
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Report of the Delegation to the Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly

London, United Kingdom, 1-4 December 2019

Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

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Members of the Delegation

Leader Hon Keith Pitt MP
 Committee Chair
 (1 August 2019 to 6 February 2020)

Member Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Official Ms Shennia Spillane
 Committee Secretary



Abbreviations

AAD	Australian Antarctic Division, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
APA, Assembly	Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly
ATS	Antarctic Treaty System
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
IAATO	International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators
JSCNCET, Committee	Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories



Report

Background

- 1.1 The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories (JSCNCET, or the Committee) is appointed by both Houses of the Australian Parliament.¹ Among its responsibilities is to inquire and report on matters relating to the Australian Antarctic Territory, which comprises Australia's sovereign territorial claim over approximately 42 per cent of the Antarctic continent.
- 1.2 The JSCNCET has conducted several inquiries related to Antarctica over many years. The most recent was undertaken by the former Committee in the 45th Parliament, in 2017-18. Among the key terms of reference for that inquiry was to examine Australia's 'international engagement, including collaboration and resource sharing with other countries'² in relation to Antarctica.
- 1.3 The former Committee's inquiry report was presented to Parliament in May 2018 and made 22 recommendations to the Australian Government aimed at strengthening Australia's already significant role in Antarctica.³ The Committee acknowledged Australia's internationally-recognised leadership in Antarctica over many decades, and made recommendations in four key areas including Australia's Antarctic leadership and governance, its international scientific collaboration, and the economic benefits to Australia from engagement in Antarctica.

1 *House of Representatives Votes and Proceedings*, 4 July 2019, pp. 53-55; *Journals of the Senate*, 22 July 2019, pp. 130-132.

2 Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, *Maintaining Australia's national interests in Antarctica: inquiry into Australia's Antarctic Territory*, Canberra, May 2018, p. xi.

3 Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, *Maintaining Australia's national interests in Antarctica: inquiry into Australia's Antarctic Territory*, Canberra, May 2018.

- 1.4 Meanwhile, in April 2018 Mr James Gray MP, convenor of the United Kingdom's All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Polar Regions, wrote to the then Chair of the JSCNCET (the Hon Ben Morton MP), to explore the Chair's interest in participating in a 'Conference of Antarctic Parliamentarians' which Mr Gray proposed to convene in London in 2019.
- 1.5 The Chair responded in May 2018, confirming his interest. In October and November 2018, further correspondence was exchanged between Mr Gray and the Chair. Following consultation with the Committee, the Chair confirmed his support and that of JSCNCET for the proposed conference. He also provided some feedback on the proposed agenda and participants, and suggested some Australian experts who could be invited to address the conference.
- 1.6 During the 2019 election period in Australia, preparations for the meeting progressed at the UK end. In July 2019 the new JSCNCET appointed for the 46th Parliament confirmed its interest in the conference – now titled the Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly – and its desire to send a bipartisan delegation. With the approval of the Presiding Officers, the (then) new Committee Chair, the Hon Keith Pitt MP, and Committee member Hon Warren Snowdon MP, were delegated to represent the Committee.

The delegation's visit

- 1.7 The delegation arrived in London on Sunday 1 December 2019, and that day attended a visit with other Assembly delegates to the Polar Worlds Gallery at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. The delegation attended the Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly and related events on 2-3 December, and departed London on Wednesday 4 December.
- 1.8 The delegation acknowledges the initiative of Mr James Gray MP and the United Kingdom Government and Parliament in conceiving the Assembly, and the hard work of Mr Gray and his staff in arranging and hosting its inaugural meeting.
- 1.9 The delegation expresses its thanks to officials from the Australian Parliament, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Canberra, the Australian High Commission in London and the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) for providing briefing and other assistance to the delegation. The delegation is also grateful to Professor Stephen Chown for his expert advice during the meeting.

