

Global Day of Climate Action for Antarctica and the Southern Ocean

Why

Antarctica and the Southern Ocean – which surrounds Antarctica – is a unique ecosystem which is at risk due to the climate crisis. It is the only continent without any Indigenous human communities, but if greenhouse gas emissions melt its massive ice sheets, sea levels will rise dramatically around the globe. In fact, Antarctica's ice sheets melting create a greater contribution to sea level rise than the Greenland ice sheet in the Arctic, and then there is thermal expansion due to rising water temperature.

Preventing sea level rise is crucial for sustaining the livelihoods of millions of people in low lying countries and island nations.

The **Antarctic Treaty** which governs Antarctica is an international agreement stemming from the Cold War and it came into force on **23rd of June 1961**. At that time, nations agreed to let sovereignty claims rest and to refrain from militarizing Antarctica. Instead, they decided to cooperate peacefully and advance scientific knowledge. This Treaty is a great achievement of cooperation.

In 1998 the treaty was amended by an environmental protocol (Madrid Protocol) which prohibits and regulates harmful activities, and bans mining indefinitely. However, the treaty does only regulate activities south of the Antarctic Circle, therefore **it cannot address climate breakdown** as greenhouse gas emissions are emitted mostly outside the treaty area. However, the 29 treaty nations emit about 80% of global greenhouse gasses.

Apart from the climate crisis, the world's living species are also going through a **mass extinction** event, due to habitat loss, overexploitation and climate change. **The Southern Ocean is one of the world's**

biodiversity hotspots. There are a myriad of species living underwater on the ocean floor – many of them still unknown to science – and it is unlikely they will be able to adapt to rapidly warming waters and increasing levels of CO₂ being dissolved in the water.

Nations are rapidly attempting to expand infrastructure as well, with the Australian government proposing a concrete airport that will be responsible for a staggering 40% of all human impacts in Antarctica. We must tell Australia and all treaty nations, that there should be no massive airports in Antarctica.

When

48hrs either side of June 23, as this is the 60th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty coming into force. The Antarctic Treaty Meeting will be happening online during this time.

10 creative actions ideas and where to do them.

Any Antarctic or potentially sea-level rise inspired action. Here are some suggestions:

- Make banners and posters or spray a penguin using our stencil (provided) and unified messages: Stop Antarctica Melting, No Airport In Antarctica, Protect Antarctica.
- Use animal costumes, penguins have been done before successfully by stay grounded anti-airport activists.
- Have a rally outside your local MPs office.
- Use our penguin stencil to make some street art for Antarctica available here: bobbrown.org.au/event_210521
- Share pictures or short video clips saying who you are and where in the world you are on your social media account with using these hashtags: #stopantarcticamelting #protectantarctica #noairportinantarctica
- Upload the same images or video clips to this Google Drive folder: bobbrown.org.au/doa_images

- Mark future sea levels with chalk on prominent buildings.
- “Flooding” a building with people, water sounds, air bubbles etc.
- Building a beach bar in places sea level will reach.
- Dressing up as penguins and going into a lobby or building and squatting a new home.

Where

- Fossil fuel HQ or production sites.
- Australian embassy (airport project).
- Environmental ministries or whoever responsible for Antarctica.
- Areas affected by sea level rise.
- Antarctica tourism operators (US, The Netherlands, Germany, France, Chile, Australia etc).
- Antarctic fishing industries (UK, Norway, China, Australia, Korea, Ukraine etc).

Press statement information and background

Here are a few quick facts on things which are problematic in Antarctica at the moment. We trust you will do your own research in addition to this and we can also help with it.

Governance

Before the Antarctic treaty 7 nations claimed land on the Antarctic continent, but when the treaty was signed the dispute around all these claims became frozen. There are currently 29 nations who can vote in the meetings. All decisions can only be taken by consensus which means all of them have to agree. This usually means a long process of negotiations and searching compromise before any decision making. There is a huge risk of harmful activities continuing because there is no consensus to regulate them. More so, the climate crisis means that decisions must be taken more urgently.

