

## **What's Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg, and What Happens When it Flips?**

Using Australia and China as case studies, to what extent has the environmental protection of Antarctica, from the 20th to the 21st century, been influenced by the securitisation of national interests and the institutional weaknesses within the Antarctic Treaty System?



Isabella Healion  
Utrecht University

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Marten Boon

A thesis submitted for the degree of  
*Masters of International Relations in Historical Perspective*  
January 2024

Word Count: 15,303

## **Abstract**

Antarctica has long held the vivid imaginations of humankind since its discovery, however in the 19th century and today it has become a symbol of climate anxiety and a reflection of the environmental vulnerability of our earth.

It stands as a vital and multifaceted domain for research, offering unique insights and contributing significantly to our understanding of complex global challenges across various disciplines including international relations, law, astronomy, biology, and climate change studies. However, its environmental future is bound by the ebb and flow of diplomacy, geopolitics and most significantly national interests of the member states and institutions which fall under its governance systems. The complexity and complications of these frameworks present additional challenges for the continent, as they seek to balance conservation, diplomacy and the appeasement of diverging interests.

The thesis explores these themes along with key historical turning points of Australia and China's interaction with Antarctic diplomacy, before and after the establishment of the Antarctic Treaty System in 1959. The research will use the Securitisation Theory to reveal several manoeuvres employed by Australia and China from the 19th century to today, to thwart perceived existential threats to their interests; both economic, military and political and the impact of such pursuits on the environmental past and future of the continent. It will become evident that many nations are not devoted to peace and science in Antarctica as the mandate of the Antarctic Treaty insists. Science instead has developed from a token of human curiosity to a token for achieving national security, among its many realms.

The overall analysis that emerges from Western Literature is lacking in historical perspective, riddled with alarmism and encompasses mostly what is a broad glance at the landscape of Antarctic Geopolitics and environmental governance measures. In the face of rapidly advancing global climate change, intellectual capital becomes paramount in comprehending decision-making processes and steering a positive trajectory of Antarctica's future.

## Table Of Abbreviations

AT	Antarctic Treaty of 1959
AAD	Australian Antarctic Division
AAT	Australian Antarctic Territory
ATCM	Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting
ATS	Antarctic Treaty System
CCAMLR	Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources  Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
CCAS	Convention for the Conservation of the Antarctic Seals
CEP	Council of Environmental Protection
CLCS	Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf
CRAMRA	Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities
IGY	International Geophysical Year 1957–58

The Protocol	The Protocol on Environmental Protection
PRC	People's Republic of China  China
PRIC	Polar Research Institute of China
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

## Introduction

Antarctica ... a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science.<sup>1</sup>

How committed are Antarctic Treaty System members to its foundational principles for the most unique and unforgiving environment on earth? Are they driven to fulfilling these aims or are underlying national interests the primary cause for concern when considering the pursuit or rejection of Antarctic conservation measures?

The development of environmental protection measures for Antarctica throughout the 20th and 21st centuries has grappled with significant institutional weaknesses within the governing framework—the Antarctic Treaty System and the diverging interests of its member states. Initiated in 1959 by the United States, the Treaty aimed to prevent the extension of the Cold War to the southernmost region of the world.<sup>2</sup> It is an instrument prohibiting militarisation, suspending seven historical claims to sovereignty over the land, and leveraging the principles of science, peace, and cooperation to maintain diplomatic stability.<sup>3</sup>

However, as the mid to late 20th century unfolded, the governing system underwent adaptations to address the global environmental security agenda as climate change research revealed the fragility of the Antarctic ecosystem. Consequently, the Treaty walks a delicate line, navigating conflicting interests of member states; and economic, military, territorial and geopolitical concerns with the imperative for dedicated environmental protection measures. The institutional strength and continued relevance of the Treaty hinge on its adept management of these often competing considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> Antarctic Treaty Secretariat. *The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty*, Protocol, adopted October 4, 1991, 2.

<sup>2</sup> “The Antarctic Treaty.” Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, accessed on August 21, 2023, <https://www.ats.aq/e/antarctic treaty.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, “The Antarctic Treaty.”

This tension is vividly exemplified through a comparative analysis of Australia and China, two Consultative Parties chosen strategically for in-depth scrutiny due to their disparate origins and trajectories in Antarctic Affairs. Their historical approach to environmental measures over the past century, influenced by underlying national security and interests, provides valuable insights into the vulnerability of the Antarctic environment. By tracing the continent's governance history, this comparison will facilitate a comprehensive study of the interplay between science, security and the environmental viability of the coldest place on earth.

### **Understanding the Antarctic Treaty System: Context, Purpose & Values**

The Antarctic Treaty, signed in Washington in 1959 amid the Cold War, serves as the cornerstone of Antarctica's legal governance.<sup>4</sup> It emerged as a diplomatic solution to regulate territorial claims by promoting scientific cooperation.<sup>5</sup> In the absence of a legal framework or native population, between the late 1800s and mid-1900s, seven countries, through a range of international declarations and domestic legislations asserted territorial or sovereign claims on the continent.<sup>6</sup> United States (U.S.) President Eisenhower, perturbed by the risk of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics pursuing its own claims and expanding the Cold War arena, initiated discussions for a collective management system.<sup>7</sup> In 1959, the twelve nations that were active during the preceding International Geophysical Year of 1957-58 were invited by the United States Government to join a diplomatic conference.<sup>8</sup> Here, on December 1st, 1959, the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) emerged and was signed by 12 nations including claimant states as seen in Figure 1; Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain (U.K.), and non-claimant states; Belgium, Japan, Northern Ireland, South Africa,

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<sup>4</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "The Antarctic Treaty."

<sup>5</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "The Antarctic Treaty."

<sup>6</sup> Doaa Abdel-Motaal, "Averting the Battle for Antarctica", *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, February 21, 2023, <https://www.yalejournal.org/publications/averting-the-battle-for-antarctica>, accessed on June 1, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Berkman, "President Eisenhower, the Antarctic Treaty, and the Origin of International Spaces," *Science Diplomacy: Antarctica, Science, and the Governance of International Spaces*, 2011, doi:10.5479/si.9781935623069.17, accessed on June 3, 2023

<sup>8</sup> Abdel-Motaal, "Averting the Battle for Antarctica"

the USSR, and the United States.<sup>9</sup> The Treaty signified a crucial milestone in the still ongoing effort to manage the world's most unrelenting natural landscapes south of 60°S latitude.



<sup>9</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty. *The Antarctic Treaty*, Treaty, adopted December 1, 1959, 49-53

**Figure 1:** A map of Antarctica, research stations and the 7 territorial claims to sovereignty.<sup>10</sup>

Established on the principles of peace, scientific research, and international cooperation,<sup>11</sup> the Antarctic Treaty System lays the foundation for its governance through a sophisticated and comprehensive legal and values-based framework. Arguably the most pivotal aspect of the Treaty amid the Cold War was the establishment of demilitarisation in Antarctica, upon its entry into force, the Treaty established the world's first nuclear-free zone.<sup>12</sup> Militarisation is completely prohibited unless for 'peaceful purposes only'.<sup>13</sup> The Treaty does *not* renounce the existing claims to sovereignty, *nor* prejudice any contracting party and their claims or status of non-recognition.<sup>14</sup> While the Antarctic treaty is in force, no further claims will be accepted and through its key articles, aims to maintain peace through the preservation of the status quo.<sup>15</sup>

Science is used as a collaborative force to dissolve tension and maintain peace on the continent. As of 2023, there are in total 29 Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties and 27 Non-Consultative Antarctic Treaty Parties.<sup>16</sup> Joining the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings; the biannual meetings whereby decision-making is made is permitted according to Article IX.2, based on the demonstration of their interest in Antarctica by "*conducting substantial research act*".<sup>17</sup> Usually, this is demonstrated through the establishment of on-site research bases and programs.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, accession is available to any state that is invited unanimously by the ATCPs. Non-consultative Parties are 'invited to attend the Consultative

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<sup>10</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Antarctic Region," image, CIA World Factbook, accessed January 15, 2024, [https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/5891ad778f8f6ca2babc96f4bc18e3ea/antarctic\\_l.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/5891ad778f8f6ca2babc96f4bc18e3ea/antarctic_l.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> "Parties." Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, accessed on August 21, 2023, [https://www.ats.aq/e/antarctic\\_treaty.html](https://www.ats.aq/e/antarctic_treaty.html).

<sup>17</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Erik J. Molenaar, "Participation in the Antarctic Treaty," *Polar Journal* 11, no. 2 (September 5, 2021): 360-380, doi:10.1080/2154896x.2021.1972257.



Meetings but do not participate in the decision-making'.<sup>19</sup> Article III insists on freely available and exchangeable scientific observations and the rights for states to observe one another on the continent.<sup>20</sup> Science is the ultimate token for diplomacy and the continued absence of military conflict in the region, however, this research will display that this token can be 'abused' for underlying considerations.

Several legal instruments developed throughout the late 20th century exist intending to develop the institutional power and core values of the Antarctic Treaty.<sup>21</sup> These include the Convention for the Conservation of the Antarctic Seals (CCAS) for commercial sealing regulations.<sup>22</sup> The Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) for the preservation and integrity of marine life.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, also known as The Madrid Protocol or The Protocol; prohibiting all mineral resource exploitation and exploration on the continent except for scientific research.<sup>24</sup> The Protocol superseded a failed mineral resources regime known as the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (CRAMRA). It is significant to note that while CCAS and CCAMLR operate as distinct agreements, they include clauses that bind their signatories to key aspects of the Antarctic Treaty, such as Article IV, which addresses the legal status of territorial claims.<sup>25</sup> Accession to the Environment Protocol is restricted to Antarctic Treaty Parties exclusively.<sup>26</sup> The Antarctic Treaty and this collection of agreements are referred to collectively as the *Antarctic Treaty System (ATS)*.

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<sup>19</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>22</sup> "Related Agreements" Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, accessed on August 21, 2023, <https://www.ats.aq/e/antarctic treaty.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Related Agreements"

<sup>24</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Related Agreements"

<sup>25</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Related Agreements"

<sup>26</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Related Agreements"

## Introducing Australia and China in Antarctica

Within Antarctic affairs, both nations have several national interest pursuits including economic, political and territorial ambitions. These interests have great implications, sometimes positive and often negative, for the progression of environmental protection measures.

Australia's claims stem from a long history of exploration beginning with the Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911-1914.<sup>27</sup> The southern nation has the largest claim to the continent, at 42%, encompassing the majority of East Antarctica - known as the Australian Antarctic Territory (ATT)<sup>28</sup> Australia is one of the original signatories of the ATS and subsequently one of the earliest Consultative Parties. Contrastingly, China's interest in the continent emerged in the 1970s, acceding to the Treaty in 1983, with the right to vote as a consultative party granted in 1985.<sup>29</sup> China does not have any claim to the continent.

While both nations currently have consultative status, the origins and timeline of their involvement with Antarctica differ heavily. Nonetheless, both nations are granted the same voting rights. China is Australia's largest source of imports, its largest export market, and the largest two-way trading partner for goods and services.<sup>30</sup> The South China Sea dispute places the strains of this bilateral relationship in the spotlight and this increasingly tense relationship between Australia and China in recent years adds layers of relevance. The Antarctic arena is a unique example of a fine interplay between friction and cooperation between both states in

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<sup>27</sup> Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water, Australian Antarctic Division "Australian Antarctic Territory," May 15, 2016, accessed on August 21, 2023, <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-antarctica/australia-in-antarctica/australian-antarctic-territory/>.

<sup>28</sup> Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water, Australian Antarctic Division "Australian Antarctic Territory."

<sup>29</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Parties"

<sup>30</sup> Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "China country brief," DFAT, July 1, 2022, accessed on 30 August 2023, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/china/china-country-brief>

contextually tiring times.<sup>31</sup> Fostering a balanced understanding of both states' intentions is significant for the 21st century providing insight into the effectiveness of the Antarctic Treaty System since 1959 and its ongoing viability in progressing environmental protection in the face of state interests.

## Historiography

Limited scholarship delves into the Australia-China relationship in Antarctic affairs and while Antarctic politics has gained traction since the mid-2010s, it remains peripheral to shifting power politics in Asia and Eastern Europe. Academic studies often prioritise national security and geopolitical stability, neglecting environmental security within the Treaty System.

Publications often oversimplify Chinese Antarctic Policy, adopting an Australian or Western-centric viewpoint. China is portrayed as a 'suspicious'<sup>32</sup> threat to national interests and the Treaty's stability, amplified by a Western lens in media that views China as consistently 'raising suspicions.' Klaus Dodds's works offer great insight into China's role in Antarctic diplomacy, yet, like many, underexplores a notable gap in Australia's historical Antarctic involvement in the context of pursuing national interests.

While research largely from the legal discipline questions the Antarctic Treaty System's effectiveness, a gap exists in exploring the role of member states' history and geopolitics on the Treaty's functioning. Understanding the Treaty's effectiveness requires acknowledging the roles of geopolitics and history. Klaus Dodd,<sup>33</sup> Buchanan and Flamm<sup>34</sup> provide an analysis of Treaty

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<sup>31</sup> Yun Jiang, "China's Antarctic ambitions – and their implications for Australia," *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, July 2022, 1-10, accessed on 17 August 2023, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Chinas-Antarctic-ambitions-and-their-implications-for-Australia-Yun-Jiang-August-2022.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Ian Bremmer, "China's Ambitious Plans in Antarctica have Raised New Suspicions," *Time Magazine*, April 28, 2023, <https://time.com/6274924/china-antarctica-south-pole-us-tension/>.

<sup>33</sup> Klaus Dodds, "Governing Antarctica: Contemporary Challenges and the Enduring Legacy of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty," *Global Policy* 1, no. 1 (January 2010):108-115, doi:10.1111/j.1758-5899.2009.00006.x.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Buchanan and Patrick Flamm, "Antarctic Treaty System at 60: fit for the future?," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 76, no. 3 (April 1, 2022): 245-247, accessed on 30 August, 2023, doi:10.1080/10357718.2022.2057919.

effectiveness in resource-related interests, but its focus lacks an in-depth analysis of the nuances of Australian and Chinese approaches throughout history.

This research addresses literature gaps, offering a historically grounded analysis complemented by insights into contemporary Antarctic diplomacy and policy-making. Existing key works often lack recent pivotal developments and the notion that ‘science is never politically innocent’,<sup>35</sup> thus hindering a dynamic and holistic understanding of the topic. The thesis focuses on Australia and China, examining the historical governance of Antarctica to investigate the interplay between national interests on the environmental sustainability of the region. Given the pace of global climate change, intellectual capital is vital for understanding decision-making and shaping the future of Antarctica. Hailed as the final frontier, it's pivotal across academic disciplines like international relations, law, astronomy, biology, and climate change studies, serving as a crucial field for research.

In July 2021, the World Meteorological Organisation documented the highest-ever recorded temperature on the frozen continent at Argentina's Esperanza Station, registering 18.3 degrees Celsius<sup>36</sup>. As Antarctica holds approximately 60% of the world's freshwater reserves,<sup>37</sup> the rising temperatures pose a significant threat, contributing to the global rise in sea levels. This, in turn, has repercussions on oceanic currents, ocean acidification, and ice-sheet cover and initiates cascading effects throughout global ecosystems and biogeochemical processes. Should ice calving persist in the Antarctic at its current rate of 12 trillion metric tonnes of ice since 1997,<sup>38</sup> the United Nations projects potential costs alone to exceed \$111.6 billion by 2050, solely to

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<sup>35</sup> Klaus Dodds, *The Antarctic: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23.

<sup>36</sup> The World Meteorological Organization (WMO), "WMO verifies one temperature record for Antarctic continent and rejects another," *WMO*, July 1, 2021, <https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/wmo-verifies-one-temperature-record-antarctic-continent-and-rejects-another>.

<sup>37</sup> Natural Environment Research Council, "Ice," British Antarctic Survey, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://www.bas.ac.uk/about/antarctica/geography/ice/>.

<sup>38</sup> NASA, "NASA Studies Find Previously Unknown Loss of Antarctic Ice," Global Climate Change, August 9, 2022, <https://climate.nasa.gov/news/3206/nasa-studies-find-previously-unknown-loss-of-antarctic-ice/>.

global harbours and ports.<sup>39</sup> As the impacts of climate change and human activity continue to thaw, an urgent increase of intellectual capital into its key stakeholders remains crucial.

## Theoretical Framework

The Securitisation Theory will serve as the theoretical framework for the research question. Securitisation in International Relations is a discursive “process by which states determine threats to national security based on subjective rather than objective assessments of perceived danger.”<sup>40</sup> In the post-Cold War era, securitisation theory evolved in the 1970’s and 80’s, out of the Copenhagen School (CS) led by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap De Wilde.<sup>41</sup> Threats shifted from concrete armed aggression between states to encompass the *anticipation* of potential threats to a state. Developed out of the broader global effort to expand the concept of security beyond traditional military considerations, the theory denoted that securitisation can occur for military, political, economic, societal, and environmental concerns.<sup>42</sup> This context saw increased momentum in the environmental security debate, reflected in the Antarctic Treaty's extension and the birth of its subparts: CCAMLR, CRAMRA, and the Environmental Protocol.

The theory denotes that if a state perceives a threat to its national security, it will securitise its concerns “by taking measures to enhance their security, often without public debate and democratic process.”<sup>43</sup> Security as an objective condition is “being without threat” or as a response is the “neutralization of threats” or “avoidance or non-exposure” to threats.<sup>44</sup> The lens of securitisation will be used to comprehend actions taken by Australia and China, either in support or ‘rejection’ of environmentally progressive measures in the interest of their national security.

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<sup>39</sup> Chad A. Greene et al., "Antarctic calving loss rivals ice-shelf thinning," *Nature*, August 10, 2022, 948-953, doi:10.1038/s41586-022-05037-w.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Kilroy Jr, "Securitization," *Handbook of Security Science*, June 5, 2018, 1, doi:10.1007/978-3-319-51761-2\_11-1.

<sup>41</sup> Kilroy Jr, "Securitization," 1.

<sup>42</sup> Kilroy Jr, "Securitization," 1.

<sup>43</sup> Kilroy Jr, "Securitization," 1.

<sup>44</sup> Lucia Zedner, "The concept of security: an agenda for comparative analysis," *Legal Studies* 23, no. 1 (March 2003): 155, doi:10.1111/j.1748-121x.2003.tb00209.x.

Due to Australia's expansive marine borders, ensuring a military-free southern flank allows the state to instead focus on Asia-Pacific instabilities. Amid the South China Sea Dispute, maintaining Antarctica as neutral minimises military threats. Despite this, the risk of the Antarctic Treaty's collapse ensures that Australia will continue to support its territorial sovereign claim of 42% of the continental mass of Antarctica.<sup>45</sup> As a nation with a wealth of natural resources, economic interests are also paramount - any extraction of mineral resources from Antarctica would hypothetically create reduced demand for Australian natural resources. Particularly if Australia does not gain any royalties or subsidies from material taken from its Antarctic Territory, maintaining Antarctica as an 'untouched' natural wonder, is of significant concern.<sup>46</sup>

For Australia, a 'securitising actor' - it is convenient to present the Antarctic environment as a 'referent object', something that needs to be protected from threat,<sup>47</sup> as any measures implemented that reduce potential human activity or commercial rights to Antarctica are of military and economic interest. The pursuit of science and environmental protection in Antarctica serves as a guise for underlying national security concerns. From the Australian perspective, actors who are perceived as going against the status quo in Antarctic Affairs are considered an 'existential threat', something that is potentially harmful to its national interests,<sup>48</sup> whether it be territorial, economic or military. The Chinese state, congruent with its placement in other foreign affairs such as the South China Sea dispute, is considered a threat to Australian interests.

China, a 'securitising actor,' seeks a balance between protection and 'peaceful utilisation' of Antarctica and securing this approach in the international governance of the continent is of the greatest significance to the State. The Antarctic Treaty System (ATS), with its elusive nature, prevents closure to peaceful utilisation, making scientific investigation, research, navigation, and

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<sup>45</sup> Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water, "Australian Antarctic Territory."

<sup>46</sup> Ben Tsamenyi, "Australia and the Convention for the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resources," *Polar Record*, 26, no. 158 (1990): 199.

<sup>47</sup> Rita Floyd, "Securitisation and the function of functional actors," *Critical Studies on Security*, October 18, 2020, accessed on 1 June, 2023, doi:10.1080/21624887.2020.1827590.

<sup>48</sup> Floyd, "Securitisation and the function of functional actors," XXXX.

biological resource development the 'referent object' for China. Therefore, measures like CCAMLR Marine Protection Areas are viewed as an 'existential threat' to Chinese interests, leading to voting blocs with similar interest states like Russia. Nonetheless, China has displayed its commitment to the Antarctic Treaty System and advocates the need to 'protect Antarctica's natural environment and ensure maintenance of the ecological balance and sustainable development in the region'.<sup>49</sup> Australia does not believe this balance is possible. Debate exists over its long-term interests, with much of the Western scholarship arguing China will attempt to make its claim to the continent to raffle its natural resources.

