Thursday 8 July 2021

P9_TA(2021)0361

Establishment of Antarctic Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the conservation of Southern Ocean biodiversity

European Parliament resolution of 8 July 2021 on the establishment of Antarctic Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the conservation of Southern Ocean biodiversity (2021/2757(RSP))

(2022/C 99/24)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDGs 13 and 14,

— having regard to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD),

— having regard to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), in particular Part XII,

— having regard to the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CAMLR Convention),

— having regard to the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) of 31 May 2019,

— having regard to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate of 24 September 2019 and to the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1,5 °C of 8 October 2018,

— having regard to the report entitled 'Mission Starfish 2030: Restore our Ocean and Waters' of the Commission's Mission Board for Healthy Oceans, Seas, Coastal and Inland Waters published on 22 September 2020,

— having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 entitled 'The European Green Deal' (COM(2019)0640),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives' (COM(2020)0380),

— having regard to the State of the Union address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament plenary of 16 September 2020,

— having regard to the joint statement of the 21st EU-China joint statement of 9 April 2019,

— having regard to the G7 Leaders' communiqué 'Our Shared Agenda for Global Action to Build Back Better' of 13 June 2021,

— having regard to the EU-US summit statement of 15 June 2021 'Towards a renewed Transatlantic partnership',

— having regard to its resolution of 28 November 2019 on the climate and environment emergency [1],

— having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Green Deal [2],

— having regard to its resolution of 9 June 2021 on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives [3],

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[1] OJ C 232, 16.6.2021, p. 28.
[2] Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0005.
[3] Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0277.

— having regard to its resolution of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity ([4]),

— having regard to its resolution of 25 March 2021 on the impact on fisheries of marine litter ([5]),

— having regard to the Antarctic Treaty signed on 1 December 1959,

— having regard to the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty signed on 4 October 1991 (the Madrid Protocol),

— having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the good ecological status of the Ocean is critical for safeguarding biodiversity and ensuring the continuity of its ecosystem services such as the absorption of CO_2 and the production of oxygen;

B. whereas Antarctica and the Southern Ocean are home to an extremely rich wildlife ecosystem of flora and fauna, while certain species are on the International Union for Conservation of Nature red list of threatened species with an endangered or vulnerable status;

C. whereas the ocean is essential to mitigating climate change, and has absorbed over 90 % of the heat trapped by our carbon dioxide emissions; whereas it is the world's largest active carbon sink, having sequestered over 30 % of the carbon from those emissions ([6])

D. whereas from 1989 to 2018 Antarctica warmed by 1,8 °C, which is three times more than the global average ([7]); whereas the Greenland and Antarctic Ice Sheets are projected to lose mass at an increasing rate throughout the 21st century and beyond;

E. whereas Antarctic krill are an essential part of the food chain for many marine predators (penguins, whales, seals, fish) in the Southern Ocean;

F. whereas the IPCC's Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate ([8]) outlined how climate mechanisms depend on the health of the ocean and marine ecosystems, which are currently being affected by global warming, pollution, overexploitation of marine biodiversity, acidification, deoxygenation and coastal erosion;

G. whereas the United Nations has proclaimed the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) to increase ocean science and build collective knowledge;

H. whereas the Antarctic Treaty, which entered into force 60 years ago on 23 June 1961, calls in Article IX for the preservation and conservation of living resources in Antarctica; whereas these efforts are defined by the Madrid Protocol; whereas this Protocol designates Antarctica as a 'natural reserve, devoted to peace and science', and sets out basic principles applicable to activities in Antarctica;

([4]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0015.

([5]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0096.

([6]) Bindoff, N. et al., 'Observations: Oceanic Climate Change and Sea Level', *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, 2007. https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/ar4-wg1-chapter5-1.pdf; Rhein, M. et al., 'Observations: Ocean', *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, 2013. https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/WG1AR5_Chapter03_FINAL.pdf; Cheng L, et al., 2019, 'Record-Setting Ocean Warmth Continued in 2019', *Advances in Atmospheric Sciences*, Vol. 37, February 2020, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00376-020-9283-7
;

([7]) Kyle R. Clem, Ryan L. Fogt, John Turner, Benjamin R. Lintner, Gareth J. Marshall, James R. Miller, James A. Renwick, 'Record warming at the South Pole during the past three decades', *Nature Climate Change*, 2020; DOI: 10.1038/s41558-020-0815-z.