Discussions at the Assembly

- 1.10 The first formal day of the Assembly consisted of presentations from experts covering a range of issues relating to Antarctica. These included:
- the framework of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS), its success to date, and its current and emerging challenges;
 - the impact of climate and environmental changes on the health and sustainability of Antarctica, its living species and surrounding ocean;
 - the importance of Antarctica as a place of scientific research;
 - the costs and benefits of increasing Antarctic tourism, and how to ensure the sustainability of tourism into the future; and
 - geopolitical and economic interests in Antarctica, and issues for present and future governance of the continent.
- 1.11 In his keynote address, UK Minister for the Polar Regions Lord Ahmad emphasised the particular role and importance of parliamentarians as advocates for Antarctica. He observed that the United Kingdom's key legislation relating to Antarctica was initiated not by its Government, but by parliamentary backbenchers. Lord Ahmad endorsed the value of strong global partnerships, including between parliaments, in support of protecting and preserving Antarctica for the good of the earth and all humankind, saying the continent was 'too remote, too hostile, to unforgiving not to collaborate. Crucially, it is also too globally important'.⁴
- 1.12 A number of speakers observed that the Assembly was taking place just one day after the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Antarctic Treaty. UK official Dr Jane Rumble noted the success of the Treaty system's reservation of Antarctica for 'peace and science', and that it was the only continent on earth that had never seen conflict. In that sense the ATS had been very successful, but had also achieved its success by not addressing key issues, including territorial sovereignty – issues that would inevitably arise at some point.
- 1.13 Dr Rumble also pointed out the importance of parliamentarians to the success of the ATS. She noted by way of example that a liability agreement agreed in 2005 under the Protocol on Environmental Protection had still not entered into force, because it had not been implemented into the domestic law of all its parties.⁵

4 All Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions, *Conference Report: Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly*, at <https://www.antarcticparliamentarians.com>, p. [3].

5 *Annex VI to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty: Liability Arising from Environmental Emergencies*, 2005, see <https://www.ats.aq/e/liability.html>. Australia enacted legislation to implement Annex VI in 2012.

- 1.14 A number of presenters spoke in detailed terms about the threats to Antarctica and its surrounding waters posed by climate change. Professor Tim Naish from New Zealand explained how sea level rise is already impacting Antarctica and emphasised that into the future, melting of polar ice sheets and ice shelves will become the dominant contributors to further sea level rise. Professor Stephen Chown from Monash University set out how the warming climate and other human impacts are threatening some Antarctic species, including fisheries in the Southern Ocean, and reducing global biodiversity.
- 1.15 Both academics spoke about the potential flow-on effects for humans, including displacement of people, with Professor Chown advising that current projections will see 340 million people around the world exposed annually to flooding by 2050.
- 1.16 Professor Naish queried the future role of the ATS as a vehicle to address the present challenges of climate change. He observed that until now the ATS Parties had essentially focused 'inward', on their own roles and interests, but that the present situation may give rise to the need to shift the focus outward, to act together as custodians of Antarctica.
- 1.17 Professor Chown urged parliamentarians to engage with their constituents to share information about the importance of and threats to Antarctica, and to reinforce the need for further, difficult measures to be undertaken to combat climate change and protect the continent.
- 1.18 Ms Birgit Njaastad from the Norwegian Polar Institute focused on whether and how Antarctica can be 'future-proofed'. She believed that the global scale of the challenges presently facing Antarctica impedes future-proofing, but that parties could 'soften the blow' using the tools available in the ATS. She noted that the Committee for Environmental Protection established under the ATS has responsibility and a 'proud history' of setting guidelines to ensure that human activities on the continent are carried out in an environmentally sensitive manner – but that guidelines only work if they are implemented by good practice. She also emphasised the need for ongoing scientific research and knowledge, and the sharing of that knowledge to facilitate sound decision-making at the political level.
- 1.19 With regard to scientific research, Ms Iqra Choudhry from the University of Manchester spoke about the unique status and contribution of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research: as both a coordinator and distributor of international research, and a vehicle for 'scientific diplomacy'.
- 1.20 Professor Klaus Dodds from Royal Holloway University in the UK provided insights on the geopolitical aspects of governing Antarctica. He noted that the Antarctic is becoming increasingly globalised, and

foreshadowed increasing pressure on Southern Ocean fisheries arising from global food insecurity.