Throughout the securitisation process, the audience, the public, the media and other ATS member states, as well as public opinion (moral audience) often play a crucial part in enabling or disabling this securitisation process. Additionally, a neutral response can be just as central to the securitisation process.

## Methodology

To apply the securitisation framework, diverse primary sources will be used, including the Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty's digitally accessible documents; historical and contemporary Consultative Meeting minutes, legal proposals and implemented frameworks. sources from the digitalised database of the National Archive of Australia, featuring released confidential letters and memos, will be consulted to support a comprehensive historical perspective.<sup>50</sup> These sources give enormous insight into the sharp turn in focus from the Australian Government to the Antarctic particularly from 1911-1933. The Australian Antarctic Division's website, the government agency overseeing the Antarctic program, provides policy documents, scientific publications, expedition reports, and news updates.<sup>51</sup> The Strategic Plan

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<sup>49</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, *Final Report of the Fortieth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting* (Buenos Aires: Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, 2017), 17, accessed on August 1, 2023, [https://documents.ats.aq/atcm40/fr/atcm40\\_fr001\\_e.pdf](https://documents.ats.aq/atcm40/fr/atcm40_fr001_e.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> National Archives of Australia, "Antarctica," National Archives of Australia, accessed August 24, 2023, <https://www.naa.gov.au/learn/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/australia-and-world/antarctica>.

<sup>51</sup> Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water, Australian Antarctic Division "Australian Antarctic Territory."

outlines long-term goals, strategic plans, and priorities, offering a digital overview of Australia's policy direction and objectives in Antarctica. Secondary documents, including publications and research studies, will support the analysis.

The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China's <sup>52</sup> website offers policy documents, reports, and statements, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides insights into China's diplomatic approach. The Polar Research Institute of China (PRIC) contributes to understanding China's Antarctic research <sup>53</sup> ensuring a nuanced analysis beyond a Western-centric perspective. Leveraging these primary sources facilitates an examination of historical context and the state activities' legitimacy.

The audience as well as the media's role in the securitisation process, particularly for Australia, is highly significant. Analysing documents like newspapers and digital articles illustrates a fearful framing toward China, aligning with the nation's stance in other foreign policy discussions on security threats. This unilateral media approach dismisses evidence suggesting that *many* states, including Australia, have national security interests in Antarctica, underneath their scientific programs and environmental protection pursuits for Antarctica's 'wilderness and aesthetic values'. <sup>54</sup> Examining Chinese media is equally crucial. The media is a key element in the securitisation process and in influencing public perceptions of Antarctic security. However, as Antarctica is still largely outside of the realm of public concern, the audience: the public is not always crucial to successful securitisation.

Nonetheless, the Treaty is complex with numerous articles and several dynamic relationships. To create a focused research paper, within the stipulated limitations this thesis has selectively focused on two key players, Australia and China. Acknowledging my Australian bias, a diverse range of sources has been included, however, language constraints contribute to the amplification of this bias. Additionally, the research encounters an imbalance in available

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<sup>52</sup> "Press Room" The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, accessed January 15, 2024, <http://english.scio.gov.cn/>.

<sup>53</sup> Polar Research Institute of China, "Research," Polar Research Institute of China, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://en.pric.org.cn/>.

<sup>54</sup> Dodds, *The Antarctic: A very short introduction*, 7.



materials, with Chinese sources in English affected by translation nuances. In the process of researching Australian and Chinese resources, it is evident that there exists an imbalance in the ratio of available materials for this research. Chinese sources available in English, are also affected by the nuance of translation and as with any political source, must be observed with a critical lens.

## **Thesis Outline**

**Thesis Question:** Using Australia and China as case studies, to what extent has the environmental protection of Antarctica, from the 20th to the 21st century, been influenced by the securitisation of national interests and the institutional weaknesses within the Antarctic Treaty System?

**Chapter One:** Contextual Foundations: Historical Origins of Australian and Chinese Engagement in the Antarctic Treaty System and their Security Interests as a Prelude to Environmental Approaches

**Chapter Two:** Evaluate the influence of the securitisation process by Australia and China in national interests, in addition to the role of science on the development of Antarctic mining regulations.

**Chapter Three:** Analyse the impact of Chinese and Australian measures to secure their economic and political interests and the institutional weakness of the Antarctic Treaty System on the marine protection of Antarctica.

Chapter one will conduct a historical analysis, examining the imperialist roots of Australian Antarctic affairs and the origins of Chinese and Australian entries into the Antarctic Treaty System during the 20th century. This historical perspective will provide a nuanced foundational understanding of both states' economic, territorial, political and resource-related

interests in Antarctica to contextualise securitisation measures undertaken over the 20th and 21st centuries and their impact on Antarctic environmental policies.

Chapter two will illuminate the monumental influence of Australia's attempts to securitise sovereignty claims, military security, and economic interests on the establishment of an Environmental Protocol for Antarctica. Meanwhile, China's pursuit of securing 'rational resource use' and global scientific leadership is exemplified by its dedicated engagement with governance institutions. This pivotal Protocol serves as a preventive measure against mineral resource exploitation on the Antarctic continent.

Chapter three will examine instances of significant political divergence between China and Australia and underscore the ranging influence of national interests on the trajectory of marine conservation in Antarctica. Australia's proposals for Marine Protection Areas showcase how environmental protection is used as a vehicle to secure underlying security interests. The vulnerability of marine conservation is exacerbated by consensus-based decision-making as China uses the foundational ATS principle of 'science' to reject protection attempts and ensure the potential future for rational use.

The securitisation framework and various sources reveal that Antarctica is not merely a scientific playground,<sup>55</sup> but rather a strategic arena where actions serve underlying national security interests, such as maintaining sovereign claims, securing potential military threats, and preventing instability or closure to resource exploitation. This is not to dismiss legitimate environmental and climate concerns or valuable research efforts and contributions of each state. The research will discuss how the ATS framework enables science to serve as a *vehicle* or strategic mechanism enabling the justification of actions that serve underlying national security interests. This analysis will consider the historical progression of Antarctic governance and national interest pursuits of both nations and the impact of such on environmental protection measures in Antarctica.

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<sup>55</sup> Abdel-Motaal, "Averting the Battle for Antarctica"

## Chapter One

### **Contextual Foundations: Historical Origins of Australian and Chinese Engagement in the Antarctic Treaty System and Their Security Interests as a Prelude to Contemporary Environmental Approaches**

Placing the origins of Australian and Chinese involvement with the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) in a historical perspective enables more recent actions regarding environmental policies to be placed in context. The continents' initial exploration serves as a foundation for analysing the Australian entry to Antarctic exploration and the establishment of the Australian Antarctic Territory in 1933. The chapter will expound upon China's 1983 accession to the ATS and discuss the motivations spurring their initial engagement.

### **1911-1914: Early Antarctic Scientific Exploration - Sir Douglas Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition and the Australian Government's Indifference to Antarctic Affairs**

Australian engagement with Antarctic Affairs, changed significantly over the early 20th century, from an indifference to scientific exploration to a comprehensive claim of territorial sovereignty. Although Australia had celebrated Federation Day in 1901 uniting its six colonies under the Commonwealth of Australia, it was still a self-governing Dominion in the British Empire.<sup>56</sup> Australia had sovereign rights over its domestic affairs, however, it was not permitted *complete* reign of its political or foreign policy independence until the Statute of Westminster in 1931, yet Australia only fully embraced this independence in 1942.<sup>57</sup> It did play some part in its approach toward Antarctic affairs and this is revealed in the following analysis. It's crucial to

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<sup>56</sup> Australian Parliament House, "Parliament Explained Federation," Parliament of Australia, July 5, 2022, [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/House\\_of\\_Representatives/About\\_the\\_House\\_News/News/Parliament\\_Explained\\_Federation](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/About_the_House_News/News/Parliament_Explained_Federation).

<sup>57</sup> Australia, Commonwealth of Australia. *Statute of Westminster Adoption Act 1942 (Cth)*, Act, adopted October 9, 1942, XXXX.

note that modern Australia, excluding its rich Indigenous history spanning 60,000 years, was then a young nation somewhat tethered to the United Kingdom.

Since the very beginning of Antarctic exploration, expeditions were rooted within narratives of scientific curiosity, territorial claims and resource exploration. The core of Australia's territorial sovereignty claims to Antarctica, have their foundations in two crucial voyages, the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) of 1911-1914<sup>58</sup> and the British, Australian, and New Zealand Antarctic Expeditions (BANZARE) of 1929-1931,<sup>59</sup> both led by Anglo-Australian Sir Douglas Mawson. It is significant to note, that the first-ever Antarctic voyage by an Australian was indeed a scientific and exploratory venture, driven by the curiosity of one man, geologist Mawson who organised the expedition from scratch without any initial Australian government support. Supported by private donations, the *Aurora* embarked on its journey with a scientific crew comprising biologists, cartographers, geologists, meteorologists, magneticians, and a taxidermist. *The Aurora* charted 2,900 kilometres of previously uncharted waters, while the sledgers from the expedition covered 4,180 kilometres of untouched land.<sup>60</sup> When trouble struck *The Aurora* in Antarctica, J.W. Edgeworth David, a friend of Mawson's from the University of Sydney, appealed to the Prime Minister of Australia, Joseph Cook for funds. David requested in a typewritten note, dated 15th September 1913:

*meet us in this hour of need by placing on the estimates the sum of £5,000 towards the cost of completing the work of the expedition and bringing Dr Lawson and his comrades back to Australia.*<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water, Australian Antarctic Division "Australian Antarctic Territory." AUSTRALASIAN ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 1911–14"

<sup>59</sup> Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water, Australian Antarctic Division "BRITISH, AUSTRALIAN, NEW ZEALAND ANTARCTIC RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS 1929–31 (BANZARE)" May 15, 2016, accessed on August 21, 2023, <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-antarctica/australia-in-antarctica/australian-antarctic-territory/>.

<sup>60</sup> Don Pinnock, *Blue Ice: Travels in Antarctica* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005), 90.

<sup>61</sup> "LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER – COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA," October 22, 1913, 97270, National Archive of Australia, Canberra, <https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/austr>

Only after this final pledge, did Australia provide any funds. Upon return, Mawson proposed the Australian Government purchase the vessel and artefacts from the voyage for a price of £15,000, arguing it would cover any of his debt but also support scientific reports moving forward.<sup>62</sup>

Whilst receiving several enthusiastic receptions, including one from Queen Consort, Alexandra of Denmark, the Australian Government refused to purchase the aforementioned or fund his scientific reporting.<sup>63</sup> The first Australian expedition to Antarctica under Mawson's leadership was indeed scientific and exploratory. However, these sources serve to illustrate that the Australian Government was indifferent to Australian Antarctic affairs and science at this time.

### **1929-1931: Strategic Antarctic Exploration - Shifting Priorities and the Pursuit of Sovereignty**

Fifteen years after Mawson's first exploratory expedition to Antarctica, Australian interests shifted from relative disinterest to actively pursuing exploratory and scientific measures to secure territory amid rising threats. Primary sources originating from the British, Australian, and New Zealand Antarctic Expeditions, under the leadership of Sir Douglas Mawson from 1929-1931, illuminate a shift in the Australian Government strategy when compared to those adopted during the Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911-1914. The Norwegian whaling expeditions in 1928 and the plans of American polar navigator Richard Byrd to fly over the continent were an existential threat to the British imperial prowess, and exerted pressure, prompting them to accelerate their policies on the continent.<sup>64</sup>

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alia-and-world/antarctica/request-further-funds-australasian-antarctic-expedition-letter-prime-minister-joseph-cook.

<sup>62</sup> Professor Edgeworth David, Request for further funds for the Australasian Antarctic Expedition – letter to Prime Minister Joseph Cook, August 15, 1913, 97270, National Archive of Australia, Canberra,

<https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/australia-and-world/antarctica/request-further-funds-australasian-antarctic-expedition-letter-prime-minister-joseph-cook>.

<sup>63</sup> Chris Turney, *1912: The Year the World Discovered Antarctica* (Penguin Random House, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> Stanley Melbourne Bruce and Department of External Affairs, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic," January 2, 1929, 97258, National Archive of Australia, Canberra, <https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/australia-and-world/antarctica/australian-expedition-antarctic-statement-parliament-prime-minister-stanley-bruce>.

In a statement to the Australian Parliament on February 21, 1929, Prime Minister Stanley Bruce outlined a comprehensive range of interests that would be advanced by the ‘scientific’ BANZARE expedition.<sup>65</sup> The statement underscored a newfound willingness for Australian Commonwealth support towards Antarctic exploration. Unlike Mawson’s initial expedition, the BANZARE was to be commissioned by the King, and *The Discovery* would be provided by His Majesty “free of charge.”<sup>66</sup> The expedition was tasked with focusing on the “Antarctic region lying south of Australia, extending from the Ross Sea in the east to Enderby Land in the west.”<sup>67</sup>

In its pursuit of “scientific and meteorological endeavours”, the source clearly emphasises an urgency to cement the referent object; territorial aspirations through the use of hydrographic surveys and the mapping of coastlines.<sup>68</sup> *The Discovery* was to be equipped with aeroplanes and Naval Officers, strictly instructed to conduct inland surveys.<sup>69</sup> The Parliamentary Statement clarified that the BANZARE would be predominantly Australian-led, helmed by a distinguished Australian scientist and explorer, Mawson. However, it also acknowledged the “advantage of the active cooperation of other parts of the British Empire in providing representatives of scientific backgrounds.”<sup>70</sup> This not only established a trend for scientific cooperation but also reaffirmed the expedition's national sentiment and leadership. This intentional special note would later become significant in securitising national sovereignty over the Australian Antarctic Territory (AAT).

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<sup>65</sup> Bruce and Department of External Affairs, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic," January 21, 1929, National Archive of Australia.

<sup>66</sup> Bruce and Department of External Affairs, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic," January 21, 1929, National Archive of Australia.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce and Department of External Affairs, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic," January 21, 1929, National Archive of Australia.

<sup>68</sup> Bruce and Department of External Affairs, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic," January 21, 1929, National Archive of Australia.

<sup>69</sup> Bruce and Department of External Affairs, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic," January 21, 1929, National Archive of Australia.

<sup>70</sup> Bruce and Department of External Affairs, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic," January 21, 1929, National Archive of Australia.



**Figure 2:** Sir Douglas Mawson and BANZARE members with the Union Jack at Proclamation Harbour in Enderby Land, Antarctica. The proclamation claiming possession of the land can be seen in a canister at the foot of the flag pole.<sup>71</sup>

Yet, the most significant expression of territorial ambitions emerges in PM Bruce's confidential sailing orders dated September 12, 1929, issued to Mawson before departure. The directive explicitly instructs him to “plant the British Flag wherever you find it practical to do so”<sup>72</sup> as

<sup>71</sup> "Antarctic explorer and scientist Sir Douglas Mawson and his team raise the Union Jack on Proclamation Island," image, National Archive of Australia, January 13, 1930, <https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/australia-and-world/antarctica/antarctic-explorer-and-scientist-sir-douglas-mawson-and-his-team-raise-union-jack-proclamation-island>.

<sup>72</sup> Stanley Melbourne Bruce, Antarctic expedition – sailing orders for Douglas Mawson from Prime Minister Stanley Bruce, September 18, 1928, 97230, National Archive of Australia, Canberra,

seen in Figure 2, indicating that the BANZARE expedition was a secret securitisation move toward declaring Australian sovereignty amid existing and increasing claims.

Prime Minister Bruce emphasises the vital importance of information on whales and their food supplies, advocating for "measures of control" to preserve them as an enduring source of wealth,<sup>73</sup> showcasing economic interest and a commitment to sustainable resource utilisation. Subsequent chapters will delve into a shift from this perspective toward comprehensive protection, especially in response to emerging perceived threats such as China. Additionally, the Prime Minister's statement alludes to vague economic resource investigations during the expedition, likely referring to mineral exploration, a referent object which later would become a key concern to economic interests.<sup>74</sup> Mawson's 1934 letter acknowledges that the Antarctic coast section between longitudinal coordinates 160° E to 45° E had year-round "free water" securing a "real commercial future",<sup>75</sup> revealing a strategic economic interest in the early 20th century.

Upon the completion of the British, Australian, and New Zealand Antarctic Expeditions expedition in 1931, funding was allocated for the scientific reports of both the Australasian Antarctic Expedition and BANZARE, a stark contrast to the denial of funding for the AAE previously. As a result of the delay in the uptake of independence in its foreign affairs, on June 13, 1933, the Australian Government was given a British Imperial Order to assent to the Australian Antarctic Territories Act of 1933,<sup>76</sup> a territorial sovereign claim to 42% per cent of

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<https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/australia-and-world/antarctica/antarctic-expedition-sailing-orders-douglas-mawson-prime-minister-stanley-bruce>

<sup>73</sup> Bruce and Department of External Affairs, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic," January 21, 1929, National Archive of Australia.

<sup>74</sup> Bruce and Department of External Affairs, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic," January 21, 1929, National Archive of Australia.

<sup>75</sup> Douglas Mawson, Territorial value of Antarctica – letter from Douglas Mawson to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, February 6, 1934, 511013, National Archive of Australia, Canberra, accessed on August 31, 2023, <https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/australia-and-world/antarctica/territorial-value-antarctica-letter-douglas-mawson-secretary-department-external-affairs>.

<sup>76</sup> National Archive of Australia, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic – statement to the Parliament by Prime Minister Stanley Bruce," National Archive of Australia, accessed March 25, 1939, <https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/austr>



the Antarctic continent or 6.5 million square kilometres. The Antarctic Treaty (AT) would later essentially freeze this territorial claim.

The four key sources from 1929-1934, signify a pivotal shift in Australian Antarctic interests compared to the AAE (1911-1914). Initially overlooked, the Australian Government and the British Empire strategically leveraged the independent Australasian Antarctic Expedition, led by Mawson, to foster nationalism and secure future sovereign claims. The subsequent BANZARE revealed clear territorial and strategic ambitions, intertwined with economic and resource interests. Australia's commitment to *measures of control* at this time, through upcoming research will develop into measures of protection. Nonetheless, this connection between research, science, and strategic goals emerged, illustrating the early use of science, in this case, research expeditions as securitisation platforms for exploration and goal consolidation amid the existential threat of Antarctica being 'taken' by other states, putting the British Imperial might and Australian military security at risk.

### **1957-1958: The Genesis and Rise of the Antarctic Treaty System - The International Geophysical Year and Australia's Participation**

The 1930s and 1940s were troubled by a flurry of claims and/or sovereignty performances to the continent by the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Chile, Argentina, Nazi Germany, and Norway. The United States pursued a non-claim approach, ultimately proving crucial to the future political picture of the continent.<sup>77</sup> In 1948, the United States proposed a United Nations Trusteeship, the first multi-lateral approach to essentially shut down the Antarctic politically.<sup>78</sup> The US sought help secure its navigation rights of innocent passage around the Southern Ocean, resolve the territorial disputes between the UK, Argentina

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alia-and-world/antarctica/australian-expedition-antarctic-statement-parliament-prime-minister-st-anley-bruce

<sup>77</sup> Klaus Dodds, *The Antarctic: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 54.

<sup>78</sup> United States of America, "ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONDOMINIUM OVER ANTARCTICA," March 8, 1958, The Office of The Historian, Washington, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v02/d269>.

and Chile and discard the Soviet Union from taking up a more prominent role.<sup>79</sup> However, the USSR took a non-recognition approach to the proposal, while the UK was occupied with the International Court of Justice in 1955, attempting to deny the encroachment of Chile and Argentina on ‘their’ land.<sup>80</sup>

On the back of a failed diplomatic solution, the proposal for a new International Polar Year / International Geophysical Year came in due time. This polar year evolved from the earlier polar years of 1882-1883 and 1932-1933 when the study of the Antarctic in these periods was minor. The Cold War meant that the Arctic was no longer the main focus, as major attention was placed on the Antarctic and Space.<sup>81</sup> The International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957 served as the major platform offering opportunities for collective international cooperation on scientific research in Antarctica - focusing on geophysical and meteorological phenomena. In the 18 months between July 1957 and December 1958, the Special Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) was formed with 67 countries including Australia, committed to global scientific investigation on Antarctica.<sup>82</sup> It was decided the IGY would be extended for another year. Between June 1958 and October 1959, 60 preliminary meetings were held to create a basic negotiating framework for the governance of Antarctica.<sup>83</sup> The United States and the Soviet Union both reiterated their rights for future claims, yet refused to recognise any claims.<sup>84</sup> All disagreements by the seven claimant states which included Australia, concerned the threat to rights to the land and militarisation.

On the 1st of December, a proposal had been finalised and the Antarctic Treaty was signed with the core principles of peace, non-militarisation, scientific research and international

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<sup>79</sup> Klaus Dodds, *The Antarctic: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 56.

<sup>80</sup> Klaus Dodds, *The Antarctic: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 55.

<sup>81</sup> Klaus Dodds, *The Antarctic: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 58.

<sup>82</sup> Klaus Dodds, *The Antarctic: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 57.