Last year, a Russian vessel was photographed fishing illegally, but Russia did not agree to sanction itself. Also, since the meetings are normally carried out in person, Russia opposed to recognise the online meetings as “official” meetings - therefore important decisions could not be taken.

- This year – even if the meetings are held online – they **should be designated as official** so that further marine protected areas can be agreed, krill catch areas can be designated.
- Keep up the cooperation within the Antarctic Treaty System. Designate all of Antarctica as a **World Heritage Site** (this would be possible if all 29 nations agree), refrain from all sovereignty claims and recognise the inherent **Rights of the Antarctic ecosystem** to exist, thrive and evolve (Rights of Nature).

Australian airport project

Australia is planning a huge airport at its Davis station. This airport and infrastructure would increase the current human footprint on Antarctica by 40%. If the plan goes ahead, then more large-scale infrastructure projects by many nations might follow. Most importantly, most Australian Antarctic scientists say that the airport is not at all necessary for science! The airport is in its process for environmental impact assessment, so we can still stop it.

- Stop the airport project.

Climate

West Antarctic Ice Shield are melting fast. Pine Island and Thwaites shelf ice may be collapsing already and once they are gone, glacier ice from the continent will flow quicker into the ocean and raise sea levels. Lots of scientific debate how fast all of this will happen, decades or centuries, but the impact will be huge.

Penguins and other seabirds are impacted by a change in temperatures and precipitation e.g. newly hatched chicks get exposed to rain rather than snow, and may freeze in the early

weeks before they get their water-resistant plumage.

Hatch rates of juvenile krill will be reduced by about 50% by the end of the century (due to a lack of sea ice, increasing ocean acidification and temperature rise) and this will have massive impacts on top predators like baleen whales, penguins and seals.

Biodiversity

Despite common public perception Antarctica and the Southern Ocean are not a nature reserve similar to a biosphere reserve or national park. While activities such as mining are banned, many activities – such as tourism e.g. - are allowed because they are not explicitly forbidden.

Within the treaty system there are mechanisms to create both marine and terrestrial protected areas. However, consensus of all members of the Antarctic treaty is needed to designate them. As a result of competing interests, the designation of such protected areas is effectively stalled. In the Southern Ocean nations which want to continue fishing oppose the designation of marine protected areas which would enforce no-take zones.

On land the process to cooperate, identify and designate areas for protection is dead slow. Internationally, 10% of all land masses should be protected. This is not achieved in Antarctica and 6 out of 16 different bioregions within Antarctica have no protection at all.

- Designate protected areas within the Antarctic treaty area.

Tourism

About 50,000 people visit per year and before Covid, tourism was rising rapidly. The industry is currently completely self-regulated. Any tourist trip to Antarctica emits on average 5.5t CO₂ including the flight, this is as much as 8 people in Bangladesh emit in a year. People who visit Antarctica for a luxury holiday contribute towards destroying the place. Many companies offer carbon-offsets and claim that tourists would

become ambassadors for Antarctic protection. There is no scientific proof either of those works.

- Most affected people and areas cannot afford any more high-carbon tourism which destroys their livelihoods. At a minimum, tourist numbers to Antarctica need to be capped at its current levels.

Fishing

There is currently no more whaling in Antarctica, but commercial fishing for krill and toothfish.

Antarctic toothfish is fished exclusively for the luxury market and sells for about 60-70 dollars per kilogram. These fishes can reach a life span of over 45 years, a mature adult may be 1.7m long and weigh around 130kg.

Krill is mainly fished by Norway and China and it is not used for direct human consumption. Part of it becomes a supplement for fish food for industrial aquaculture, to produce high quality fish such as salmon, another part gets turned into “Omega 3” health products which supposedly have benefits for human consumption but also are fed to pets such as cats and dogs, this way introducing them into the Antarctic food chain.

Fishing is currently regulated within the Antarctic Treaty System and is managed by a body called CCAMLR. However, fishing in the Southern Ocean contributes nothing at all towards food security globally and nevertheless wastes a lot of fossil fuels to catch those species.

- End fishing in the Southern Ocean. Globally, fishing should only be carried out if it contributes to food sovereignty and security and is part of subsistence. Switch to plant-based diets where possible.