- 1.21 Tourism in Antarctica was another key subject of interest, commented on by several presenters. Dr Daniela Portella Sampaio from the University of Leeds noted the rapid growth of Antarctic tourism, in terms of both the number of visitors and the range of activities contemplated. She drew attention to the important role of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) in ensuring safe, environmentally responsible operations that minimise human impact on the continent. Nevertheless, balancing increasing tourism with the environmental objectives of the ATS was a growing challenge.
- 1.22 Dr Portella Sampaio said that IAATO and its operators believed strongly that legislation was needed to give ‘teeth’ to its agreed measures, and that there was concern about the gap between the growth of tourism and the speed of governments’ decision-making.
- 1.23 A more detailed summary report of the presentations made at the Assembly was prepared and published by the Assembly’s UK hosts.⁶
- 1.24 Overall, the delegation found the quality of presentations made at the Assembly to be very high, with a range of topical and interesting material presented by some extremely well informed and engaged experts.
- 1.25 The small and relaxed setting for the conference also provided a good environment for informal discussion and networking between participating parliamentarians, as well as with the experts and senior officials present.
- 1.26 Delegates discussed possible presentations at future Assemblies, and offered suggestions for some that would be particularly useful to parliamentarians. These included:
- updates on progress on key issues such as environmental degradation, wildlife and fisheries conservation and tourism;
 - updates on recent developments and issues arising in ATS meetings and forums;
 - presentations on behalf of individual ATS member states, to inform parliamentarians from other countries about their activities and initiatives in, and in relation to, Antarctica;
 - presentations about emerging initiatives or projects; and
 - discussion of initiatives or projects that are the subject of, or could benefit from, international cooperation, such as collaborative scientific research projects.

⁶ All Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions, *Conference Report: Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly*, at <https://www.antarcticparliamentarians.com/>.

Conference statement

- 1.27 The second day of the Assembly was scheduled for debate on the proposed 'Conference Statement'.
- 1.28 A draft of the statement had been prepared by the UK hosts and circulated to delegations prior to the Assembly. The hosts proposed a process for consideration of amendments and agreement on the Statement, not unlike those used for formal ATS negotiations and other inter-governmental meetings.
- 1.29 In practice, negotiating agreement on the draft Statement proved to be problematic. While the Statement was intended to reflect the sentiments of participating parliamentarians in support of Antarctica and the ATS, rather than constituting an inter-governmental agreement, the draft was very detailed and called for specific actions from the governments of Treaty Party countries. Participants therefore became understandably concerned to ensure that all wording was consistent with their various national positions. This resulted in discussions on the Statement becoming complex, contested and duplicative of formal negotiations undertaken in inter-governmental ATS bodies.
- 1.30 Nevertheless, a Conference Statement was eventually agreed. With the provision of excellent support at short notice from Australian (DFAT and AAD) officials and experts, and in cooperation with representatives from likeminded countries, the delegation was able to ensure that Australia's interests and perspectives were adequately reflected in the final Statement, which is attached at Appendix B.
- 1.31 It is the delegation's view that negotiation and adoption of the Statement, which proved challenging and took up a significant proportion of the time and energy of the Assembly, was not the most beneficial use for the gathering. The Australian delegation, along with several others, believed that such a lengthy and detailed statement was unnecessary and inappropriate for a conference of this nature.
- 1.32 The delegation considers that future Assemblies would be best focused on sharing information, building networks, and discussing the role that parliamentarians in particular can play in ensuring the future peace and preservation of Antarctica. Any statement ensuing from the Assembly should be brief and simply reaffirm the support of participating parliamentarians for Antarctica and the ATS.