<sup>83</sup> John Hanessian, The Antarctic Treaty, May 3, 1960, Institute of Current World Affairs, Washington, <https://www.icwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/JH-15.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup> Klaus Dodds, *The Antarctic: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 61.

cooperation. While the Treaty is in force, no further territorial claims will be accepted and previously existing claims cannot be strengthened.<sup>85</sup> Science and peace are inextricable structural elements of the ATS and while the AT is vital for safeguarding Antarctica as a distinctive and valuable area for the well-being of both humanity and the planet, its governance framework did *not* arise with a focus on environmental protection. Any environmentally protective measures that initially emerged out of the ATS, were by-products of the aim to maintain the status quo during the Cold War epoch through non-militarisation, non-politicisation and non-commercialisation of the land. Consequently, as the world has transitioned beyond the Cold War, and the imperative to address climate change has taken centre stage, the ATS faces various institutional weaknesses that jeopardise the effective implementation of evolving environmental policies.

Ultimately, the ATS aims to maintain peace through the absence of military conflict and the preservation of the status quo, however, this comes with complications in progressing the environmental protection of the continent, an issue that will continue to be explored in the following chapters. The expansion of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Party list to 27 Non-Consultative Parties and 29 Consultative Parties<sup>86</sup> does not exactly correlate to the progression of policies in the direction of increased environmental protection. This is a consequence of the defacto veto power of each Consultative Party state.<sup>87</sup> As the unanimous agreement is often required for decision-making, the expansion of the ATS party list thus results in difficulty in creating regulatory changes or the sanctioning of non-compliance.<sup>88</sup> An agreed minimum level of scientific research is also not required. Changes to membership require unanimous voting - this ultimately protects states from having their membership revoked or suspended when they fail to comply with the Treaty. The unanimous voting structure protects states however ultimately protects their status revoked or suspended<sup>89</sup> - creating a problem when faced with states not complying. Understanding the historical context of the Antarctic Treaty's emergence reveals that it was not initially designed with environmental protection in mind,

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<sup>85</sup> Klaus Dodds, *The Antarctic: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 61.

<sup>86</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Parties"

<sup>87</sup> Molenaar, "Participation in the Antarctic Treaty,"

<sup>88</sup> Molenaar, "Participation in the Antarctic Treaty,"

<sup>89</sup> Molenaar, "Participation in the Antarctic Treaty,"

contributing to its current challenges, as it competes to secure national interests from threats through its institutional weakness or environmental protection measures.

### **1970s-2000s: Chinese Entry into Antarctic Affairs, the Concept of Sustainable Use, and Contemporary Approaches by Australia and China**

Unlike Australia, China faced internal complications from the late 19th to the late 20th century, leading to its absence in South Polar affairs until the late 1970s. While European colonial powers explored Antarctica during the 'Heroic Age' (late 19th to early 20th century)<sup>90</sup>, China grappled with colonial threats, the Opium Wars, internal conflicts, addiction, and 'unequal treaties,'<sup>91</sup> conceding sovereignty rights. Sir Douglas Mawson's 1911 Antarctic expedition coincided with the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China. From 1927-1949, as Australia conducted imperial expeditions, China experienced the Civil War, followed by the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) during WW2.<sup>92</sup> The Chinese Communist Party emerged in 1949, amid the ideological Cold War, with the U.S. eager to prevent its extension to the South Pole. China initially intended to join the International Geophysical Year convention in 1958-1959, however, placed its participation contingent on the exclusion of the renegade province, Taiwan.<sup>93</sup> The inclusion of Taiwan as a separate entity by the US, was viewed as a breach of Chinese sovereignty.<sup>94</sup> Consequently, China was not involved in establishing the Antarctic Treaty System in 1959.

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<sup>90</sup> Dr. Nengye Liu, "Defining the "Rise" of China in Antarctica," *Australian Outlook* (blog), *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, January 24, 2019, accessed 15 October 2023, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/defining-rise-china-antarctica/>.

<sup>91</sup> "The Practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region," The State Council of the People's Republic of China, June 2014, accessed 23 November, 2023, [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2014/08/23/content\\_281474982986578.htm](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/08/23/content_281474982986578.htm).

<sup>92</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Second Sino-Japanese War | Summary, Combatants, Facts, & Map," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Second-Sino-Japanese-War>.

<sup>93</sup> Roger D. Launius, James Rodger Fleming, and David H. DeVorkin, *Globalizing Polar Science* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 143.

<sup>94</sup> Zuoyue Wang and Jiuchen Zhang, *Globalizing Polar Science*, ed. Roger D. Launius, James Rodger Fleming, and David H. DeVorkin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), XXXX.

China's engagement with Antarctica saw a transformation following the normalisation of diplomatic relations with the United States. Triggered by the Cultural Revolution's impact (1966-1976) and external pressures, China embraced an open-door policy, liberalising markets, fostering foreign trade, and attracting investments.<sup>95</sup> This policy not only revitalised China's diplomatic ties with the U.S. after WWII but also positioned it as a crucial intermediary between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.<sup>96</sup> China was a large early critic of the Treaty - citing a lack of legitimacy, transparency and openness. China and India had expressed concerns about the Treaty giving preference to the original treaty signatories<sup>97</sup> and as a rapidly developing country at this time and had apprehensions about potential restrictions as threats to its access to resources. Hence, the revitalisation of China hinged on scientific development, embodying a techno-nationalist sentiment rooted in preventing historical setbacks when confronted by more technologically advanced nations.<sup>98</sup> Subsequently, recognising the imperative to achieve its foreign policy objectives, China strategically securitised its future resource-related interests by integrating itself into the U.S.-led international system, a move that included a later move to actively participate in the Antarctic Treaty System.

China's developments regarding Antarctica should also be situated within the state's larger social and economic goals. Coined 'Five Year Plans', though referred to as guidelines by China, since the 1980s have indicated scientific advancement as having a pivotal role in their economic and political growth within the international system.<sup>99</sup> Chinese accession to the Antarctic Treaty in 1983, coincided with the Sixth Plan of 1981–1985, whereby the People's Republic of China stipulated the significance of;

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<sup>95</sup> Guocang Huan, "CHINA'S OPEN DOOR POLICY, 1978-1984," *Journal of International Affairs* 39, no. 2 (1986):1-2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24356571>.

<sup>96</sup> Huan, "CHINA'S OPEN DOOR POLICY, 1978-1984," 1-2.

<sup>97</sup> Jiang, "China's Antarctic ambitions – and their implications for Australia," 3.

<sup>98</sup> Andrew B. Kennedy, "Red Dragon Green Energy" (Crawford School of Economics and Government, The Australian National University, 2011), 2, [https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/25848/2/01\\_Kennedy\\_Red\\_Dragon\\_Green\\_Energy:\\_2011.pdf](https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/25848/2/01_Kennedy_Red_Dragon_Green_Energy:_2011.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> "The 6th Five-Year Plan (1981-1985) -- china.org.cn," China.org.cn, accessed March 16, 2023, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/MATERIAL/157619.htm>.

promot[ing] the application of new technologies, and to strenuously develop education, science and culture to accelerate the construction of an ideological and material civilisation.<sup>100</sup>

Coinciding with the scientific values embedded within their five-year plans, China first sought to maintain consultative status in 1983, 23 years following Australia,<sup>101</sup> realising that the only way to secure these interests was through compromise and integration within the governing system. Before China eventually obtained consultative status on the 7th of October 1985, China maintained an observer status in the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings.<sup>102</sup> To become a consultative party, China abided by Art. IX.2, demonstrating their interest in Antarctica by “conducting substantial research activity there”.<sup>103</sup> Australia played a crucial role in China's accession to the treaty by hosting the first group of Chinese scientists to travel to East Antarctica to conduct research in the early 1980s.<sup>104</sup> With the demonstration of scientific contribution being the token of recognition, China did so with incredible speed, acquiring consultative status in 1985, within two years of ratifying the treaty. This new phase would mark the beginning of Chinese activity in Antarctica and Antarctic affairs.

China's first Antarctic Research Station, the Great Wall Station, was completed in 1985 on King George Island toward the northern cape of Antarctica. China now has 4 research stations; Zhongshan station (1989), Kulum Station (2009), and Taishan (2014).<sup>105</sup> Chinese advancements in Antarctic science shifted from the establishment of research stations, toward research following the 1990s - while its funding also increased from “under US\$2 million in 2010 to more than US\$5 million in 2019”.<sup>106</sup> A summary submitted by China to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in 2017, details some of the nation's major research achievements by the Polar Research Institute of China Foundation established in 1989, these included 240 study reports, 6 research books and 579 papers published between 2011-2016, on field

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<sup>100</sup> "The 6th Five-Year Plan (1981-1985) -- china.org.cn."

<sup>101</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Parties"

<sup>102</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Parties"

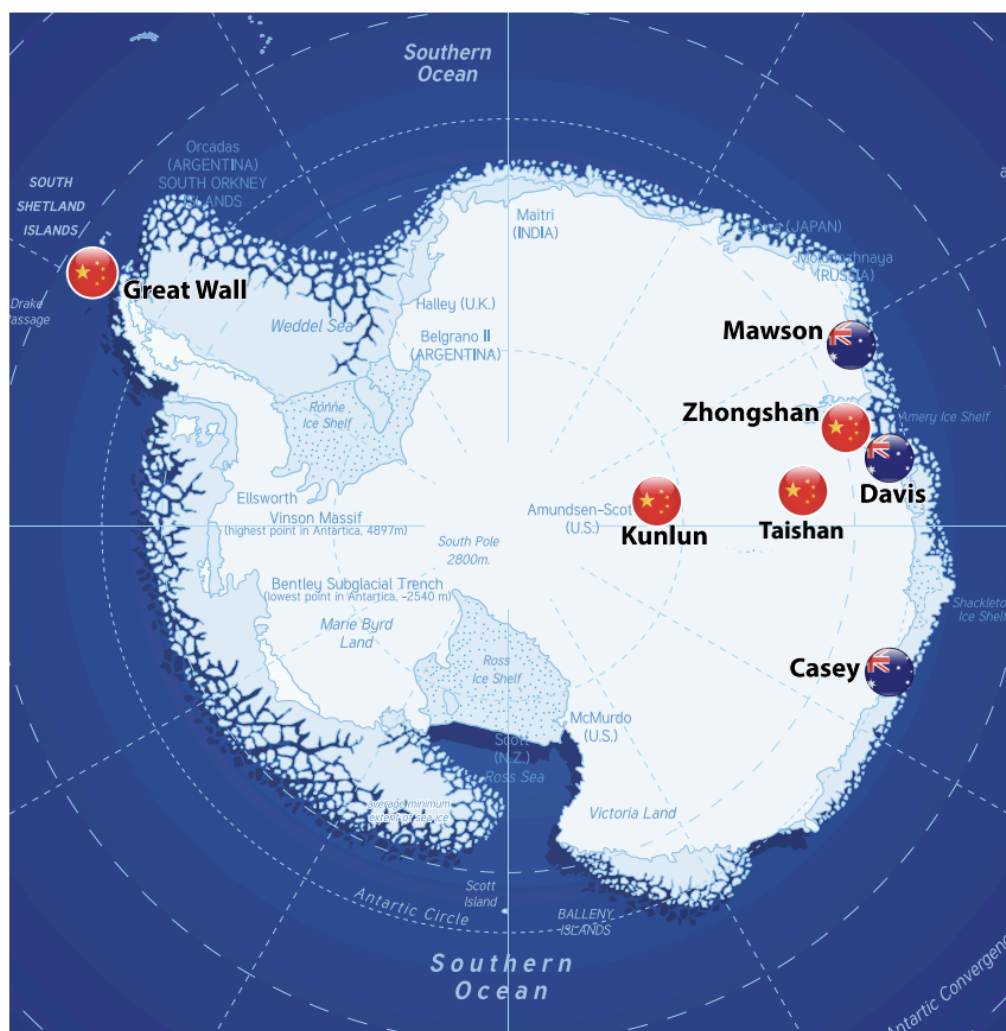
<sup>103</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Parties"

<sup>104</sup> Jiang, "China's Antarctic ambitions – and their implications for Australia,"

<sup>105</sup> Anthony Bergin and Tony Press, *CHINA IN THE ANTARCTIC TREATY SYSTEM* (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020), 9-12, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25131.5>.

<sup>106</sup> Jiang, "China's Antarctic ambitions – and their implications for Australia,"

observation data, bottom current data, paleoclimatic changes, ice-sheet and space science.<sup>107</sup> China notes their contributions are for “decision-making in climate security, climate change diplomacy and relevant international conventions concerning the polar area.”<sup>108</sup>



**Figure 3:** A map illustrating the locations of current Chinese and Australian Research Stations.

<sup>107</sup> People's Republic of China, "Summary of the major research achievements of Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Environment Comprehensive Investigation & Assessment Program for the past five years since its implementation," April 21, 2017, IP082, Antarctic Treaty System, <https://www.ats.aq/devAS/Meetings/DocDatabase?lang=e>.

<sup>108</sup> People's Republic of China, "Summary of the major research achievements of Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Environment Comprehensive Investigation & Assessment Program for the past five years since its implementation," April 21, 2017, IP082.

From the 1990s onward, actively participating in conservation and environmental protection initiatives, alongside endorsing international agreements, became a crucial strategy for China to securitise its influence on Antarctic policy. While China has demonstrated cooperation by ratifying numerous protocols and producing substantial scientific research, questions persist regarding the underlying agenda of 'sustainable use.' On the 9th of October 1991, during the opening address at the initial meeting after the adoption of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (The Environmental Protocol), which prohibited mining, Sun Lin, the Head of the Chinese Delegation, made statements raising inquiries on their long-term commitment to the protocols:

Sound protection of the Antarctic environment aims at using Antarctica for the benefit of mankind. That is to say, a sustainable use of Antarctica for the well-being of mankind depends on a good job of protecting the Antarctic environment. The Protocol is seeking a better balance between these two objectives. <sup>109</sup>

A clear link is established between using science and securitizing the referent object, sustainable use. Explored later in the research, this connection often hinders the adoption of new environmental measures.

In 2017, the nation hosted the 40th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in Beijing and released its 2017 White Paper. The keynote speech given by His Excellency Mr Zhang Yesui provides the clearest insight yet from the Chinese Government into their involvement with the continent. The Chair's summary "Our Antarctica: Protection and Utilisation", details three core focuses on climate change and marine pollution as key environmental concerns, while exemplifying the "need to protect Antarctica's natural environment and ensure maintenance of the ecological balance and sustainable development in the region." <sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Sun Li, "Opening Address by Sun Lin, Head of the Chinese Delegation at the 16th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting," in *ATCM XVI*(Buenos Aires: Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, 1991), XXXX, [https://documents.ats.aq/ATCM16/ip/ATCM16\\_ip061\\_e.pdf](https://documents.ats.aq/ATCM16/ip/ATCM16_ip061_e.pdf).

<sup>110</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, *Final Report of the Fortieth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting*, 17.



The concept of "utilisation" can include scientific investigation, research, navigation, bioprospecting, iceberg harvesting, non-living resources exploration and extraction and fishing.

<sup>111</sup> Chinese Antarctic policy from publicly available sources is limited, however, the repeated ambiguity in addresses to the ATCM in 1991 and 2017 has raised questions by Australia and the media about the state's intentions. China's substantial investment in infrastructure and transportation over the past decade has raised concerns in both media and political circles. <sup>112</sup>A notable development in 2023 was the establishment of two ground satellite stations at Zhongshan Station, supporting China's Global Navigation Satellite System known as BeiDou. <sup>113</sup> This move has been positioned as a potential rival to the US-led GPS. State media outlet Global Times CN, on February 2, 2023, highlighted the system's capabilities for marine resource exploitation, and the development of the marine economy. <sup>114</sup> While dual-use applications fall within the bounds of the Antarctic Treaty, China faces persistent negative coverage, despite similar initiatives by other nations like the US and Norway.

Contrastingly, Australia's policy toward Antarctica is akin to a description made by Hans Morgenthau; "A nation whose foreign policy tends toward keeping power and not toward changing the distribution of power in its favour pursues a policy of the status quo". <sup>115</sup> Following a shift in the balance of power after the entry of Brazil (1983), India (1983) and China (1985) into the ATS, Australia must now compete with States such as China, with potential long-term differing interests. Increased 'scientific' funding <sup>116</sup> is another display of Australia attempting to

<sup>111</sup> Rob Curtin, et al. "Resources in Antarctica: With the World's dwindling natural resources, is there a chance for exploitation in Antarctica?" (Postgraduate Certificate in Antarctic Studies, University of Canterbury, 2004), 1, <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/items/4b62da0f-f59f-4c1b-8489-98e7cfad3d92>.

<sup>112</sup> Jiang, "China's Antarctic ambitions – and their implications for Australia," 2.

<sup>113</sup> Jiang, "China's Antarctic ambitions – and their implications for Australia," 2.

<sup>114</sup> Fan Wei, "China to build satellite ground station in Antarctica for ocean observation," *China Global Times*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202302/1284719.shtml>.

<sup>115</sup> Marco Genovesi, "Australia's Key Role in Antarctica, in Defence of Its Environment," *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/australias-key-role-antarctica-defence-its-environment-23529>.

<sup>116</sup> 9 News, "'Eyes on Antarctica': PM unveils \$800 million package to bolster Australia's Antarctic claims," *9 News*, February 22, 2023, <https://www.9news.com.au/national/australia-antarctica-program-800-million-dollar-funding-package-bolsters-strategic-claims/>.

secure threats such as China to the balance of power. China's increased demonstration of soft power within Antarctic Affairs will continue to create a competitive dynamic for Australia which aims to use environmental protection as a method to secure the balance of power and their territorial claims.

## **Conclusion**

The historical roots of Australia's Antarctic involvement and analysis of China's and Australia's role in the ATS, lays the foundation for the following chapters. The Australian government initially exhibited limited enthusiasm for actively supporting the groundbreaking scientific expedition of Douglas Mawson in 1911. It wasn't until a surge of sovereignty assertions, that Australia's policies shifted from passive to active. Australia's main aim is to keep the continent de-militarised to protect its borders and secure its dormant claim should the ATS ever collapse. After the 1930s, endorsing scientific and eventually environmentally protective measures became crucial for securitising this referent object and maintaining the status quo that safeguards Australia's interests against 'threatening' states. China, as a securitising actor, strategically integrated into Antarctic governance mechanisms to advance its goals of rational resource use and geopolitical influence to safeguard against existential threats, particularly environmental policies that could restrict its access to the continent. As the ATS emerged mainly as a diplomatic instrument, it has had to adapt to address climate change concerns facing challenges as tries to balance the status quo, interests of emerging states like China and environmental protection amidst institutional weaknesses.

## Chapter Two

**Evaluate the influence of the securitisation process by Australia and China in national interests, in addition to the role of science, in the development of Antarctic mining regulations.**

There is no justification for the exploitation of Antarctica, except in terms of human greed. For we do not need Antarctica's supposed resources – we merely desire them to prolong a way of life which must, ultimately, come to terms with its own bankruptcy <sup>117</sup>

The opening quote sets the stage for the upcoming chapter, tracing Antarctic mineral resource policy evolution through key agreements: The Convention for the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (1988) and the Environmental Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty (1998). The inclination for mineral extraction stems not from necessity but from human curiosity and short-term economic interests, posing risks amid a looming climate crisis. Case studies will spotlight the securitisation of national strategic interests, by Australia and China, revealing the impact of these considerations on Antarctic policies. Spanning historical and contemporary contexts, the chapter explores the nexus of economic, geopolitical, and environmental factors in shaping Antarctic policies, highlighting inherent weaknesses and the media's role. Ultimately, historical policies reflect a delicate balance between scientific pursuits, national security, and environmental consciousness.

### **1970s: Shifting Landscapes and the Emergence of the Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities**

The Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (CRAMRA) is a key example of historical divergence between the respective approaches of Australia and China

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<sup>117</sup> Curtin, "Resources in Antarctica: With the World's Dwindling Natural Resources, Is There a Chance for Exploitation in Antarctica?," 1.

in securing their national interests in Antarctica. In the early 1970s, international demand for minerals inflated as prices surged and mineral resource supplies in Russia and South Africa became unstable.<sup>118</sup> The Antarctic Treaty, established in 1959, served as the inaugural modern arms control treaty; nevertheless, its original design did not envision it to be an instrument for environmental protection.<sup>119</sup> Consequently, the unanswered question of mineral resource extraction left the continent vulnerable to exploitation. Before the late 20th century, the threat of mineral exploitation was low, mostly due to the extreme conditions of the continent which in practice, deferred the extraction of minerals.

Nevertheless, with the destabilisation of the geopolitical landscape, an economy experiencing stagflation, and advancements in technology, the escalating risk of a mineral race destabilizing the continent became a significant concern for the emerging hegemon, the United States. The 7 Consultative Parties of the Antarctica Treaty including Australia understood that they were “better off with a mineral agreement than without one”,<sup>120</sup> as they knew that its absence would inevitably lead to instability and the possible collapse of the Antarctica Treaty System which would threaten their territorial claim and economic positioning for the trade of mineral resources from the homeland. A resource agreement was imperative to ensure the ongoing viability of the ATS amid this shifting geopolitical landscape.

