



Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

Department of Home Affairs submission to the Inquiry into the importance of Antarctica to Australia's national interests

Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and
External Territories

12 April 2024

Table of Contents

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| 1. | Department of Home Affairs' remit | 3 |
| | Specific interests pertaining to Antarctica | 3 |
| 1.1. | Visa and immigration support for the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) | 3 |
| 1.2. | Critical infrastructure | 4 |
| 1.3. | Research to support future policy development | 4 |

1. Department of Home Affairs' remit

The Department of Home Affairs ('Department') is responsible for central coordination and strategy policy leadership in relation to cyber and critical infrastructure resilience and security, immigration, border security and management, counter-terrorism and the protection of our sovereignty, citizenship and social cohesion.

The Department implements a strategically coordinated approach to the cyber security and resilience of all Australians through the appointment of a National Cyber Security Coordinator and threats of terrorism and foreign interference through the dedicated coordinators. Additionally, the Department contributes to Australia's prosperity and unity through the management and delivery of the migration, humanitarian and refugee programs. The Department also promotes social cohesion through multicultural programs, providing settlement services and managing and conferring citizenship.

Specific interests pertaining to Antarctica

1.1. Visa and immigration support for the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)

Australia hosts the headquarters of CCAMLR in Hobart, and has done so since the international Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources ('the Convention') entered into force on 7 April 1982.

CCAMLR is an international commission with 27 Members, an additional ten countries that have acceded to the Convention, and invited observers. CCAMLR makes decisions by consensus to adopt conservation measures and resolutions aimed towards achieving the Convention objective of conserving Antarctic marine living resources, which includes rational use.

The relationship between the Australian Government and CCAMLR has been governed by the Headquarters Agreement since it was signed on 8 September 1986. The agreement includes provisions on the issuing of visas for CCAMLR representatives, for which the Department is responsible and we take our obligations under the Headquarters Agreement seriously.

Recently, the relationship between the Department and the CCAMLR Secretariat has been strengthened, and a number of visa management changes are being made to better enable the Department to facilitate attendance at CCAMLR meetings in Australia. Visa management enhancements in recognition of the important relationship between CCAMLR and the Australian Government include:

- facilitating centralised processes for managing visa applications from CCAMLR invited delegates;
- reducing the administrative burden for delegates lodging their annual visa application to attend the annual CCAMLR meeting in Hobart;
- facilitating access to visas without a visa application charge;
- providing visa application guidance for CCAMLR annual meeting attendees, including guidance on visa application processing times; and
- providing CCAMLR with contacts within the Department for liaison regarding visa matters.

1.2. Critical infrastructure

The Australian Government works closely with subsea cable owners and operators to ensure they are taking appropriate steps to secure their assets against a spectrum of natural and human-induced hazards.

Owners of subsea cables in Australian territory are regulated through the *Telecommunications Act 1997* and the *Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018*.

Future subsea cable projects planned for Antarctica will have links to Australian critical infrastructure, which may have implications for interdependency and/or redundancy.

- The proposed new Humboldt subsea cable system has a planned route from Valparaiso, Chile to Sydney, Australia with connections to Easter Island, New Zealand and Antarctica.
- This route would be of interest to the Australian Government and Department of Home Affairs as the planned route may intersect or overlap with subsea cables that connect to the Australian mainland.
- Google, which is overseeing the Humboldt cable project with private and nation-state investors, is a member of the International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC). The Department of Home Affairs continues to monitor for any updates regarding the Humboldt cable system.

1.3. Research to support future policy development

Research in Antarctica will provide insights regarding climatic and cyclical impacts, with a million year record of Earth's climate and atmospheric composition currently being targeted.

Once this research is complete, it will provide invaluable insights regarding historical climate fluctuations and cycles, which will inform future scenarios of what can be anticipated globally, in terms of climate change and second order effects (for example, increasing incidence and severity of natural hazards; sea level rise).

This research will provide Australia with an evidence base upon which to formulate policy to support Australia's national interests in the context of:

- better positioning Australia to deal with our exposure and vulnerability to nationally significant crises, including those that result from climate change;
- better understanding of climate change induced effects on fish stock distribution and availability, as fish migratory patterns are predicted to undergo a poleward migration in the coming decades, this will help Australia to prepare for any increase in illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the region;
- preparation for multiple threats within an all-hazards agenda, spanning multiple domains (for example, critical infrastructure and national security); and
- global developments that heighten risks for regional stability and irregular migration, including climate-related natural hazards and humanitarian disasters.