Future of the Assembly

- 1.33 While the Assembly was conceived and funded within the UK as a one-off event, the hosts were keen to establish it as a periodic gathering, and this was supported by other delegations.
- 1.34 The Conference Statement proposes that the Assembly be convened biennially, and alternate between the Northern and Southern hemispheres. Participants indicated that an offer by Australia and/or New Zealand to host the next Assembly in late 2021 would be welcomed. The delegates from both countries undertook to take the idea back to their respective parliaments for further consideration.
- 1.35 In the Australian delegation's view, there would be value in our Parliament offering to host the next APA. It would provide the opportunity, at an early stage of the Assembly's development, to shape its format and assist in ensuring that it continues in an effective and beneficial way.
- 1.36 The delegation further proposes that consideration be given to hosting the next APA in Hobart. This would locate the Assembly in the 'hub' of Australia's Antarctic engagement, and provide an opportunity to showcase Australia's Antarctic facilities and activities to a global audience of interested parliamentarians.
- 1.37 The delegation acknowledges that hosting the event at Parliament House in Canberra would be simpler and cheaper, given available meeting facilities, expertise and staffing resources. This is a possible alternative.
- 1.38 The delegation considers that JSCNCET remains the appropriate body to lead Australia's engagement with the Assembly, including as the potential host. At the same time, successful hosting or co-hosting of such an event would be done by the Committee on behalf of the Parliament of Australia, and as such would require the approval of the Presiding Officers.
- 1.39 Moreover, the APA presently has no permanent secretariat or membership structure and no budget. While delegates could be expected to fund their own travel and accommodation costs, the host would need to organise the in-country elements of the event and bear the costs of doing so. Whether it took place in Canberra or Hobart, hosting the 2021 APA would require dedicated staffing and financial resources beyond those of the existing JSCNCET secretariat.
- 1.40 In addition, practical engagement and support from relevant Government agencies, notably DFAT and AAD, as well as the Government and Parliament of Tasmania, would be essential to the success of the event.
- 1.41 As such, the delegation recommends that the Committee first seek the in-principle agreement of the Presiding Officers to JSCNCET hosting the next

APA in 2021 on behalf of the Parliament of Australia. Should such approval be received, the Committee secretariat could then work on a more detailed plan for the event, including a proposed format, arrangements, budget and staffing, for further consideration by the Committee and Parliament.

The Hon Keith Pitt MP

Delegation Leader



Appendix A—Conference Program

Sunday 1 December

Delegates Arrive

Afternoon **Social Event:** Visit to the Polar Worlds Gallery at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich

Monday 2 December

08:30 *Registration opens*

09.30-09.40 **Opening Address**
- James Gray, Chairman, UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions

09.40-10.10 **Keynote: Celebrating 60 Years of the Antarctic Treaty System**
- Lord Ahmad, UK Minister for the Polar Regions

10.10-10.30 **Introduction to the Antarctic Treaty System**
- Jane Rumble, Head of the Polar Regions Department, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office

MORNING SESSION: Why Antarctica Matters

10:30-10:40 **Introduction: The global impact of climate change in Antarctica**
- Professor Dame Jane Francis, Director, British Antarctic Survey

1040-1120 **How is climate change affecting Antarctica and what does it mean for us?**
- Professor Tim Naish, Antarctic Research Centre, New Zealand

11:20-12:00 *Coffee break*

1200-1245 **How will life in the Antarctic survive a changing world?**
- Professor Steven Chown, Monash University, Australia

13:00-14:00 *Lunch break*

AFTERNOON SESSION: Challenges Facing Antarctica

- 14:00-14:10 **Geopolitics and Governance in Antarctica**
- Professor Klaus Dodds, Royal Holloway University, UK
- 14:10-14:50 **Future proofing Antarctica - can we succeed?**
- Birgit Njaastad, Norwegian Polar Institute, Norway
- 14:50-15:30 **Antarctic tourism: can human presence support environmental protection?**
- Dr Daniela Portella Sampaio, University of Leeds, UK
- 15:30-16:00 *Tea break*
- 16:00-16:40 **A Force for Good? Antarctica and the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research**
- Iqra Choudhry, University of Manchester, UK
- 16:40-17:00 Final Questions
- 18:30-23:00 Evening reception and dinner at Armoury House in the City of London

Tuesday 3 December

- 08:30 *Conference opens*
- 09:30-09:35 **Welcome**
- James Gray, Chairman, UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions
- 09:35-12:15 **Parliamentarians' discussion and debate of Conference statement**
2a. Protection of the Antarctic environment
 - Climate change, plastics and pollution
 - Marine biodiversity
 - Terrestrial specially protected areas
 - Ratification of Annex VI to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty
- 11:00-11:30 *Coffee break*
- 11:30-12:15 **Parliamentarians' discussion and debate of Conference statement (continued)**
2b. Scientific collaboration
 - Improve climate change predictions
 - Collection and sharing of scientific information
 - Sharing scientific information with decision makers
- 12:15-12:30 Official Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly photograph