The 63-page Convention sought to provide a framework which balanced mineral resource extraction with environmental management with a complex set of assessment procedures as indicated by Appendix D. Mineral resources like the potential deposits in Antarctica, as seen in Figure 5, are defined as “all non-living natural non-renewable resources, including fossil fuels,

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<sup>118</sup> Stephen Malherbe, *A Perspective on the South African Mining Industry in the 21st Century* (Cape Town: Graduate School of Business of the University of Cape Town, February 2000), 23, <https://www.grafiati.com/en/>.

<sup>119</sup> Evan Bloom, "The History, Vision Behind and Impact of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty," May 30, 2016, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/e/oes/rls/remarks/2016/258286.htm>.

<sup>120</sup> United States. Congress. Office of Technology Assessment., *Polar prospects: A minerals treaty for Antarctica*. (Washington, DC: Congress of the United States Office of Technology Assessment, 1989), 63.

metallic and non-metallic minerals”<sup>121</sup> while activities surrounding this included “prospecting, exploration or development”<sup>122</sup>. The Convention noted the possibility of exploitable minerals in the Antarctic, yet also the potential adverse effects on the atmospheric, terrestrial, marine, biological, scientific, aesthetic features and historical significance of the continent.<sup>123</sup> The Convention’s definitions of 'adequate,' 'significant,' and 'adverse' effects on the environment were unclear.

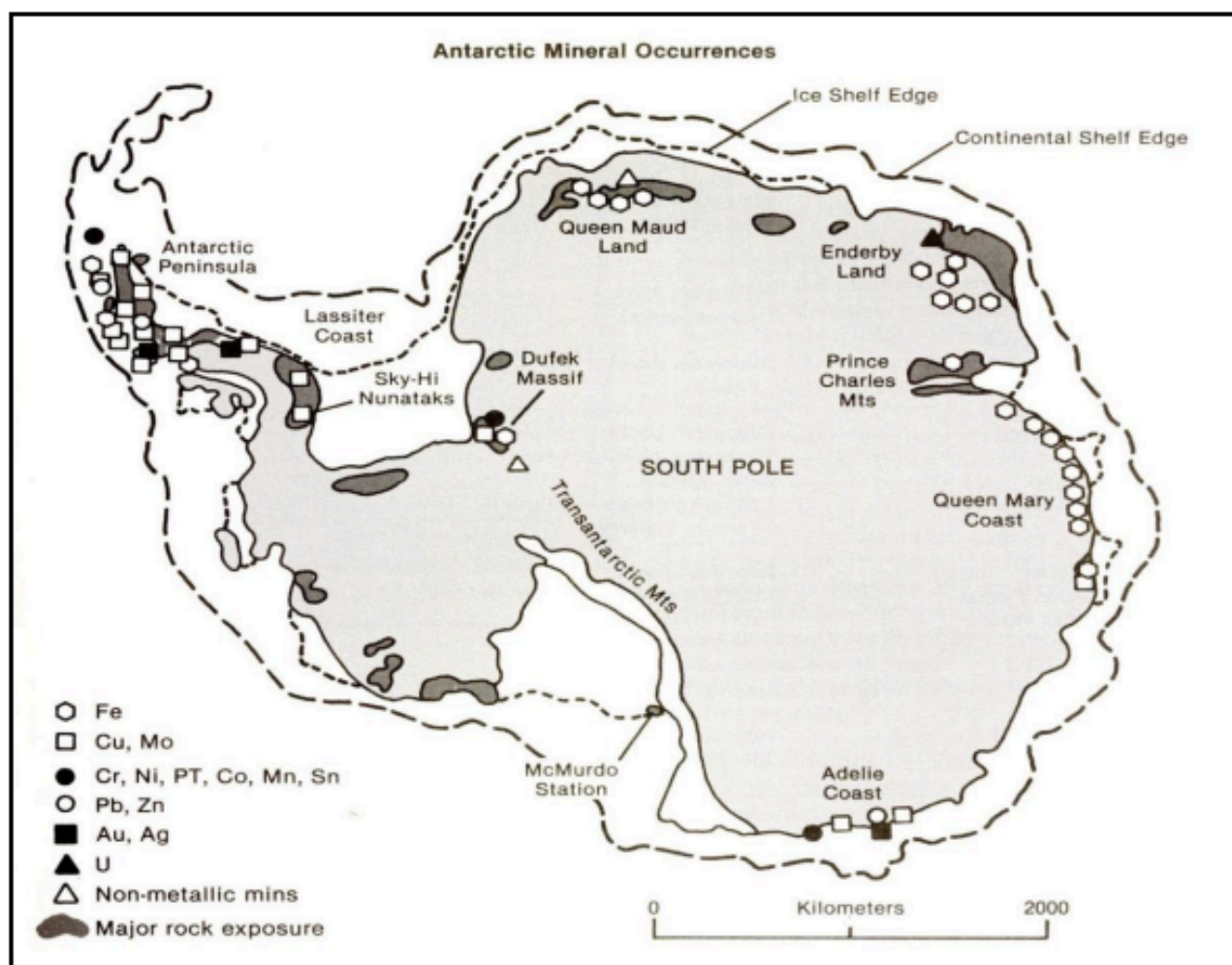


Figure 5: Potential mineral resource deposits in Antarctica.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Antarctic Treaty System. *Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities*, Convention, 3 accessed July 5, 2023, [https://documents.ats.aq/recatt/att311\\_e.pdf](https://documents.ats.aq/recatt/att311_e.pdf).

<sup>122</sup> *Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities*, 3.

<sup>123</sup> *Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities*, 1.

<sup>124</sup> Curtain, Rob. "Mineral Resources in Antarctica." Image. UC Research Depository. Accessed January 15, 2024.

### **1981-1989: China's Integration into the Antarctic Treaty System Amidst Mineral Discussions and Australia's Changing Approach to the Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities**

The 1980s were a transformative period with several securitisation processes at play greatly shaping Antarctic environmental governance. As China ventured into Antarctic affairs amid mineral discussions and geopolitical complexities, Australia navigated strategic shifts. Australia sought to mitigate the risk of economic loss stemming from potential mining ventures by strategically advocating for an environmental regime. This proactive approach aimed to restrict mineral exploitation on the continent, thereby safeguarding both domestic exports and Australia's territorial claims in Antarctica.

In 1981, prompted by a proposal from the US, the Consultative Parties decided that before any identification or exploratory mineral measures, negotiations must be conducted to establish a comprehensive minerals regime.<sup>125</sup> In 1982, China, among other nations, supported the Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities. In 1983, Chinese scientists attended an Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting as a Non-Consultative Party delegation.<sup>126</sup> By 1984, China launched its first major research expedition, constructing a research station to bolster its bid for full membership in the Antarctica Treaty System.<sup>127</sup> Some Chinese scholars view this integration as supporting collective governance and rejecting territorial claims,<sup>128</sup> while others see it as a strategic securitisation move for accessing Antarctica's nonliving resources. Limited primary source data from the Chinese Government

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<https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/9f684387-1a2b-4ea7-83d4-c8ea8af9ed8b/content>.

<sup>125</sup> Rob Curtin, "Resources in Antarctica: With the World's Dwindling Natural Resources, Is There a Chance for Exploitation in Antarctica?" (Postgraduate Certificate in Antarctic Studies, University of Canterbury, 2004), 35,

<https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/items/4b62da0f-f59f-4c1b-8489-98e7cfad3d92>.

<sup>126</sup> Jonathan Harrington, "China in Antarctica: A History.," *Southeast Review of Asian Studies*, January 1, 2015.

<sup>127</sup> Harrington, "China in Antarctica: A History."

<sup>128</sup> Wu Sancheng, "Antarctic Sovereignty Dispute And Its Future Prospects," *Journal Of Hengyang Normal University, Sociology* 4 (1991): 34-40.

during this time makes it challenging to assess their perspective, however, their actions mirror the rational use cases later supported by the state. China was among many nations in support of the convention and did not face fierce criticism for this. Nonetheless, China's early engagement with environmental policy frameworks, such as the Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities, reflected its security concerns over resources and territorial ambitions, which had emerged during mining discussions in the 1970s and 80s.

For six years, negotiations were conducted until a formal draft legal proposal for mining activity was finalised and ready for signature on June 22, 1998, in New Zealand. The adoption of the proposal however wouldn't bind a state to its provisions. At the 12th Special ATCM, on the 23rd of May 1988, Australia had indicated its desire to pursue an anti-subsidy clause and royalties for any mining <sup>129</sup> within its claimed territorial boundaries despite, Article IV. 2 of the Antarctic Treaty stipulating no acts shall support a claim to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica. <sup>130</sup> China argued Australia's attempt at gaining royalties confirms de facto sovereign recognition. <sup>131</sup> At several points, Australia indicated its desire for economic compensation for any mineral on 'their' land however with good reason, the nation was concerned that this would cause diplomatic isolation, particularly with the United Kingdom and the United States.

Consequently, by June 2nd 1988, Australia followed suit, along with China, in signing the CRAMRA. This unity was short-lived, as the initial diplomatic harmony of the Convention unravelled swiftly. After the draft proposal was signed in June 1988, the convention's official ratification period remained open for signatures until November 1989. <sup>132</sup> Shortly following the agreement in June, Australia reversed its stance on the draft signature, opting instead to pursue what would become the country's most important imprint on the future of Antarctic governance. In a document dated April 27, 1989, Paul Keating wrote to Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke and emphasised economic concerns over the major deficiencies in respect of revenue and

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<sup>129</sup> Ben Tsamenyi, "Australia and the Convention for the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resources," *Polar Record*, 26, no. 158 (1990): 199.

<sup>130</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 4.

<sup>131</sup> Lan Mingliang, "Issues of Antarctic Law," *Journal of Xibei University: Philosophy and Social Science* 2 (1980): 110-115.

<sup>132</sup> Jackson, "Who Saved Antarctica? : Australia and Heroic Antarctic Diplomacy," 75.

subsidies.<sup>133</sup> Writing to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia Gareth Evans, Keating again expressed:

‘Australia should [not] sign the Convention until we attempt further to negotiate provisions that better protect our national interest...[S]ignature would mean we would, in effect, concede our economic claims over Antarctica for virtually nothing, forfeiting our sovereignty over Antarctica and opening up the possibility of subsidized production competing with Australian mineral producers...’<sup>134</sup>

The two primary sources indicate the referent object; Australia’s desire for mining royalties was existentially threatened by the proposed convention. Consequently, an extraordinary measure was undertaken to begin this securitisation process despite knowing it would provoke international outrage. Prime Minister Bob Hawke spearheaded a domestic and international campaign against the convention's ratification, creating intense diplomatic tension with the majority of ATS parties, notably the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. The United States argued that Australia’s resistance was “motivated solely in response to domestic concerns”.<sup>135</sup> To counter claims of dissatisfaction with rights under CRAMRA, Australia's Cabinet amended its policy statement, removing any mention of benefits from mining or oil drilling in Antarctic resources.<sup>136</sup> One week following the amendment, in a public announcement, Prime Minister Hawke declared Australia's first Ambassador for the Environment, Sir Ninian Stephen and publicly addressed various environmental concerns; greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity, re-forestation and phasing out ozone-depleting

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<sup>133</sup> Tsamenyi, "Australia and the Convention for the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resources," 198.

<sup>134</sup> Tsamenyi, "Australia and the Convention for the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resources," 197.

<sup>135</sup> Andrew Jackson, "Who Saved Antarctica? : Australia and Heroic Antarctic Diplomacy" (University of Tasmania, 2019), 183, [https://figshare.utas.edu.au/articles/thesis/Who\\_saved\\_Antarctica\\_Australia\\_and\\_heroic\\_Antarctic\\_diplomacy/23238578](https://figshare.utas.edu.au/articles/thesis/Who_saved_Antarctica_Australia_and_heroic_Antarctic_diplomacy/23238578).[https://figshare.utas.edu.au/articles/thesis/Who\\_saved\\_Antarctica\\_Australia\\_and\\_heroic\\_Antarctic\\_diplomacy/23238578](https://figshare.utas.edu.au/articles/thesis/Who_saved_Antarctica_Australia_and_heroic_Antarctic_diplomacy/23238578)

<sup>136</sup> Jackson, "Who Saved Antarctica? : Australia and Heroic Antarctic Diplomacy," 108.



chlorofluorocarbons, as well as the commitment to keep Antarctica "free from mining."<sup>137</sup> These two acts play a crucial role in the 'speech act,' whereby formulating the most 'righteous' motive for the conventions rejection was essential for diplomatic and public support. Overtly presenting the referent object; the underlying economic concerns wouldn't have effectively served Australia well. Australia securitised against an existential threat to its economic and territorial security through the vehicle of an environmental measure. This would evolve to become the *greatest* measure of environmental protection for the continent yet.

While the rejection of the convention was undoubtedly driven by economic and territorial concerns, appeasing a growing environmentally conscious public was also crucial. Additionally, Hawkes's extensive public statement does also indicates a genuine turn in Australian environmental policies. Keating wrote to Hawke that with a 'major claim' over the continent, Australia should take a leadership role in protecting the "wilderness for future generations", due to its "enormous ecological importance".<sup>138</sup> He referenced similar initiatives in Tasmania, Kakadu, and Fraser Island.<sup>139</sup> The Australian Government was likely aware that the establishment of a world park was unlikely, but the electoral advantage of advocating for this or similar, in the face of an increasingly environmentally-conscious Australian public was highly pragmatic.<sup>140</sup> Between June 1988 and May 1989, Australia received thousands of public objections urging against signing the convention, illustrating the key role of the audience and moral audience (public opinion) in the securitisation process.<sup>141</sup> Concerns were further prompted by the Argentinan naval ship *Bahia Paraiso's* 640,000L fuel spill in Antarctic waters

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<sup>137</sup> Speech by the Prime Minister Launch of Statement of the Environment Wentworth, NSW 20 July 1989, July 20, 1989, 7687, PM Transcripts - Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-7687>.

<sup>138</sup> Paul Keating, Letter to the Prime Minister, July 27, 1989, SPARC, Hobart, <https://sparc.utas.edu.au/uploads/r/antarctic-documents-database/1/a/8/1a8e0176e38b618abd8709940f6dfbfa5c03ea1e1dbf0cd55eea0cb847398261/b90f78b2-0816-4e59-b181-47dbddeb98af-AU-ATADD-1-BB-AU-196.pdf?token=1d1e6e25c255644ab1ff509f435d331bf2cd8d3956200084ff1f56c9c0e9d757>.

<sup>139</sup> Keating, Letter to the Prime Minister, July 27, 1989.

<sup>140</sup> Tsamenyi, "Australia and the Convention for the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resources," 198.

<sup>141</sup> Tsamenyi, "Australia and the Convention for the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resources," 198.

in January 1989<sup>142</sup> and disastrous the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in March 1989 which saw:

Penguins... emerging from the icy depths covered in oil. Their natural oil glands clogged, they are unable to function and will die.<sup>143</sup>

The media was another ‘audience’ member crucial to Australia’s decision not to sign the Convention. Bob Hawke argued the Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities provided “a dangerous illusion of environment protection”.<sup>144</sup> Many states argued that a complete ban on mining was simply impossible and that the renegade nation was attempting an unachievable utopia.<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless, Australia, garnered the support of France and in November 1989, when the proposal closed for signature, fervently refused to agree to it. A domino effect occurred with Japan & New Zealand following suit.<sup>146</sup> Australia indicated that finding a balance between the two core opposing realities; use and protection, as China advocates for now, would be difficult, if not unachievable, and instead of the mercy waters of the CRAMRA, sought a stern, clear-cut governance framework on permitted or forbidden activities. Despite, underlying strategic interests, this brave securitisation move was one of the most crucial steps in history so far for Antarctic environmental protection.

### **1989-1991: Australian Advocacy Of A New Method Of Mineral Resource Governance: The Protocol On The Environmental Protection To The Antarctic Treaty**

Australia not only played a crucial role in rejecting the potentially environmentally catastrophic Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities but also took a lead in advocating for a new environmental governance solution as this was crucial to

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<sup>142</sup> James F. Smith, " Struggling to Protect ‘The Ice’ : Tourism and even scientific research are threatening Antarctica’s pristine beauty. But the push is on to preserve this last untainted laboratory.," *LA Times*, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-04-05-mn-986-story.html>.

<sup>143</sup> Jiang, “China’s Antarctic Ambitions - and Their Implications for Australia.”

<sup>144</sup> Jackson, "Who Saved Antarctica?: Australia and Heroic Antarctic Diplomacy," 138.

<sup>145</sup> Jackson, "Who Saved Antarctica?: Australia and Heroic Antarctic Diplomacy," 97.

<sup>146</sup> Jackson, "Who Saved Antarctica?: Australia and Heroic Antarctic Diplomacy," 318.

completing the securitisation process. The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in 1989 led to Special Consultative Meetings, resulting in an 8-year process of ratification, acceptance and accession to the Environmental Protocol by all the states which were Consultative Parties (in 1991).<sup>147</sup>

In July 1991, Australian Prime Minister Robert Hawke issued a statement offering insights into Australia's role in navigating disagreements over the draft environmental protocol. The United States, initially a staunch supporter, surprised delegates in June 1991 by withholding agreement, insisting on the ability to unilaterally exit the accord after 50 years.<sup>148</sup> Previously the mining ban could be lifted 50 years following its entry into force, with the unanimous approval of *all* 26 full voting rights consultative members of the treaty.<sup>149</sup> Hawke successfully persuaded President Bush to agree on July 1, 1991, following compromises.<sup>150</sup> After compromises with the US, following 50 years (2048), mining can only be permitted for nations if any wish to do so, *if a majority* of all Antarctic Treaty Parties, including three-quarters of the Consultative parties, agree to have the prohibition removed.<sup>151</sup>

The Australian Government's rejection of the Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities in 1989 undoubtedly paved the way for current Antarctic environmental protection under The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. As the US admitted in 2016, “the daring – perhaps heroic – decision by leaders of countries like Australia and France, we must admit, led to something better.” In 1991, China followed other countries in signing the new proposal and while it may not have suited potential mineral interests, it remains a reflection of the commitment to work within the governing

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<sup>147</sup> Norha Abu Hanifah and Rugayah Hashim, "The Madrid Protocol 1991 and its Environmental Impacts towards the Quality of Life," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 35 (2012): XXXX, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.02.104>.

<sup>148</sup> Jackson, "Who Saved Antarctica?: Australia and Heroic Antarctic Diplomacy," 220.

<sup>149</sup> New York Times, "Blind on Antarctica," *New York Times*, June 30, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/30/opinion/blind-on-antarctica.html>.

<sup>150</sup> "Press Release - Environmental Protocol," n.d., PM Transcripts, Canberra, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00008313.pdf>.

<sup>151</sup> "Press Release - Environmental Protocol," July 4, 1991.

systems.<sup>152</sup> Whereby international support for the previous convention dwindled, the ultimate way for China to secure its interests was to go along with the status quo. This however slowly changed, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Signed in October 1991, The Protocol links tightly back to the original Antarctic Treaty, reinforcing that Antarctica must be a “natural reserve, devoted to peace and science”.<sup>153</sup> The relationship between Australia and China at this time was stable, as hadn't yet begun its go global foreign policy approach. Accession to the Environment Protocol is restricted to Antarctic Treaty Parties exclusively.<sup>154</sup> It also created the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP), a body which provides recommendations on the Antarctic environment to the delegations. Article 7 unequivocally prohibits any mineral resource activities other than those of a scientific nature,<sup>155</sup> a significant departure from the previous approach of balancing environmental protection with "sustainable" mineral extraction in the failed Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities. Australia's bold diplomatic decision to go “out on a limb”<sup>156</sup> in advocating for the rejection of the Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities was majority driven by concerns over threats to its referent object: its sovereign claim and domestic mineral resource exports. Despite this, this securitisation move ultimately led to a commercial mining ban in 1998 when The Protocol entered into force.<sup>157</sup> The securitisation move undertaken by Australia played a monumental role in safeguarding the Antarctic environment from potential environmental crises, including but not limited to potential acid mine drainage, metal contamination, leaching, chemical pollution, erosion, and loss of biodiversity.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Andrea Herbert, "China and Antarctica: Hot ambitions in an icy climate" (Critical Literature Review, University of Canterbury, 2017), 10, <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/44d9653e-39bc-4b04-855c-82e31b5ef3c4/content>.

<sup>153</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 3.

<sup>154</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Related Agreements"

<sup>155</sup> Antarctic Treaty Secretariat. *The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty*, Protocol, adopted October 4, 1991, 2.

<sup>156</sup> "Press Release - Environmental Protocol," July 4, 1991.

<sup>157</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Related Agreements"

<sup>158</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Mining and the environment* (Canberra: Australia, January 2003), <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/90a12181d877a6a6ca2568b5007b861c/ce28d7fbe5faa308ca256cae0015da32!OpenDocument>.