([8]) *IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate. Summary for Policymakers*, 2019. https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/chapter/summary-for-policymakers/

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I. whereas the European Union and its Member States, Australia, Norway, the United Kingdom and Uruguay were joined on the 28 April 2021 by the United States and New Zealand as sponsors for the proposal to establish two MPAs in the Southern (Antarctic) Ocean, in the East Antarctica and Weddell Sea;

J. whereas negotiations are ongoing in the Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to establish these two new MPAs, which would have a combined size of approximately 3 million km^2; whereas the approval of these MPAs would contribute to achieving EU and global commitments on protecting marine biodiversity;

K. whereas MPAs are an important tool for protecting ocean ecosystems as they can increase the diversity and abundance of species while enhancing the ocean's resilience to environmental impacts, including climate change;

L. whereas G7 leaders have stated that they fully support the CCAMLR's commitment to develop a representative system of MPAs in the CAMLR Convention Area in the Southern Ocean based on the best available science;

M. whereas the EU and the US have expressed full commitment to promoting a successful and ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework in the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity and their full support for the designation of new MPAs in the Southern Ocean, and to continuing cooperating to promote the sustainable blue economy, sustainable fishing and the prevention of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing;

N. whereas Parliament has expressed its strong support for ambitious action to protect and restore marine biodiversity, notably in its resolution on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives and its resolution on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity;

O. whereas Parliament has called on the Commission to champion an ambitious international governance model on marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions, and to recognise all seas and the ocean as a global common good; whereas, further, it has called for the EU to push for the adoption of an ambitious global ocean treaty to protect marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction worldwide in the next session of the Intergovernmental Conference on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction;

P. whereas negotiations are ongoing in the United Nations for an implementing agreement to protect marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction under UNCLOS, which provides for the establishment of MPAs in the high seas;

1. Emphasises that Antarctica and the Southern Ocean contain ecosystems and biodiversity of exceptional value and scientific importance, and that the Weddell Sea is key for global ocean circulation and the world's climate; underlines the importance of ensuring their rapid and effective protection;

2. Expresses its full support for the efforts made by the European Union and its Member States, Australia, Norway, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, United States and New Zealand to establish two new MPAs in the eastern Antarctic and the Weddell Sea in the Antarctic Ocean; calls on the Commission and Member States, in preparation for the 2021 annual CCAMLR meeting, to intensify their bilateral and multilateral efforts to secure support for the establishment of these MPAs in the forthcoming months, and in particular to focus on CCAMLR members which have expressed opposition to the MPA proposals;

3. Recalls that according to the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the EU should use all of its diplomatic leverage and outreach capacities to help broker agreement on the designation of vast MPAs in the Southern Ocean;

4. Recalls the Union's commitment on marine protection to legally protect a minimum of 30 % of the EU's sea area, including strictly protecting 10 % of its seas; recalls that the EU should ensure that the post-2020 global framework includes ambitious global 2030 targets in line with EU commitments; reiterates, further, its position that the EU should act as a global leader and push for a high level of ambition, matching or exceeding its own, during the negotiations for the global framework, which should include legally binding global restoration and protection targets of at least 30 % by 2030; underlines that protected areas need to be effectively protected;

5. Recalls the CCAMLR's commitment to create a representative system of MPAs in the CAMLR Convention Area by 2012 that protects representative examples of marine ecosystems, biodiversity and habitats;

6. Underlines that the Madrid Protocol prohibits activities related to Antarctic mineral resources except for scientific research purposes; calls for this crucial provision to be maintained in future agreements;

7. Points out that the geographic isolation of the Southern Ocean makes monitoring operations in the CAMLR Convention Area complex and difficult;

8. Highlights that over 80 % of the seabed remains unexplored ([9]), and that further oceanographic research is necessary, especially on the impacts of pollution and climate change on ecosystems;

9. Calls on the Commission and the Member States together with global partners to strengthen the network of MPAs globally through enhanced management, better spatial planning, evaluations and enforcement in order to increase ecological coherence and connectivity of MPAs;

10. Underlines that IUU fishing activities represent a considerable threat to sustainable fishing and the resilience of marine ecosystems;

11. Underlines that tourism in Antarctica must be conducted in a sustainable way; calls therefore on the CCAMLR to ensure that tourism is conducted accordingly and that it does not adversely impact the ecosystem;

12. Underlines that the establishment of these two new MPAs would be an important contribution to the global dimension of the EUs Biodiversity Strategy; calls on the Commission and Member States to use the establishment of these MPAs as a basis in the global negotiations under the Convention on Biological Diversity in the COP15 UN Biodiversity Conference in Kunming, China;

13. Notes that the establishment of MPAs covering over 3 million km^2 in the eastern Antarctic and the Weddell Sea would create one of the largest marine protection areas in history;

14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the European Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the Member States of the CCAMLR.

([9]) National Ocean Service, 2021: https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/exploration.html