITERS TIGHTEN THEIR
GRIP, THREATENING OUR OCEAN AND THE LIFE WITHIN. BUT
WE SEE THE DANGER, AND WE WON'T LOOK AWAY. WILL
THE FORCES OF GOOD RISE IN TIME, OR WILL THE
LAST WHALE SING ITS FINAL SONG?**

Our Antarctica has mobilised a group of scientists, ocean leaders, wildlife photographers, policymakers and other high ambition individuals, in one united voice of the Antarctic Avengers, calling to protect one of the world's last remaining wildernesses, the Southern Ocean.

WWW.OUR-ANTARCTICA.COM