## **2048: The Looming Mining 'Expiry Date' and Rising Tensions Between China and Australia in the 2020s**

The Environmental Protocol has maintained its peaceful existence since 1998, with no significant alterations to its governance protocols. Despite this, in the past decade, diplomatic tensions have risen between China and Australia regarding the regime as it nears its so-called 'expiration date' of 2048. This tension is aided by media speculation that China is plotting a resource-plundering regime for the continent.

China's Fourteenth Plan (2021–2025) underscores a commitment to advancing deep-sea and polar exploration, reflecting its keen interest in mastering technologies for national security and development.<sup>159</sup> Nonetheless, certain analysts contend that China recognises the impracticality of resource extraction. Instead, the nation appears to prioritise scientific exploration, aligning with its dedication to climate change research and securing its continued desire for scientific leadership in the developing world.<sup>160</sup>

Many developments China makes within the region, despite being within its rights are labelled "suspicious"<sup>161</sup> or threatening by the media which supports an unassuming role as an audience member of the securitisation of Australian geopolitical concerns; namely the nation's biggest perceived threat: China. This coverage is concurrent with the political tension between Australia and China on Antarctica, particularly during the tenure of the Morrison Government. On the 22nd of February 2022, in a clear effort to secure against the perceived threat of China, Prime Minister from 2018-2022, Scott Morrison pledged \$804 million (AUD) to support the continuation of Australia as an Antarctic leader. The investment included "drone fleets, helicopters and other vehicles [to] enable us to explore areas of East Antarctica's inland that no

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<sup>159</sup> People's Republic of China, "The Outline of the The Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development (2021–2025) and Long-Range Objectives through the Year 2035 of the People's Republic of China," National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) People's Republic of China, 2021, <https://en.ndrc.gov.cn/policies/202203/P020220315511326748336.pdf>.

<sup>160</sup> Jiang, "China's Antarctic ambitions – and their implications for Australia," 8.

<sup>161</sup> Bremmer, "China's Ambitious Plans in Antarctica have Raised New Suspicions."

country has ever been able to reach before".<sup>162</sup> The pledge was made strategically on a Prime Ministerial visit to the Antarctic gateway; Tasmania, where Morrison was campaigning for key Tasmanian seats for the upcoming election. In an interview, Morrison spoke of other motives other than science and referring to China said the nation "[doesn't] share the same objectives as Australia as a treaty nation when it comes to protecting Antarctica"<sup>163</sup> and that some may "seek to exploit (Antarctica's) resources".<sup>164</sup> Morrison's significant investment and words regarding security drew significant attention from the Chinese media. The Global Times, a tabloid newspaper falling under the Chinese Communist Party's flagship paper the People's Daily, wrote about how the Morrison government "has embraced serving as the pawn of the US government's anti-China geopolitical game".<sup>165</sup> The illustration of Australia featured in the article, see Figure 5 (as a Kangaroo) as an aggressor toward an innocent and confused China. Author Wi Ying argued Australia was "Bringing the outdated Cold War mentality to Antarctica"<sup>166</sup> and that recent US-inspired hostility would only risk and potentially "backfire" on a mutually beneficial economic relationship between the two countries.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> 9 News, "'Eyes on Antarctica': PM Unveils \$800 Million Package to Bolster Australia's Antarctic Claims."

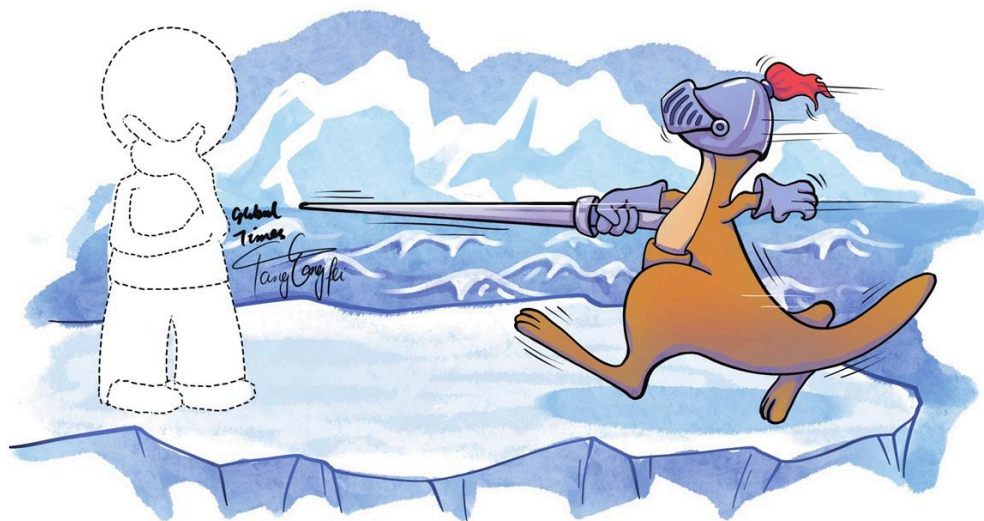
<sup>163</sup> 9 News, "'Eyes on Antarctica': PM Unveils \$800 Million Package to Bolster Australia's Antarctic Claims."

<sup>164</sup> 9 News, "'Eyes on Antarctica': PM Unveils \$800 Million Package to Bolster Australia's Antarctic Claims."

<sup>165</sup> Wang Yi, "Australia's Antarctica plan stems from its hostility toward China," *China Global Times*, February 22, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1252892.shtml>.

<sup>166</sup> Yi, "Australia's Antarctica plan stems from its hostility toward China."

<sup>167</sup> *Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities*, 3.



**Figure 5:** A Chinese Illustration: Australia the Agressor toward Puzzled China

Despite China's adoption of major Antarctic governance systems, Western media has played a crucial role in shaping negative public and political approaches toward China, particularly on Article 7 of the Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. However, Western media coverage lacks an in-depth understanding of the Protocol's complexities, often incorrectly assuming a ban expiration date. While politicians like Scott Morrison portray Australia's primary Antarctic concern as environmental, this chapter reveals otherwise. Australia is the “world’s largest exporter of black coal, iron ore, alumina, lead and zinc and the second largest exporter of uranium”<sup>168</sup> and minerals have been a cornerstone of the nation's economy since the gold rush. In 2021, Australia’s largest import partner for all products was China, with

<sup>168</sup> Parliament of Australia, "The minerals sector," APH, accessed June 12, 2023, [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/BriefingBook43p/mineralssector](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook43p/mineralssector).

the Asian country constituting 27.85%.<sup>169</sup> Australia makes up 46.66% of all mineral imports to China.<sup>170</sup>

Any local competition would be an existential threat to Australia's key trade partnership and mutual dependency with China. Scott Morrison's government was consistently alleged to be insufficient in its efforts to address climate change, instead supporting fossil fuel industries underpinned by a gendered and radicalised logic and masculine leadership style.<sup>171</sup> For 3 consecutive years the Morrison government refused to increase its Paris Agreement emissions target for of 26-28% below 2005 levels by 2030.<sup>172</sup> It was only until June 2022, that Anthony Albanese stepped in as Prime Minister and raised the target to 43%, while making a "\$2 billion critical minerals boost crucial to energy transition" toward net zero.<sup>173</sup> The historical lens utilised throughout this chapter has illustrated Australia's fervent drive to securitise its interest in preventing the mineral exploitation of the cold continent in the absence of royalties has been and continues to be largely economically and strategically driven, not out of environmental concern.

### **Environmental Protocol Constraints: Exploring Limitations in the Current State of Antarctic Conservation.**

The Environmental Protocol was highly successful given the difficult circumstances surrounding the Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities that it had to follow. Nevertheless, the Protocol is not immune to scrutiny. It has several weaknesses regarding

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<sup>169</sup> "Australia Products Imports by country & region 2021 | WITS Data," World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) | Data on Export, Import, Tariff, NTM, 2021, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/AUS/Year/2021/TradeFlow/Import/Partner/all/Product/Total>.

<sup>170</sup> "Australia Products Imports by country & region 2021 | WITS Data."

<sup>171</sup> "Election 2022: Climate and energy," Melbourne Climate Futures, 2022, <https://www.unimelb.edu.au/climate/expertise/research-papers-and-reports/research-papers-and-reports/election-2022-climate-and-energy>.

<sup>172</sup> "Australia," Climate Action Tracker, 2021, <https://climateactiontracker.org/climate-target-update-tracker/australia/>.

<sup>173</sup> Madeline King, "\$2 billion critical minerals boost crucial to energy transition," October 25, 2023, XXXX, <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/king/media-releases/2-billion-critical-minerals-boost-crucial-energy-transition>.



Article 7. This is marked by a notable absence of robust control mechanisms.<sup>174</sup> Since it entered into force in 1998, The Protocol has witnessed a stagnancy in the implementation of additional modifications. This stagnation underscores a systemic challenge within the Treaty framework, revealing an apparent inability to adapt to the rapid pace of evolving complexities of safeguarding Antarctica's pristine environment in the face of emerging challenges such as tourism and dual-use technology. Furthermore, the provision within the ban enabling scientific research could pertain to resource assessments, which raises concern about this information being used to advocate for modifications to come in 2048.

Notwithstanding the weaknesses of the Protocol itself, the practicality of mineral extraction in the Antarctic in the foreseeable future would face several constraints. Identification of resources would require exploratory activity, which is limited to ice-free areas or 2% of the terrain of the continent.<sup>175</sup> Port construction would also be limited. Transport to resource deposits would have to cross complex landscapes and deep glaciers<sup>176</sup> and would likely require land transport, which is either not economically viable, environmentally friendly or even built yet.<sup>177</sup> Aircraft transport is equally costly and dangerous in unpredictable conditions and 6 months of polar night.<sup>178</sup> The technology required for mining in such landscapes is limited. The risk of geopolitical tension and collapse of the Antarctic Treaty system would be large and public sentiment towards new mining developments is progressively becoming increasingly unfavourable.

While altering the mining ban poses a challenge, it remains within the realm of possibility. The preservation of the status quo appeases more conservative states such as

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<sup>174</sup> Luis Valentin Ferrada, "Antarctic Environment Protocol Challenges and Achievements: 20 Years in Force," *European Journal of International Law*(blog), July 11, 2018, <https://www.ejiltalk.org/antarctic-environment-protocol-challenges-and-achievements-20-years-in-force/>.

<sup>175</sup> Curtin, "Resources in Antarctica: With the World's Dwindling Natural Resources, Is There a Chance for Exploitation in Antarctica?," 11.

<sup>176</sup> Curtin, "Resources in Antarctica: With the World's Dwindling Natural Resources, Is There a Chance for Exploitation in Antarctica?," 11.

<sup>177</sup> Curtin, "Resources in Antarctica: With the World's Dwindling Natural Resources, Is There a Chance for Exploitation in Antarctica?," 11.

<sup>178</sup> Curtin, "Resources in Antarctica: With the World's Dwindling Natural Resources, Is There a Chance for Exploitation in Antarctica?," 11.

Australia, while the prospect for change in 2048, permits more progressive states like China to keep their foot in the door. It is this dynamic that maintains the delicate equilibrium essential for upholding peace and international cooperation in the Antarctic Treaty System.

## **Conclusion**

Australia's security concern or national interest, has been continually presented by its government, to its audience; the public and the media as environmental degradation. This has been convenient since the 1980s due to the increasing climate anxiety which has grappled with people's consciousness. Through the historical analysis and securitisation framework, it is obvious that this is not Australia's primary referent object. It is however a combination of strengthening its sovereignty claims despite its freeze under the ATS, military security and domestic economic mineral export strengths. Australia's resolute rejection of the Convention of Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities and leadership in advocating for The Environmental Protocol, in light of its alternate interests, is no doubt the most significant historical conservation triumph for the continent. Meanwhile, China has indicated its steadfast commitment to its national interests of rational use and being a global scientific leader, by engaging with governance conventions through the token of science. Due to the provisions of the protocol, the future remains unclear, yet it is clear that the securitisation of state interests fundamentally shapes the trajectory of Antarctic environmental policies. The upcoming chapter will delve into this concept further through an exploration of Marine Protection Areas.

### Chapter Three

#### **Analyse the impact of Chinese and Australian measures to secure their economic and political interests, and the institutional weakness of the Antarctic Treaty System, on the marine protection of Antarctica.**

A State's securitization of economic and political interests can either harm or enhance marine protection, contingent upon the state's underlying interests. Weaknesses' within the Antarctic Treaty System and the Convention of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources also play a significant role in the process of implementing Marine Protection Areas (MPAs) in the Southern Ocean.

#### **Marine Protection Areas Within The Antarctic Treaty Framework**

Marine Protection Areas fall under Annex V. Article 3 of the Protocol on the Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (The Environmental Protocol) <sup>179</sup>and can be nominated for being representative locale of aquatic ecosystems and marine ecosystems, unusual assemblages of species, the presence of a major bird or mammal breeding colonies, outstanding aesthetic and wilderness value or an area of particular interests for scientific research. Annex V was adopted at the 16th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and entered into force in 2002.

This chapter will focus primarily on Marine Protection Areas; “a marine area that protects all or part of the natural resources it contains” <sup>180</sup> Marine Protection Areas must be coupled with a management plan which details; its inherent value, aims, objectives, management activities, period of designation, detailed descriptions and location and other details. <sup>181</sup>Goals range from conservation habitat protection, ecosystem monitoring or fisheries management

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<sup>179</sup> *The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty*,.

<sup>180</sup> CCAMLR, "Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)," Home Page | CCAMLR, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://www.ccamlr.org/en/science/marine-protected-areas-mpas>.

<sup>181</sup> CCAMLR, "Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)."

objectives. Restrictions on fishing, access and waste disposal serve the aim of achieving these goals.<sup>182</sup> Antarctic Specially Protected Areas, also known as MPAs have stringent exclusionary and protective regulations in place, differing from Antarctic Specially Managed Areas which focus on *management* measures. MPA's serve as control zones for comparative research, enabling the study of the relative impacts of human interventions, including fishing and climate change, against unprotected areas.<sup>183</sup> Fishing, tourism and commercial interests including bioprospecting., currently threaten the southern ocean,<sup>184</sup> however for states, motivations behind establishing or negotiating around MPAs often diverge from the prioritisation of ecological concerns.

Designation of a Marine Protection Area at the institutional level is split between two institutions the ATCM and CCAMLR, adding extra convolution atop of diverging state interests.<sup>185</sup> Due to the juridical overlap, any marine proposed area '[enters] a double process, consideration within both the CEP and CCAMLR Scientific Committee.'<sup>186</sup> Proposal submissions are open to members, with CCAMLR ultimately deciding on their consideration, based on the best available science. CCAMLR was developed in 1982 under the patronage of the Treaty and maintains a tight relationship, articulating that its members must not, 'engage in any activities in the Antarctic contrary to the principles and purposes of that Treaty'.<sup>187</sup> Despite this, when acceding to the ATS, the consultative and non-consultative parties do not automatically become CCAMLR Commission member states. CCAMLR 'urges States acceding to the CAMLR Convention to also consider acceding to the Antarctic Treaty.'<sup>188</sup> CCAMLR is an

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<sup>182</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)."

<sup>183</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "Relationship to the Antarctic Treaty System | CCAMLR," CCAMLR, accessed March 17, 2023, <https://www.ccamlr.org/en/organisation/relationship-antarctic-treaty-system>.

<sup>184</sup> *Designation of Marine Protected Areas within the Antarctic Treaty Area* (Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, 2008), 4, <https://cdn.asoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Designation-of-Marine-Protected-Areas-within-the-Antarctic-Treaty-Area.pdf>.  
<https://cdn.asoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Designation-of-Marine-Protected-Areas-within-the-Antarctic-Treaty-Area.pdf>

<sup>185</sup> *Designation of Marine Protected Areas within the Antarctic Treaty Area*, 4 .

<sup>186</sup> *Designation of Marine Protected Areas within the Antarctic Treaty Area*, 4

<sup>187</sup> [https://www.ccamlr.org/en/system/files/e-linkages\\_0.pdf](https://www.ccamlr.org/en/system/files/e-linkages_0.pdf)

<sup>188</sup> [https://www.ccamlr.org/en/system/files/e-linkages\\_0.pdf](https://www.ccamlr.org/en/system/files/e-linkages_0.pdf)

Observer at ATCM annual meetings and final approvals of MPAs occur at the annual CCAMLR meeting and decision-making within the convention on MPAs is *almost* always based on consensus.<sup>189</sup> Australia was one of the original signatories and a member of CCAMLR in 1982, while China acceded to the Commission in 2006, acquiring membership the following year in 2007.<sup>190</sup>

### **Exploring Historical Approaches to Marine Protection Areas: A Contextual Analysis of Chinese Commercial Interests and Geopolitical Values**

Understanding historical responses to the Ross Sea Region Marine Protection Area (RSr MPA) first requires contextualisation within the economic and commercial interests of both Australia and China, as well as an introduction to the commercial value of Antarctic marine species. Krill and the Antarctic Toothfish are the most significant species to this discussion.

The Southern Ocean, hosts approximately 700 million adult krill that play a foundational ecological role.<sup>191</sup> Commercial demand for nutrient-rich krill is rising due to its use in omega-3 supplements, protein supplements, and salmon fish feed.<sup>192</sup> The Antarctic Toothfish, notable for its unique qualities like bone-free meat, high Omega-3 levels, and a prized flavour,<sup>193</sup> ignites

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<sup>189</sup> "CCAMLR within the Antarctic Treaty System | CCAMLR," CCAMLR, accessed February 9, 2023,

<https://www.ccamlr.org/en/organisation/chapter-3-role-ccamlr-within-antarctic-treaty-system>.

<sup>190</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "Members," CCAMLR, accessed February 3, 2023, <https://www.ccamlr.org/en/organisation/members>

<sup>191</sup> World Wildlife Fund, "Top 10 facts about Antarctic krill," WWF, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://www.wwf.org.uk/learn/fascinating-facts/antarctic-krill>.

<sup>192</sup> Joshua Goodman and David Keyton, "From Antarctica to Tasmania, the debate over whether to fish a creature the size of a paper clip is key to saving the climate—and the humpback whales," *Fortune*, October 14, 2023, <https://fortune.com/2023/10/13/factory-fishing-krill-antarctica-climate-change-humpback-whales/>.

<sup>193</sup> Australian Fisheries Management Authority, "Toothfish," Australian Fisheries Management Authority, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://www.afma.gov.au/species/toothfish>.

several difficulties faced in CCAMLR negotiations. This complexity arises from the competition among fishing states to secure access to the "Wagyu of the Sea."<sup>194</sup>

Australia refrains from any commercial fishing in CCAMLR-governed areas. In contrast, China captures 16.4% of Antarctic krill at the Antarctic Convergence, though lagging significantly behind Norway, which contributed 63.2% of the total catch between 2012-2022.

<sup>195</sup>Chinese vessels focus on Toothfish and Krill, but the Southern Ocean constitutes only a fraction of China's overall fishing activities. The nation hasn't ratified some key global fishing agreements, unlike Australia, that include enforcement authorisation, inspections and sustainable practice monitoring. According to strategists, including Anthony Bergin, China's entry into CCAMLR in 2007 responded to increasing pressure stemming from its nationals' involvement in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing for Toothfish. <sup>196</sup> Other pressures included the 1994 introduction of Exclusive Economic Zones under UNCLOS, which imposed significant commercial activity limits, prompting the state to seek new zones, including in West Africa.<sup>197</sup> China's involvement with CCAMLR is a securitisation process aimed at safeguarding its referent object, commercial fishing from threats such as the depletion of fish stocks and the introduction of conservation measures.

Securing fishing interests is not only economically pivotal for states like China but also assumes heightened geopolitical significance. In various global geo-political domains, China has demonstrated what can be described as an anxiousness for global common. This is supported by

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<sup>194</sup> Australian Broadcasting Corporation, "Dangerous art of chasing Patagonian toothfish in the Southern Ocean," *ABC News*, May 30, 2015, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-30/the-dangerous-art-of-chasing-patagonian-toothfish/6508510>.

<sup>195</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, *Fishery Report 2022: Euphausia superba in Area 48* (Hobart, March 2023), [https://fishdocs.ccamlr.org/FishRep\\_48\\_KRI\\_2022.html](https://fishdocs.ccamlr.org/FishRep_48_KRI_2022.html).

<sup>196</sup> Anthony Bergin and Tony Press, *Eyes Wide Open, Managing the Australia–China Antarctic relationship* (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020), 9, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25131.5>.

<sup>197</sup> Nengye Liu and Cassandra M. Brooks, "China's Changing Position Towards Marine Protected Areas in the Southern Ocean: Implications for Future Antarctic Governance," *Marine Policy* 94, August (2018): <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2018.05.011>.

Patrick Anderson's comprehensive study which delves into the four lenses that summarise the Chinese perspective on the significance of the *Arctic* region to the world:

“global common” (全球公域, *quanqiu gongyu*), “shared heritage of mankind” (人类共同遗产, *renlei gongtong yichan*), “window for observing global warming” (全球变暖的窗口, *quanqiu bian nuan de chuangkou*), and “treasure trove of resources” (资源的宝库, *ziyuan de baoku*)<sup>198</sup>

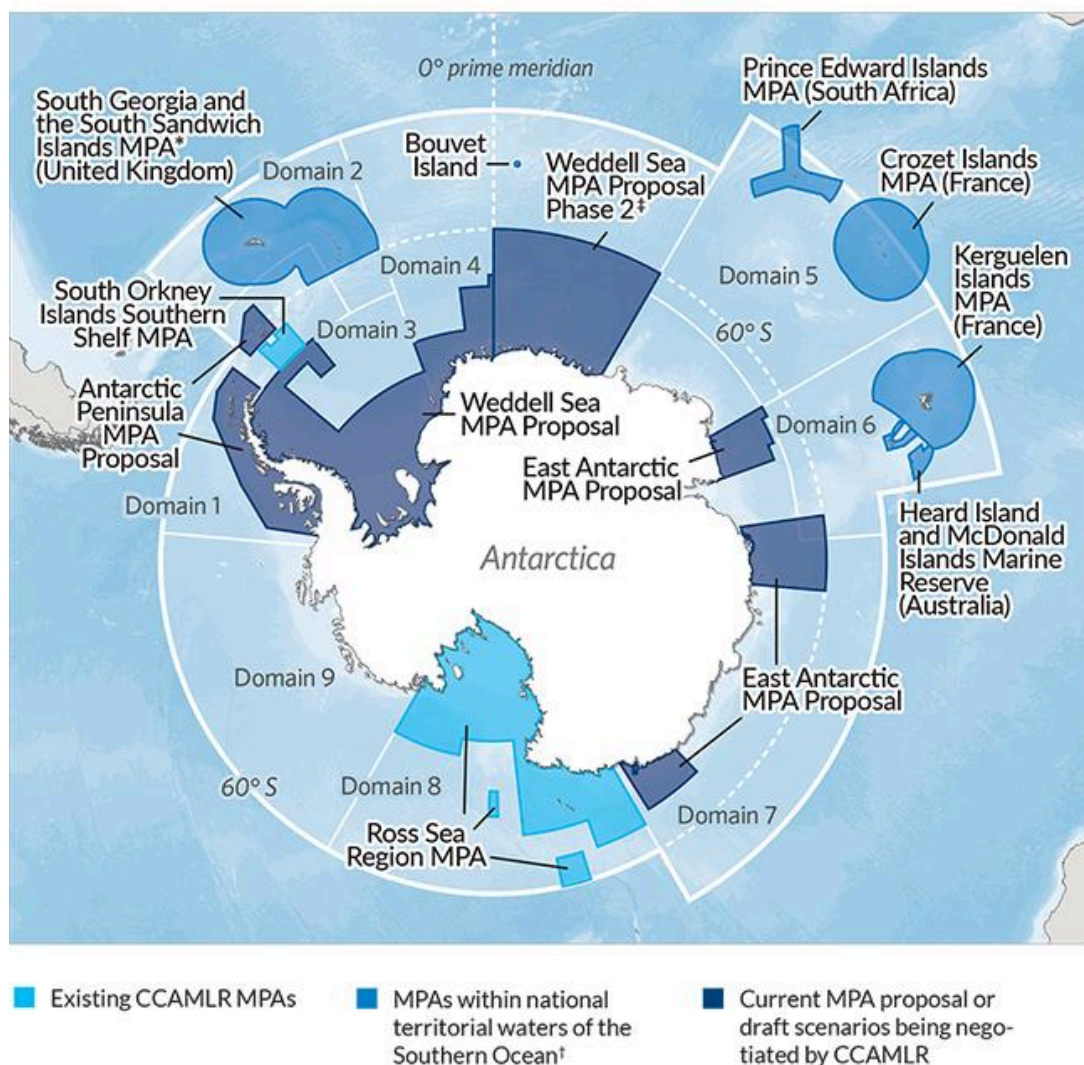
These studies also inform China's approach to Antarctic Affairs. The increased presence of Marine Protection Areas (MPAs) in Antarctic Waters threatens fishing interests and the pursuit of global commons. Concessions to environmental agendas must be viewed through this lens. Nengye Liu & Cassandra M. Brooks argue that fishing expansion serves strategic goals, asserting power and securing future access within global commons.<sup>199</sup> The 2016-2017 expansion of Chinese fisheries into the East Antarctic where fisheries had been absent before the mid-1990s exemplifies this notion.<sup>200</sup> The geopolitical value of Chinese fishing ambitions and access to global commons potentially surpasses its monetary worth.

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<sup>198</sup> Patrik Andersson, "The Arctic as a “Strategic” and “Important” Chinese Foreign Policy Interest: Exploring the Role of Labels and Hierarchies in China’s Arctic Discourses," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, August 3, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026211018699>.

<sup>199</sup> Liu and Brooks, "China's Changing Position Towards Marine Protected Areas in the Southern Ocean: Implications for Future Antarctic Governance," 193.

<sup>200</sup> Liu and Brooks, "China's Changing Position Towards Marine Protected Areas in the Southern Ocean: Implications for Future Antarctic Governance," 193.



\* The United Kingdom designated the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands MPA. These islands' sovereignty remains contested by Argentina.

† All domestic protected areas north of 60° S have been included.

‡ Norway is working on a WSMPA Phase 2 proposal that is expected to be submitted as early as October 2023. The shaded area is the full planning area, but the boundaries of the MPA are still unknown.

Note: In 2011, CCAMLR members agreed by consensus to adopt Conservation Measure 91-04, a framework for creating a network of MPAs, and identified nine planning domains for developing these protected areas.

## Figure 6: MPA Network <sup>201</sup>

<sup>201</sup> The Pew Charitable Trusts, "European Union Commits to Secure Additional Southern Ocean Protections," image, The Pew Charitable Trusts, May 20, 2020, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2020/05/20/european-union-commits-to-secure-additional-southern-ocean-protections>.



## 1991-2009: Unraveling the Dangerous Precedent of the First Marine Protection Area at South Orkney Islands

The South Orkney Islands Southern Shelf Marine Protected Area (SOISS MPA), was the first of its kind to be established in the Southern Ocean, however, set a dangerous precedent for future MPAs - see Figure 6.<sup>202</sup> In 2009, the UK submitted a proposal for a 94,000 square kilometre area northeast of the peninsular of the British Antarctic Territory.<sup>203</sup> A legal guide for MPAs was established in 2011, only *after* the implementation of the first MPA and before the establishment of the second MPA. The SOISS MPA permitted scientific research activities and fishing but prohibited commercial fishing,<sup>204</sup> setting a dangerous precedent for future MPAs, having initially *avoided* areas of previously existing fisheries, meanwhile making accommodations for the potential of future fishery locations.<sup>205</sup> Negotiations on this MPA with Australia, China and other members, were relatively uncontentious, due to the absence of evaluation criteria, management, research and monitoring plans at the time.<sup>206</sup> The geographic location, size, and perceived value of a proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) to fishing states are crucial factors determining the ease or difficulty of its establishment. The South Orkney Islands MPA appeared like a victory for states with conflicting interests and an ecological triumph, however, would reveal itself over time as the opening chapter in a protracted, politicised struggle for environmental progress.

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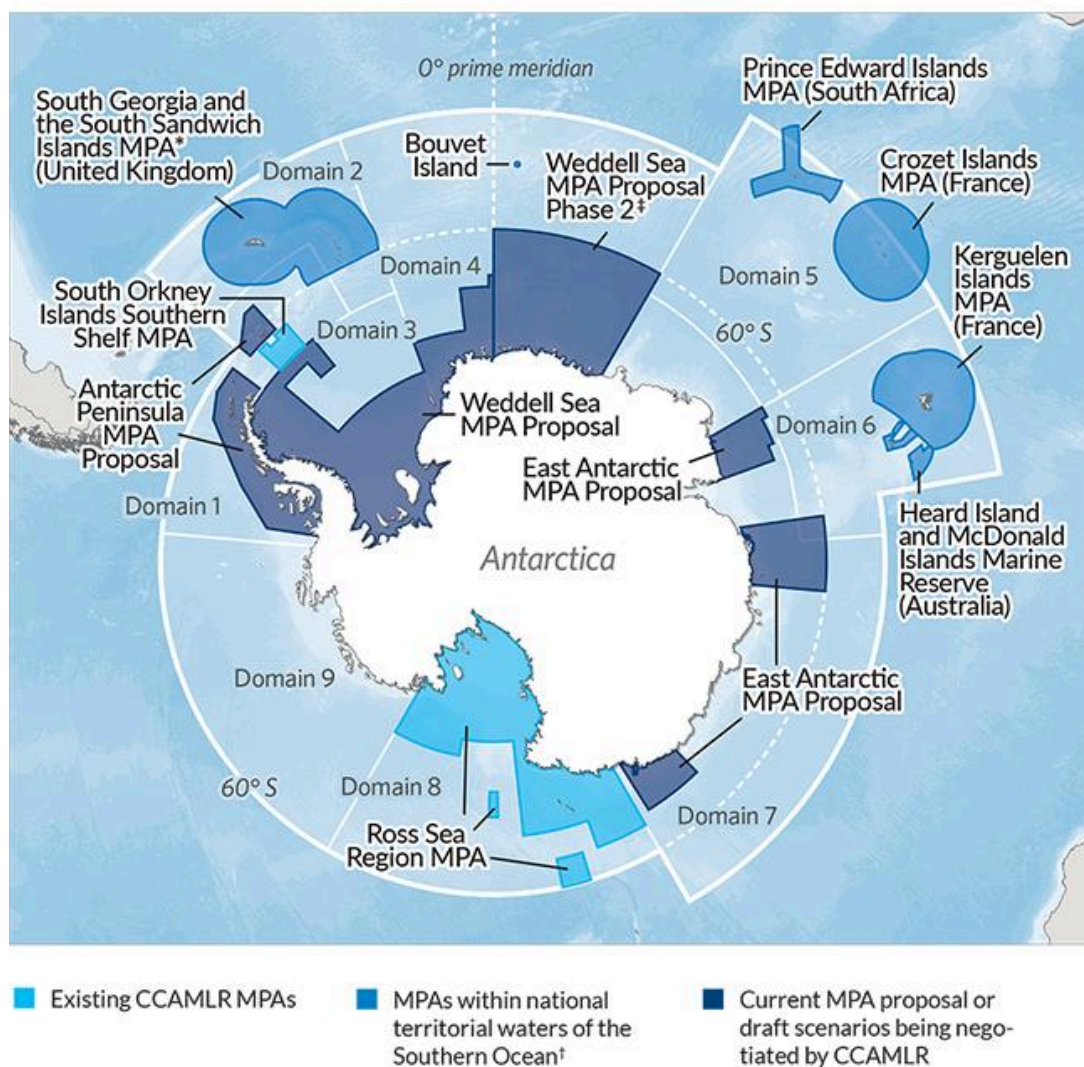
<sup>202</sup> Cassandra M. Brooks et al., "Reaching Consensus for Conserving the Global Commons: The Case of the Ross Sea, Antarctica," *Conservation Letters* 13, no. 1 (September 20, 2019): <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12676>.

<sup>203</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)."

<sup>204</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)."

<sup>205</sup> Brooks et al., "Reaching Consensus for Conserving the Global Commons: The Case of the Ross Sea, Antarctica,".

<sup>206</sup> Brooks et al., "Reaching Consensus for Conserving the Global Commons: The Case of the Ross Sea, Antarctica,".



\* The United Kingdom designated the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands MPA. These islands' sovereignty remains contested by Argentina.

† All domestic protected areas north of 60° S have been included.

‡ Norway is working on a WSMPA Phase 2 proposal that is expected to be submitted as early as October 2023. The shaded area is the full planning area, but the boundaries of the MPA are still unknown.

Note: In 2011, CCAMLR members agreed by consensus to adopt Conservation Measure 91-04, a framework for creating a network of MPAs, and identified nine planning domains for developing these protected areas.

**Figure 6:** MPA Network <sup>207</sup>

<sup>207</sup> The Pew Charitable Trusts, "European Union Commits to Secure Additional Southern Ocean Protections," image, The Pew Charitable Trusts, May 20, 2020,

## **2012-2017: Balancing Economic Security, Politicisation of Conservation Efforts, and Governance Challenges in Establishing the Ross Sea Marine Protection Area**

When compared to the South Orkney Islands Marine Protection Area establishment process, the Ross Sea Region MPA emerges as an enlightening case study highlighting the politicisation of environmental conservation, especially when faced by states with commercial interests like China. Proposed by New Zealand and the USA in 2012, the RSr MPA was justified based on its ecological significance, covering a substantial portion of the world's Adélie penguins (30%), a quarter of emperor penguins, 30% of Antarctic petrels, half of the Ross Sea killer whales, and crucial breeding areas for Antarctic Toothfish and krill.<sup>208</sup>

In the case of the RSr MPA, China was able to capitalise on vulnerabilities within the frameworks of CCAMLR to securitise its referent object; commercial interests from protective measures. Both China and Russia states were at the forefront of the debate during the inaugural year of 2012, accounting for more than half of the objections toward the proposal. With a consensus-based decision-making process embedded in the framework of both the ATS and CCAMLR, China alongside Russia persisted with firm objections and demands, prolonging the signing and subsequent ratification of the proposal over five long years of diplomatic debate.

This decision-making process ultimately resulted in a significant extension of the time required for ratification and a reduction of the proposed protection and conservation value. In 2012, CCAMLR held its first intersessional meeting, deviating from its procedural annual meeting. China, Chile, Japan, Korea, and Russia collectively contributed to the removal of the northern area of the MPA,<sup>209</sup> citing scientific uncertainties, a concept explored later in this chapter. Further reductions occurred after 2015, introducing a Special Fishing Research Zone and

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<sup>208</sup> Emil Dediu, "European Union Commits to Secure Additional Southern Ocean Protections," The Pew Charitable Trusts, May 20, 2020, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2020/05/20/european-union-commit-s-to-secure-additional-southern-ocean-protections>.

<sup>209</sup> Brooks et al., "Reaching Consensus for Conserving the Global Commons: The Case of the Ross Sea, Antarctica."

Krill Research Zone to appease fishing states.<sup>210</sup> The Commission also permitted Krill fishing in the Toothfish fishing zone, impacting critical breeding areas for Antarctic penguins.<sup>211</sup> Over 5 years, 650 thousand square kilometres were lost from the original proposal of 2.2 million square kilometres.

Perhaps the most significant influence of China and other fishing states during the RSr MPA, was establishing a new precedent within CCAMLR. In the Antarctic Treaty System and its conventions, policy changes traditionally required consensus. Yet, for the first time, a pivotal clause in the ATS underwent a notable alteration;

*If the Commission does not reach a consensus to reaffirm or modify this MPA, or adopt a new MPA at its meeting in 2052... this conservation measure shall expire at the end of the 2051/52 fishing season.*<sup>212</sup>

Modifications to the MPA would be allowed unilaterally after the initial 35 years. The change from 'needing consensus to expire or cease, rather than consensus to continue'<sup>213</sup> could pose adverse consequences in 2052 if a minority of states advocate for modifications or discontinuation, risking conservation efforts. China specifically pushed for a reduced duration of 20 years from the proposed 50-year expiry, and after private diplomatic meetings, the MPA was signed in 2016, entering into force in December 2017.<sup>214</sup>

The Marine Protection Area now spans 1.55 million square kilometres, surpassing Northeast Greenland National Park as the world's largest marine protected area.<sup>215</sup> Despite the

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<sup>210</sup> Brooks et al., "Reaching Consensus for Conserving the Global Commons: The Case of the Ross Sea, Antarctica."

<sup>211</sup> Brooks et al., "Reaching Consensus for Conserving the Global Commons: The Case of the Ross Sea, Antarctica."

<sup>212</sup> "Conservation Measure 91-05 (2016)," n.d., CCAMLR Conservation Measures, Hobart, accessed April 15, 2023, <https://cm.ccamlr.org/en/measure-91-05-2016>.

<sup>213</sup> [https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6082&context=sol\\_research](https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6082&context=sol_research)

<sup>214</sup> Brooks et al., "Reaching Consensus for Conserving the Global Commons: The Case of the Ross Sea, Antarctica."

<sup>215</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Ross Sea region Marine Protected Area," MFAT, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/environment/antarctica-and-the-southern-ocean/ross-sea-region-mar>

eventual agreement, concessions made for China's support raise concerns about the Commission's commitment to conservation. The acknowledgement by the United States and New Zealand, thanking China for its "constructive approach" and "spirit of cooperation," indicates compromises made for diplomatic unity, revealing a conflict between conservation goals and diplomatic processes within CCAMLR's framework.<sup>216</sup>

### **2012 - 2024: The Decade-Long Debate Over the East Antarctic Marine Protection Area Proposal and Environmental Concessions**

*“no new MPA has been created because the system of consensus decision-making allows member states to veto any proposal...If CCAMLR is serious about conserving Antarctic marine ecosystems, as stated in its mandate, and making a major contribution towards protecting 30% of the oceans by 2030, the states members must step up and make their priorities clear.”<sup>217</sup>*

Härkönen's quote serves as a fitting preamble to the subsequent section of this chapter which will delve into the consequences of institutional weaknesses within CCAMLR. Whether persistent failure lies entrenched within the system or results from states securitising their interests – necessitates an in-depth discussion. There's also the question of whether the marine proposal itself is motivated by endeavours to securitise territorial claims.

The proposal for the East Antarctic Marine Protection Area (EAMPA) emerged in 2012 during the 35th Annual Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) meeting held in Hobart, Australia, alongside the Ross Sea Marine Protection Area

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ine-protected-area/#:~:text=The%20Ross%20Sea%20region%20contains,square%20kilometres%20is%20fully%20protected.

<sup>216</sup>Brooks et al., "Reaching Consensus for Conserving the Global Commons: The Case of the Ross Sea, Antarctica."

<sup>217</sup> Greenpeace International, "Antarctic Ocean Commission: Greenpeace urges progress on ocean protection," October 13, 2023, <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/press-release/63117/antarctic-ocean-commission-green-peace-progress-ocean-protection/>.

(established 2017).<sup>218</sup> Remarkably, both of these MPAs have followed similar paths, characterised by prolonged debates and environmental concessions. Australia and the European Union were the original proponents of the EAMPA in 2012, and a decade following its inception, continue to advocate for its establishment.<sup>219</sup>

Divided into three main zones; the MacRobertson Area is a critical Adélie and Emperor penguin breeding area and exhibits a highly productive coastal and oceanic food web system.<sup>220</sup> The Drygalski area contains diverse seafloor environments, including cold water reefs and submarine landforms.<sup>221</sup> The D'Urville Sea-Mertz area, is a critical site for the Antarctic Bottom Water Formation, playing a pivotal role in global ocean circulation and the containment of greenhouse gasses.<sup>222</sup>

By 2017, the proposal received a high level of support, engaging 22 members including key fishing states like Japan in favour of its proposal, however, China, Russia and Norway remained in stiff opposition.<sup>223</sup> However five years into the proposal's consideration, the designated area had already halved to 970,000 square kilometres.<sup>224</sup> The most recent CCAMLR annual meeting took place between 16-27th October 2023 in Hobart Australia, with *no* changes in the implementation of any of the existing MPA proposals including the EAMPA.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, *Area Based Marine Conservation Planning in East Antarctica* (Hobart: Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, June 2023), 1, [https://www.antarctica.gov.au/site/assets/files/57808/eampa\\_explainer\\_eng\\_final\\_v3\\_16\\_06.pdf](https://www.antarctica.gov.au/site/assets/files/57808/eampa_explainer_eng_final_v3_16_06.pdf).

<sup>219</sup> Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, *Area Based Marine Conservation Planning in East Antarctica*, 1

<sup>220</sup> Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, "East Antarctic MPA - Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition," Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, accessed May 27, 2023, <https://www.asoc.org/campaign/east-antarctic-mpa/>.

<sup>221</sup> Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, *Area Based Marine Conservation Planning in East Antarctica*, 2.

<sup>222</sup> Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, *Area Based Marine Conservation Planning in East Antarctica*, 2.

<sup>223</sup> Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, "East Antarctic MPA - Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition."

<sup>224</sup> Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, "East Antarctic MPA - Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition."

<sup>225</sup> Francesco De Augustinis, "Amid Record Melting, Countries Fail Again to Protect Antarctic Waters," *Mongabay*, accessed October 30, 2024,

## 2012 - 2024: The East Antarctic Marine Protection Area Proposal. Genuine Conservation Effort or the Reinforcement of Territorial Claims?

The politicisation of the East Antarctic Marine Protection Area (see Figure 7) is subject to two contrasting viewpoints, as echoed by the media, academic scholarship, and government administrations. In a preliminary search of CCAMLR East Antarctic Marine Protected Area, major news outlets show limited coverage, emphasising the Antarctic as overlooked with an assumed pristine status. Articles primarily focus on two themes: blaming Russia and China for blocking conservation plans<sup>226</sup> and criticising world leaders for insufficient protections.<sup>227</sup> Media often portrays China as obstructionist and resource-plundering without understanding its perspective, while, from China's viewpoint, MPAs serve as strategic tools for claimant states to strengthen their sovereign claims in Antarctica.

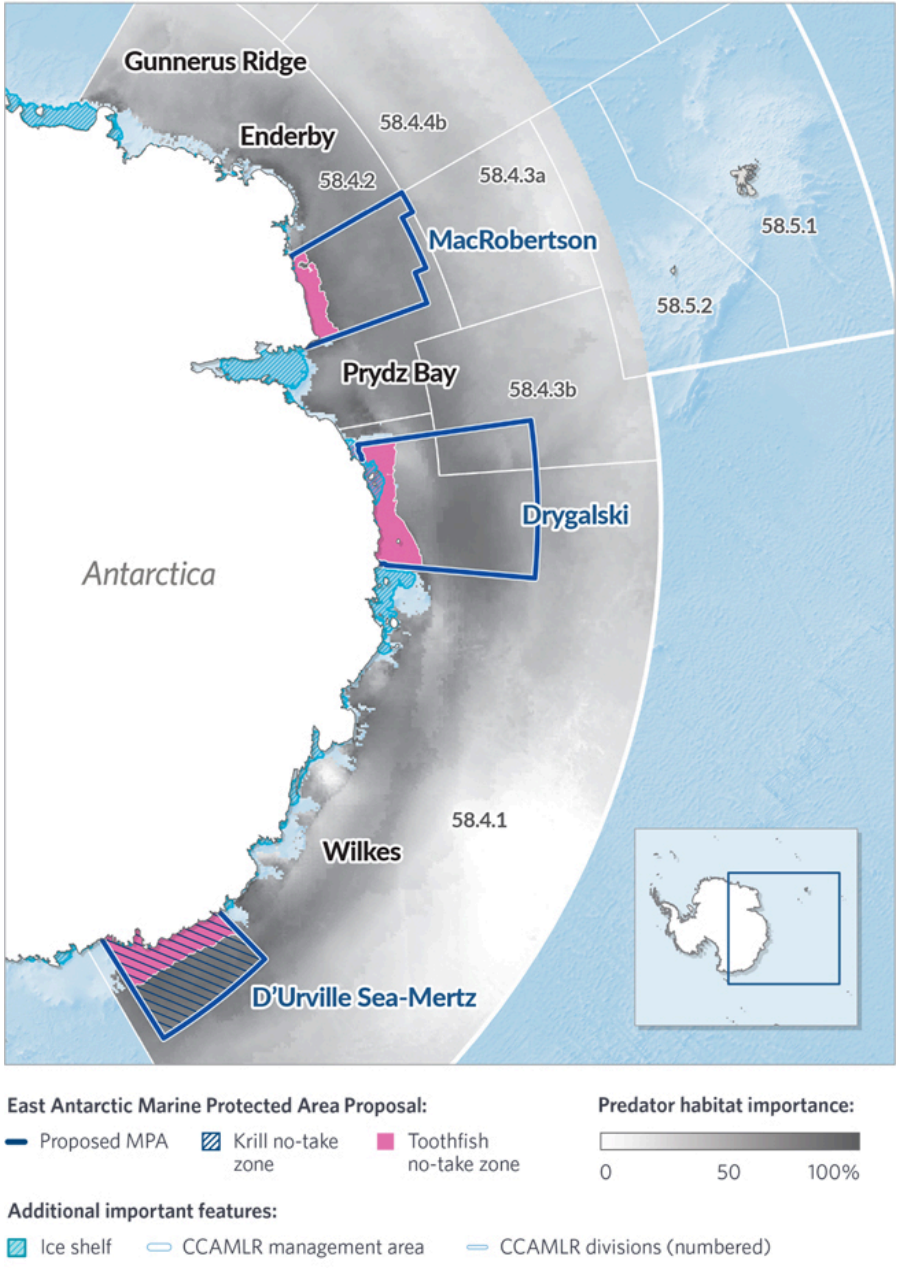
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<https://news.mongabay.com/2023/10/amid-record-melting-countries-fail-again-to-protect-antarctic-waters/>.

<sup>226</sup> Adam Morton, "Russia and China must 'get on side with conservation', US tells Antarctic commission meeting in Hobart," *Guardian*, October 25, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/25/russia-and-china-must-get-on-side-with-conservation-us-tells-antarctic-commission-meeting-in-hobart>.

<sup>227</sup> "World Leaders Fail To Expand Protections Around Antarctica Yet Again," *Forbes*, December 1, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/allenelizabeth/2021/12/01/world-leaders-fail-to-expand-protections-around-antarctica-yet-again/?sh=37c88aeb32ac>.





**Figure 7:** East Antarctic Marine Protection Area Proposal <sup>228</sup>

<sup>228</sup> "East Antarctic MPA - Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition," image, Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, accessed January 1, 2024, <https://www.asoc.org/campaign/east-antarctic-mpa/>.



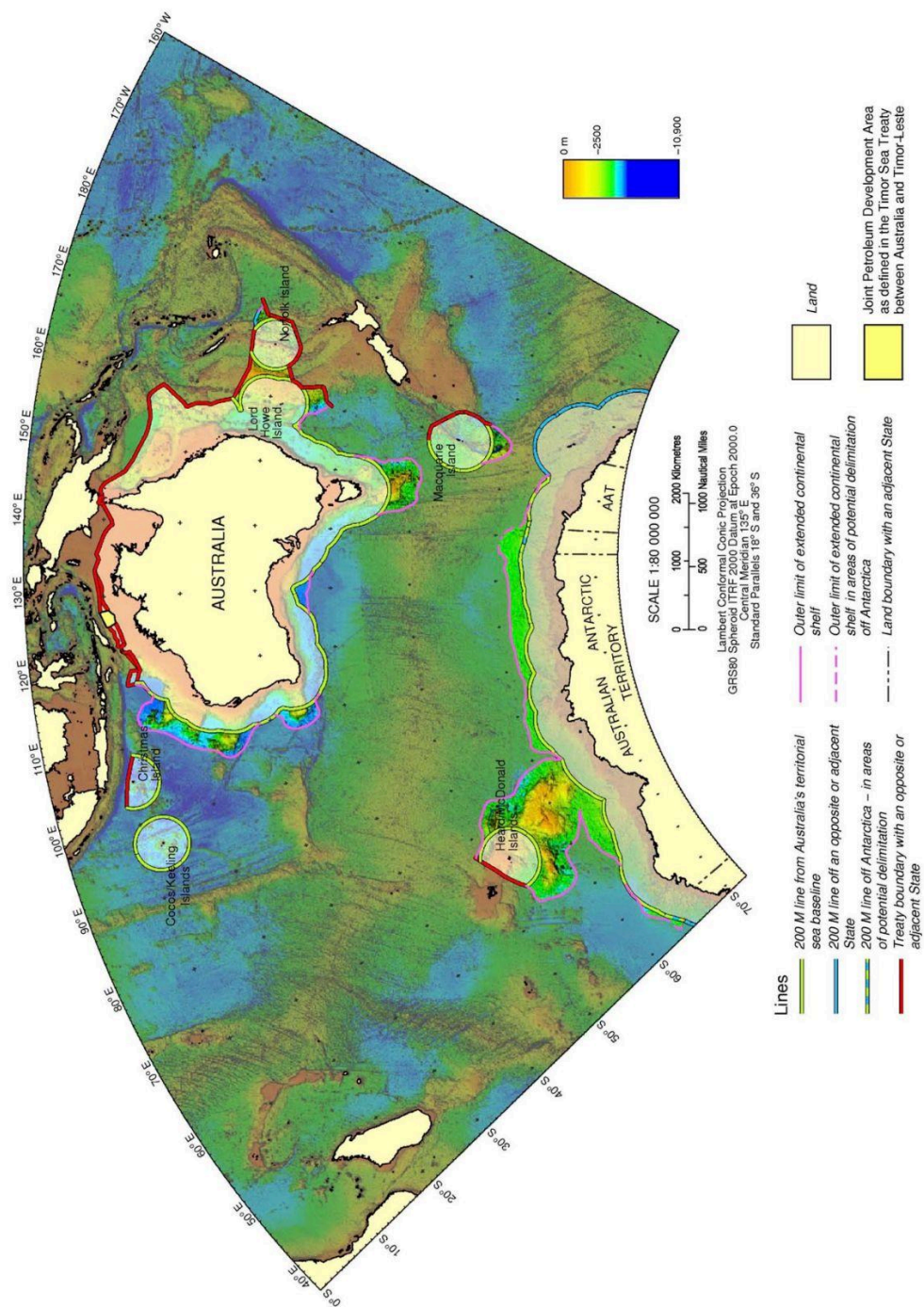
This idea is underscored by a contentious move from Australia aimed at reinforcing and securing its territorial sovereignty over segments of Antarctica. Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) usually extends up to 200 nautical miles from its territorial sea baseline. However, if the 'Australian' continental plate margin surpasses this limit, Article 76 of UNCLOS can be used to propose to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) for sovereignty over the outer continental shelf and its marine areas. The CLCS confirmed jurisdiction over 2.5 million square kilometres following the Australian request in 2008, excluding any inclusion based on debated Australian Antarctic Territories. The proposal stirred controversy for potential breaching of the Antarctic Treaty System's Article IV against any activity 'supporting .. a claim to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica'.<sup>229</sup> These actions are similar to Chinese actions on the South China Sea, using UNCLOS and proximity or history as justification to solidify claims.<sup>230</sup> If the ATS collapses, the Australian Antarctic Territory Act 1954 provides a well-defined legal structure for the area, creating a dilemma noted by Chinese academics on Australia's commitment to ATS.<sup>231</sup> Australia's manoeuvring to protect its territorial ambitions while outwardly endorsing the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) is a narrative often overlooked in Western media and scholarship.

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<sup>229</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 4.

<sup>230</sup> Jennifer Jacquet et al., "'Rational Use' in Antarctic Waters," *Marine Policy* 63 (January 2016): XXXX, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2015.09.031>.

<sup>231</sup> Molly Thomas and Jessica Honan, "Australian Antarctic Law and Policy Through the Lens of Chinese Academics – Nengye Liu – ILA Reporter," *International Law Association (Australian Branch)*.(blog), *ILA Reporter*, October 2, 2019, <https://ilareporter.org.au/2019/10/australian-antarctic-law-and-policy-through-the-lens-of-chinese-academics-nengye-liu/>.



**Figure 8:** The outer limit of the continental shelf of Australia showing the outer limit line and the area of extended continental shelf<sup>232</sup>

<sup>232</sup> Australia, *Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) Outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines: Submissions to the Commission: Submission by Australia* (Canberra: Oceans and Law of the Sea, November 2004), 7,

While Australia used overt legal avenues for its territorial claim, China relies on 'science' within the Treaty System to resist additional Marine Protection Areas. The Research Institute of China terms claimant states and the United States as a “monopoly block,” exempt from expressing demands through science or political interaction. Buchanan argues China's hesitancy toward RSrMPA and EAMPA proposals was valid, citing doubts about the Antarctic Treaty System's ability to oversee such vast areas and questioning the scientific basis for designation.<sup>233</sup> In 2012, China opposed the Eastern proposal, citing insufficient scientific support for the extensive no-take policy, insisting on research and monitoring plans before implementation due to the area's significant scientific value.<sup>234</sup> Harrison contends that China's actions support and defend the Antarctic Governance status quo, challenging common portrayals of obstructionist behaviour.<sup>235</sup>

These differing views are no doubt supported by ambiguity embedded in the term ‘rational use’. The term, although consistent with Article II of CCAMLR's ecosystem-based fishery management philosophy (see Appendix D)<sup>236</sup> has posed challenges to adopting new conservation measures. Consistent with the social constructivism highlighted within the Securitisation Theory and as Jacquet, Blood-Patterson, Brooks and Ainley argue, ‘rational use’ - is a ‘value-laden’ term.<sup>237</sup> China insists MPAs “Article II. The balance of conservation and rational use must be maintained.”<sup>238</sup> Australia clarifies that 'rational use' doesn't entail fishing vessels accessing the entire stock range.<sup>239</sup> The term's ambiguity, as an 'albatross around CCAMLR's neck,'<sup>240</sup> hampers new conservation measures, exposing institutional weakness. Driven by evolving social values, it can be used to securitise commercial interests, perpetuating vulnerability for sustainable measures.

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[https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/aus04/Documents/aus\\_doc\\_es\\_web\\_delivery.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/aus04/Documents/aus_doc_es_web_delivery.pdf).

<sup>233</sup> Elizabeth Buchanan, "Antarctica in the Gray Zone," September 17, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2057917>.

<sup>234</sup> Buchanan, "Antarctica in the Gray Zone."

<sup>235</sup> Harrington, "China in Antarctica: A History."

<sup>236</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "CAMLR Convention Text."

<sup>237</sup> Jacquet et al., "'Rational Use' in Antarctic Waters."

<sup>238</sup> Jacquet et al., "'Rational Use' in Antarctic Waters."

<sup>239</sup> Jacquet et al., "'Rational Use' in Antarctic Waters."

<sup>240</sup> Jacquet et al., "'Rational Use' in Antarctic Waters."

Speech Act plays a crucial role in the securitisation process, whereby China has attempted to securitise its fishing interests through a shift in language within CCAMLR meetings (See Appendix E) Young argues that China aims to reorient the discourse as demonstrated in 2017 when Chinese officials attempted to establish equal standing for 'protection' and 'utilisation' during an ATS meeting in Beijing.<sup>241</sup> Young argues this linguistic rhetoric is consistently used by China in multilateral forums, again indicating the role of speech act in supporting the securitisation process.<sup>242</sup> These exemplify China's broader strategic efforts to secure its interests and influence in the Antarctic region.

To construct a comprehensive argument, exploring the Chinese perspective on Australian territorial ambitions and strategic placement of the East Antarctic Marine Protection Area proposal is crucial. The South Orkney Islands MPA, proposed by the UK, covers the islands and surrounding ocean within the British Antarctic Territory claim.<sup>243</sup> Similarly, the East Antarctic Marine Protection Area, jointly proposed by Australia and the EU, falls within the Australian Antarctic Territory and nearby French Dumont d'Urville Station and the Italian Mario Zucchelli Station, raising questions about strategic placement. In the event of an ATS breakdown, the EAMPA could create protective buffers around the Australian Davis Research Station, posing concerns for proximal China's Zhongshan Research Station (see Figure 8). These coincidences may raise suspicions among non-claimant states, as environmental importance is used to justify and surpass territorial claims.

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<sup>241</sup> Young, "Charting new paths for Antarctic protection despite China's resistance | Lowy Institute."

<sup>242</sup> Young, "Charting new paths for Antarctic protection despite China's resistance | Lowy Institute."

<sup>243</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)."

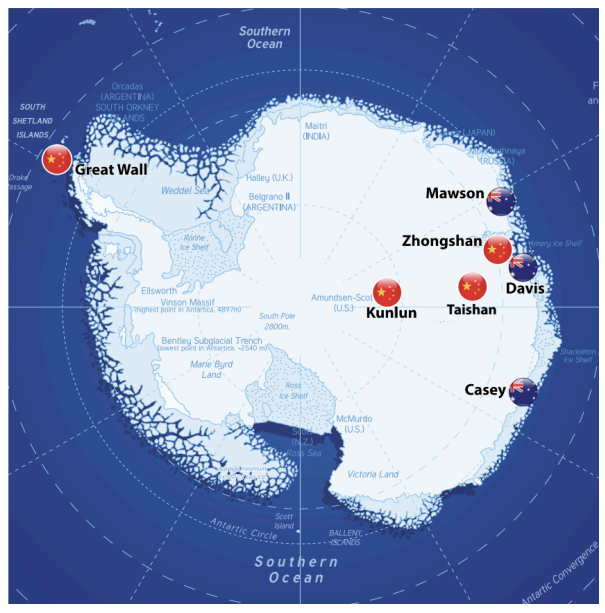


Figure 8: A map illustrating the locations of current Chinese and Australian Research Stations.

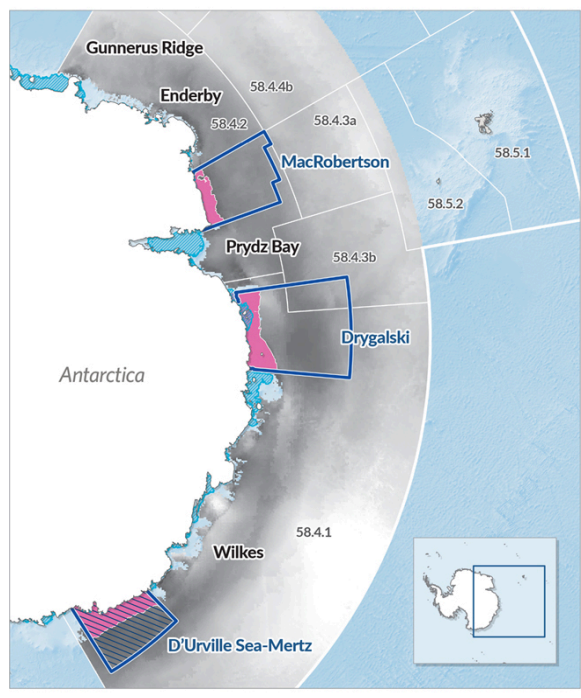


Figure 9: East Antarctic Marine Protection Area Proposal <sup>244</sup>

<sup>244</sup> "East Antarctic MPA - Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition," image, Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, accessed January 1, 2024, <https://www.asoc.org/campaign/east-antarctic-mpa/>.

## Is CCAMLR under the patronage of the Antarctic Treaty System, a sufficient avenue to achieving Marine Protection?

Continual conservation setbacks question the efficiency of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources in fulfilling its mandate. In 2015, Sweden argued that CCAMLR shifted from conservation to fisheries management,<sup>245</sup> criticising the Commission's failure to work consensually. They highlighted the 'suboptimal' time designations of MPAs,<sup>246</sup> noting the insufficiency for sensitive habitats that may take 'decades if not centuries' to recover from fishing events.<sup>247</sup>

The East Antarctic Marine Protection Area faced rejection in late 2023, mirroring similar fates as the Weddell Sea MPA proposed by Germany in 2016 and the Antarctic Peninsula MPA proposed by Argentina and Chile in 2018. The last successful MPA in the Ross Sea was signed six years ago, maintaining the Southern Ocean's protection at 11.98%,<sup>248</sup> with only 4.6% as no-take areas, providing a mere 7.8% complete protection from human activities.<sup>249</sup> The proposed Eastern MPA, if approved, would increase protection to 22%, achieving 10% representation of Antarctic ecosystems. Scientists advocate for 30% of the total ocean to be protected as MPAs with a complete extraction prohibition for positive spillover effects.<sup>250</sup>

Suggested solutions to break the cycle involve a shift in legal approaches for enhanced environmental protection. The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions Treaty (BBNJ) is

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<sup>245</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "Performance Review Activities," CCAMLR, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://www.ccamlr.org/en/organisation/performance-review-activities>.

<sup>246</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "Performance Review Activities."

<sup>247</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "Performance Review Activities."

<sup>248</sup> Cassandra M. Brooks et al., "Progress towards a representative network of Southern Ocean protected areas," *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 4 (April 22, 2020): e0231361, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0231361>.

<sup>249</sup> Brooks et al., "Progress towards a representative network of Southern Ocean protected areas,"

<sup>250</sup> Callum M. Roberts, Julie P. Hawkins, and Fiona R. Gell, "The role of marine reserves in achieving sustainable fisheries," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 360, no. 1453 (January 28, 2005): XXXX, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2004.1578>.

proposed as an alternative for declaring MPAs in the Southern Ocean, requiring a two-thirds majority for ratification.<sup>251</sup> As an extension of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the BBNJ Treaty aims to regulate conservation beyond Exclusive Economic Zones and Continental Shelves, without the duration periods, unlike MPAs.<sup>252</sup> The proposal will take effect upon ratification by 60 Parties, spanning from September 2023 to September 2025.<sup>253</sup> While historically independent from UN Treaty Systems, CCAMLR has influenced BBNJ negotiations, and the next two years will reveal its approach to the BBNJ Agreement Structure.

## Conclusion

CCAMLR Marine Protection Areas reveal a flaw within the Antarctic Treaty System and highlight the influence of national interests on environmental policies. Australia leverages science and environmental concerns to secure its military security and historical claims to sovereignty, while China exploits the foundational ATS principle of 'science' to reject protection attempts and ensure future rational use. The vulnerability of marine conservation is exacerbated by consensus-based decision-making and irregular commission meetings. With each passing year of failed conservation proposals, the risk to vulnerable ecosystems grows.

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<sup>251</sup> Lowy Institute, "Charting new paths for Antarctic protection despite China's resistance | Lowy Institute," *The Interpreter* (blog), *Lowy Institute*, July 11, 2023, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/charting-new-paths-antarctic-protection-despite-china-s-resistance>.

<sup>252</sup> Abdel-Motaal, "Averting the Battle for Antarctica"

<sup>253</sup> Emily S. Nocito and Cassandra M. Brooks, "The Influence of Antarctic Governance on Marine Protected Areas in the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement Negotiations," *NPJ Ocean Sustainability* 2, no. 1 (September 18, 2023): XXXX, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44183-023-00019-5>.

## Final Conclusion

The examination of Australian and Chinese government policies, as highlighted in this research, underscores the significant repercussions of securitizing diverse national interests on the establishment, advancement or hindrance of environmental protection measures for Antarctica.

In the early 20th century, Australia's approach to Antarctic affairs shifted significantly after the Mawson Australasian Antarctic Expedition (1911-1914).<sup>254</sup> Initially disinterested, Australia, a conduit within the British Empire, transformed into an active participant, aligning with the British imperial and economic interests. The core of the environmental protection measures lay in the scientific research that drove its early explorers, like Douglas Mawson.<sup>255</sup> However, science developed to become a token of diplomacy and a facade for the securitisation pursuit of strengthening national security interests. The British Imperial Order's approval of the Australian Antarctic Territories Act in 1933<sup>256</sup> marked a turning point, reflecting Australia's evolving policies. Early documents reveal dual concerns: military security and the potential loss of economic resources.

Notably, Treasury and Prime Ministerial records indicate a nuanced consideration for The establishment of the Antarctic Treaty System in 1959<sup>257</sup> resulting in a freeze on the Australian Commonwealth's territorial claims. The threat to commercial mining in the 1970s and 1980s prompted Australia, under Treasurer Keating and Prime Minister Robert Hawke, to shift from responsible resource management, echoing the concept of 'rational use', to a no-take policy in the Australian Antarctic Territory.<sup>258</sup> This strategic securitisation move involved speech acts of diplomatic initiatives, compromises, and international campaigns to address environmental concerns and mitigate underlying territorial and economic risks. Australia played a crucial role in

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<sup>254</sup> Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water, "Australian Antarctic Territory."

<sup>255</sup> Bruce and Department of External Affairs, "Australian expedition to the Antarctic," January 21, 1929, National Archive of Australia.

<sup>256</sup> National Archive of Australia, "Australian Expedition to the Antarctic – Statement to the Parliament by Prime Minister Stanley Bruce."

<sup>257</sup> Bloom, "The History, Vision Behind and Impact of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty."

<sup>258</sup> Paul Keating, Letter to the Prime Minister, July 27, 1989, SPARC, Hobart, <https://sparc.utas.edu.au/uploads/r/antarctic-documents-database/1/a/8/1a8e0176e38b618abd8709940f6dfbfa5c03ea1e1dbf0cd55eea0cb847398261/b90f78b2-0816-4e59-b181-47dbddeb98af-AU-ATADD-1-BB-AU-196.pdf?token=1d1e6e25c255644ab1ff509f435d331bf2cd8d3956200084ff1f56c9c0e9d757>



steering the shift from a balanced mineral use approach to the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities to the adoption of the most significant conservation measure yet, the Environmental Protection Protocol of 1991.<sup>259</sup> Meanwhile, China's main method until recently with Marine Protection areas has been to integrate with governance systems to avoid diplomatic isolation and strengthen rational use goals.

While CCAMLR operates its distinct agreements, its clauses bind their signatories to key aspects of the Antarctic Treaty, such as Article IV, which addresses the legal status of territorial claims. Nonetheless, this unusual crossover with the ATS and the Environmental Protocol, calls to question the effectiveness of the Antarctic Treaty System. It appears the system is at odds with its original primary goals of diplomatic peace and appeasement through ambiguity and conscious decision-making, with the continually demanding reality of destructive climate change. Consensus-based decision-making for MPA is stagnating conservation progress, enabling nations like Russia and China to veto as a method for strengthening access to living resources. The future will reveal how the governance structures of Antarctica manage to balance these competing priorities in a geopolitically changing arena.

Australia's persistent advocacy for 'no-take approaches' in the Southern Ocean serves not only as a strategic method to fortify its territorial claims but also as a deterrent against emerging geopolitical players and perceived existential threats, notably China. The use of environmental initiatives as a means to reinforce national interests is a consistent thread in Australia's Antarctic policy. However, this approach has occasionally brought it into conflict with certain core annexes of the Antarctic Treaty, particularly concerning sovereignty over the outer continental Australian Antarctic Territory shelf and its associated marine zones. This research puts the Chinese rejection of current MPA proposals into context, while also underlying their economic interests and continued desire to securitise 'global commons' across the world.

Despite Australia's manoeuvres within the Antarctic governance framework and the historic evolution of their policies, China faces a considerable degree of scepticism, alarmism and criticism in Western media and scholarship.<sup>260</sup> The critique often centres on China's ambiguity regarding its rational use policies in the Antarctic region, however, lacks a nuanced understanding of their political differences and larger socio-cultural and economic goals.

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<sup>259</sup> Keating, Letter to the Prime Minister, July 27, 1989.

<sup>260</sup> Ian Bremmer, "China's Ambitious Plans in Antarctica have Raised New Suspicions," *Time Magazine*, April 28, 2023, <https://time.com/6274924/china-antarctica-south-pole-us-tension/>.

While the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) operates under distinct agreements, it binds signatories to fundamental aspects of the Antarctic Treaty, such as Article IV addressing the legal status of territorial claims.<sup>261</sup> The intricate overlap between the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) and the Environmental Protocol prompts an examination of the system's efficiency. It raises questions about whether the original goals of the ATS—diplomatic peace and appeasement through deliberate ambiguity and decision-making—are at odds with the escalating realities of climate change.

As destructive climate change advances, the governance structures of Antarctica face the challenges of its own flaws and of balancing these competing priorities in a geopolitically evolving arena. The future trajectory of Antarctic governance will unveil how these dynamics are managed to address both environmental imperatives and geopolitical complexities within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty System. Looking beyond 2048, the ramifications of Australia's initial concessions for the United States, made to secure the passage of the Environmental Protocol in 1991,<sup>262</sup> are poised to materialise. 2048 marks a critical juncture as it opens the possibility of revisiting the prohibition on certain activities in Antarctica. Per the provisions outlined in the Environmental Protocol, any state, subject to consensus among a majority of all Antarctic Treaty Parties, including three-quarters of the Consultative Parties, could potentially seek the removal of the existing prohibition.<sup>263</sup> This prospective scenario underscores the enduring significance of the securitisation protocols for Antarctica not only in the past and the present but for the future.

The dedication of member states, such as Australia and China, to the core tenet of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) — maintaining Antarctica as a "natural reserve, devoted to peace and science"<sup>264</sup> — raises questions. Australia's securitization efforts, channelled through environmental protection, reveal a dual agenda, evident in pursuits to fortify territorial claims. Conversely, newer entrants and institutional weaknesses could disrupt the delicate balance in the ATS, paving the way for a diplomatic and environmental crisis.

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<sup>261</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "Related Agreements"

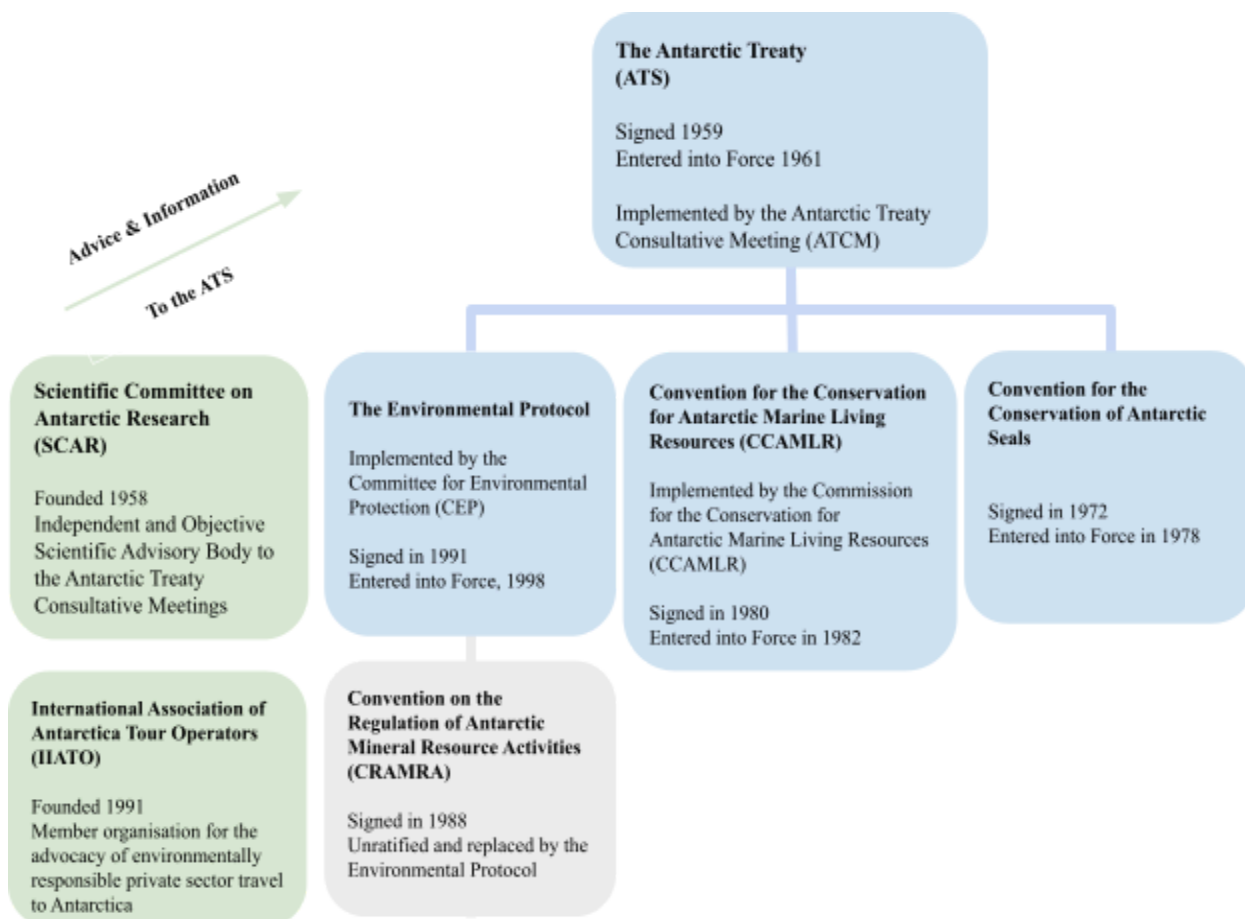
<sup>262</sup> Jackson, "Who Saved Antarctica?: Australia and Heroic Antarctic Diplomacy," 220.

<sup>263</sup> "Press Release - Environmental Protocol," July 4, 1991.

<sup>264</sup> *The Antarctic Treaty*, 3.

## APPENDIX

## “Appendix A”



Appendix A: A diagram illustrating key Antarctic Governance Structure within the Antarctic Treaty System; legislation, international bodies and important documents.<sup>265</sup> The Antarctic Treaty and this collection of agreements are referred to collectively as the *Antarctic Treaty System (ATS)*. Each has its own unique set of procedures about the Antarctic Treaty. This list is not exhaustive but illustrative of the key elements relevant to this research.

<sup>265</sup> McCarthy, A., L. Peck, K. Hughes, and D. Aldridge, “Antarctica: The Final Frontier for Marine Biological Invasions.” *Global Change Biology* 25 (2017) 7, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/gcb.14600>, accessed on Jan. 10, 2024.

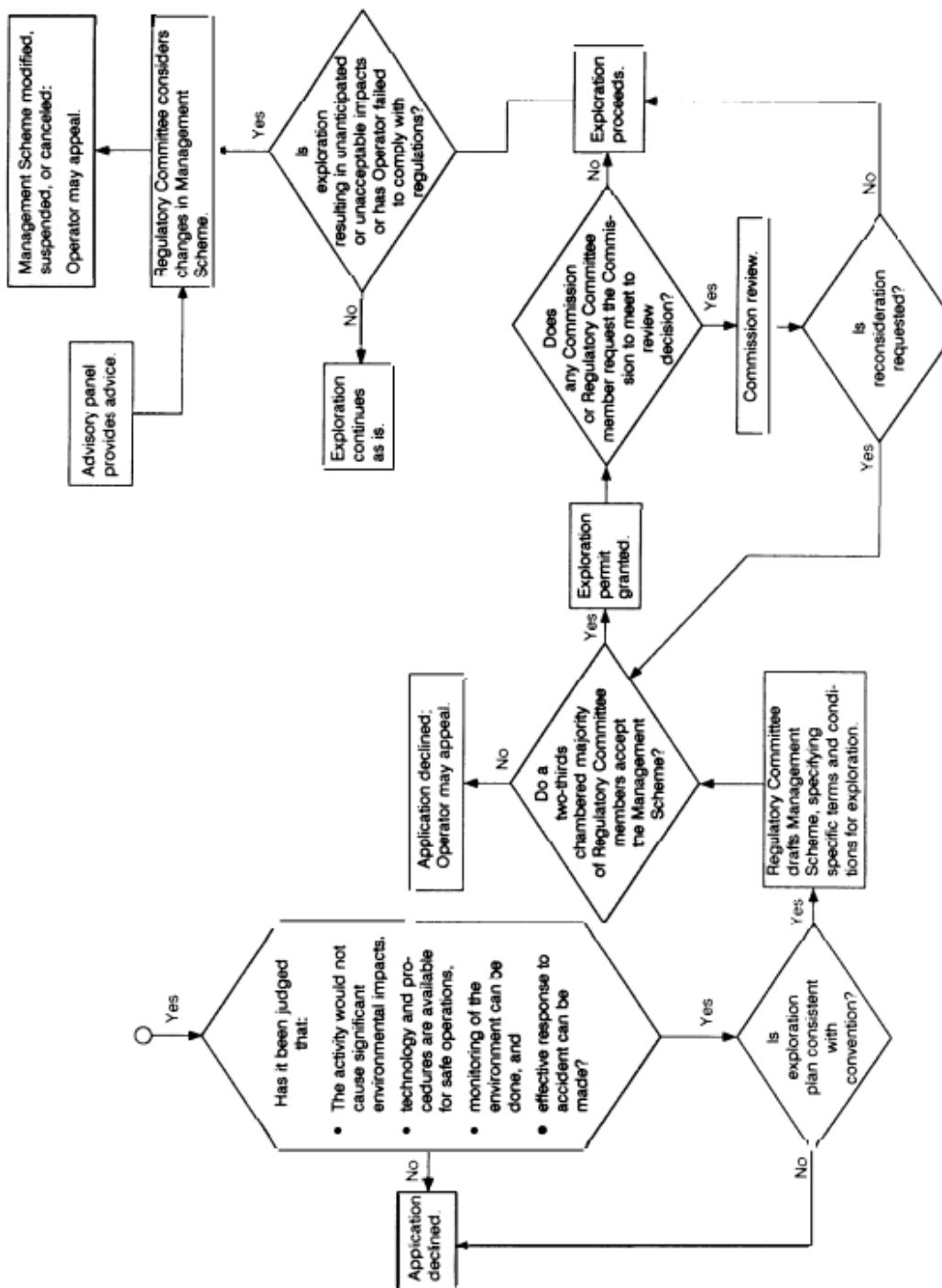
**“Appendix B”**

Date	Constitutional background
1773	Captain James Cook first person known to have sailed into the Antarctic Circle. Recorded his experience of the Bellinghausen Sea in his journals of 1773.
1820	Recorded sightings of Antarctica although no proclamations made on behalf of the respective sovereigns sponsoring those voyages undertaken by Branfield (Britain), Palmer (United States) and Bellingshausen (Russia)
1830-32	Earliest definite sightings of that part of the Antarctic mainland to become the AAT were made by Captain J Biscoe in 1830-32
1901-04	Extensive land exploration by Captain Robert Scott
1911 and 1914	First Australian Antarctic Expedition under command of Sir Douglas Mawson - sighting and chartings formed the foundations of Australia's sovereignty claims in Antarctica
1929-30	Further extensive claims to sovereignty made by the British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition of 1929-30 led by Mawson
1933	British Government issued an Order in Council asserting British sovereignty rights over the AAT and placed the Territory under the authority of the Commonwealth of Australia.  Transfer of sovereignty implemented by the <i>Australian Antarctic Territory Acceptance Act 1933</i> which came into effect in 1936
1954	<i>Australian Antarctic Territory Act 1954</i> provided for application of Commonwealth legislation to the Territory
1959	Australia signed the Antarctic Treaty as one of 12 original signatories
1960	Implementation of the Antarctic Treaty by Australia through the <i>Antarctic Treaty Act 1960</i> which commenced 22 September 1961

**Appendix B:** A timeline of the Constitutional Background to the Australian Antarctic Territory from the perspective of the Australian Government <sup>266</sup>

<sup>266</sup> "Chapter Six: Antarctic Territories," infographic, Australian Parliament House, accessed May 18, 2023, [https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary\\_business/committees/house\\_of\\_representatives\\_committees?url=ncet/communication/report/chapter6.pdf](https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=ncet/communication/report/chapter6.pdf).

“Appendix C”



Appendix C: CCAMLR - a complex framework which balanced mineral resource extraction with environmental management with a complex set of assessment procedures as indicated by Appendix D<sup>267</sup>

<sup>267</sup> United States. Congress. Office of Technology Assessment., "Polar Prospects: A Minerals Treaty for Antarctica.," infographic, 1989.

## “Appendix D”

### Article II

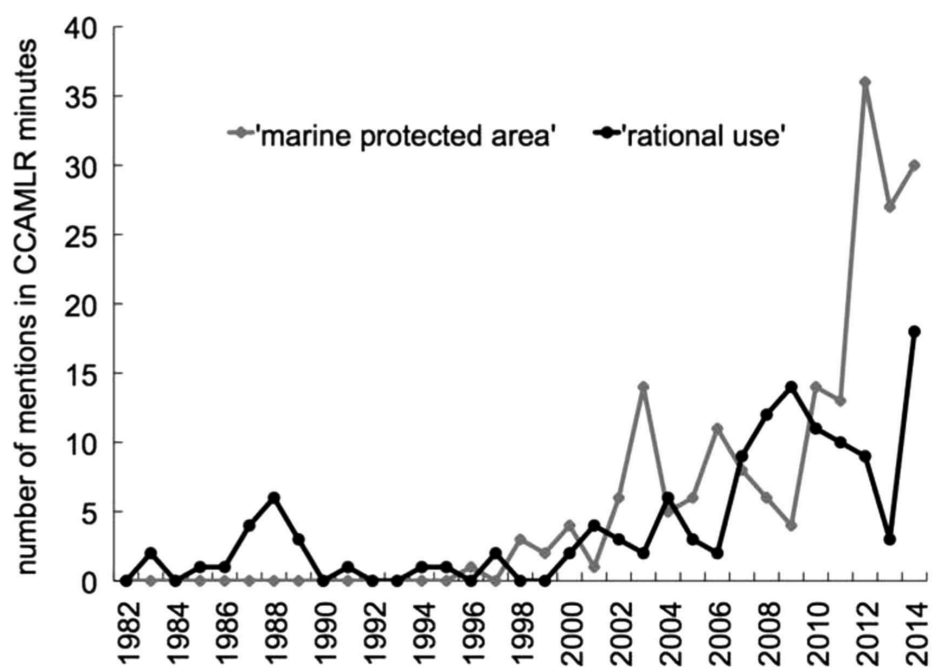
1. The objective of this Convention is the conservation of Antarctic marine living resources.
2. For the purposes of this Convention, the term ‘conservation’ includes rational use.
3. Any harvesting and associated activities in the area to which this Convention applies shall be conducted in accordance with the provisions of this Convention and with the following principles of conservation:
  - (a) prevention of decrease in the size of any harvested population to levels below those which ensure its stable recruitment. For this purpose its size should not be allowed to fall below a level close to that which ensures the greatest net annual increment;
  - (b) maintenance of the ecological relationships between harvested, dependent and related populations of Antarctic marine living resources and the restoration of depleted populations to the levels defined in sub-paragraph (a) above; and
  - (c) prevention of changes or minimisation of the risk of changes in the marine ecosystem which are not potentially reversible over two or three decades, taking into account the state of available knowledge of the direct and indirect impact of harvesting, the effect of the introduction of alien species, the effects of associated activities on the marine ecosystem and of the effects of environmental changes, with the aim of making possible the sustained conservation of Antarctic marine living resources.

Appendix D illustrates Article 2 of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, and the significant note that under the term “Conservation”, rational use is included.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "CAMLR Convention Text," image, Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://www.ccamlr.org/en/organisation/camlr-convention-text>.

## “Appendix E”



Appendix E: The increasing number of mentions of the terms ‘rational use’ and ‘marine protected area’ in CCAMLR meeting minutes until 2014. <sup>269</sup>

<sup>269</sup> Jennifer Jacquet et al., "The number of mentions of the terms ‘rational use’ and ‘marine protected area’ in the CCAMLR meeting minutes." infographic, Science Direct, January 2016, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X15002821>.

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