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- 12:30-14:00 Lunch break - Working lunch for conference statement drafting committee
- 14:00-15:30 **Parliamentarians' discussion and debate of Conference statement**
(continued)
- 2c. Human activities
- Environmental Impact Assessments
 - Marine Protected Areas
 - Sustainable fishing
 - Responsible tourism
 - Improving hydrographic charting and navigation systems
3. Future of the Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly
- 15:30-16:00 *Tea break*
- 16:00 Presentation and signing of Conference Statement
- 17:00 Closing remarks
- 17:30 *End of conference*
- 17:30 - 19:30 - Drinks reception in the Library



Appendix B—Conference Statement

ANTARCTIC PARLIAMENTARIANS ASSEMBLY

Meeting in London, 2-3 December 2019

CONFERENCE STATEMENT

We, as a group of parliamentarians from Antarctic Treaty Parties, gathered at the inaugural Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly in London on 2-3 December:

Recognise the global importance of the Antarctic Treaty System, comprising the Antarctic Treaty and its Protocol on Environmental Protection, which designates Antarctica as a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science; and the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, which provides for the conservation of Antarctic marine living resources;

Note with concern the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate, which highlights the profound effects of climate change on Antarctica's ecosystems and the potentially catastrophic effects of Antarctic ice loss on global sea level;

Encourage the continued and strengthened contribution of all scientific investigation in, from, and about Antarctica to the better understanding of our world and the implications of climate change and other environmental changes;

Commit ourselves to upholding the Antarctic Treaty System and its key objectives: to preserve the continent for peace and science; prevent mineral exploitation and measures of a military nature; promote scientific endeavour and research; comprehensively protect the Antarctic environment and dependent and associated ecosystems; and conserve Antarctic and Southern Ocean marine living resources;

Recommit ourselves to supporting our Governments with regard to the full implementation of the Antarctic Treaty, including to expedite the entry into force of measures made under the Antarctic Treaty, and

Recognise that national legislatures, alongside governments, international organisations, the private sector and civil society all have an important role to play in promoting the conservation and protection of Antarctica, including the Southern Ocean.

Agree to:

1. Work towards establishing the Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly on a biennial basis:
 - a. Parliamentarians from Antarctic Treaty Parties are invited to participate, and Parliamentarians from other countries, representatives from non-governmental organisations, and other experts wishing to support the actions of the Assembly are invited to observe the Assembly; and
 - b. The Assembly will be hosted by agreement among participating parliamentarians from Antarctic Treaty Parties, subject to further discussions, and alternating between the Southern and Northern hemispheres.
2. Urge the Antarctic Treaty Parties and Members of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources actively to support and, as appropriate, prioritise their efforts to:
 - a. Protect and conserve the Antarctic environment including by:
 - i. Continuing international efforts, through relevant forums, to address issues arising from activities outside the Antarctic region that adversely impact on the Antarctic environment;
 - ii. Ensuring robust Environmental Impact Assessment processes are conducted for all activities in Antarctica, in accordance with Annex I of the Protocol on Environmental Protection and that environmental impacts are mitigated and minimised as far as practicable;
 - iii. Reinforcing international cooperation on pollution issues, including plastics, that affect the Antarctic environment;
 - iv. Encouraging work to further strengthen the interaction and synergies within the Antarctic Treaty System, to ensure that the clear connectivity between ocean and land in Antarctica is appropriately addressed;
 - v. Addressing the effects of climate change on Antarctic marine biodiversity and marine conservation, including ecosystem-based fisheries management;

- vi. Promoting effective establishment, management and monitoring of a systematic network of Antarctic specially protected areas;
 - vii. Enhancing the management and protection of Antarctic heritage;
 - viii. Encouraging the exchange of knowledge and best practice among Antarctic Treaty Parties;
 - ix. Urging those countries that have not yet ratified Annex VI to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty relating to environmental liability to do so; and
 - x. Ensuring effective national engagement in the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.
- b. Promote and support international scientific collaboration, including to:
- i. Facilitate the detection, assessment, and predictions of the rate of change in Antarctica in response to human activities and climate change, and the consequential effects of these changes on the Antarctic ecosystem and the rest of the world;
 - ii. Enhance the scientific knowledge of Antarctic biodiversity to be used for the conservation and management of Antarctic ecosystems;
 - iii. Encourage further coordinated efforts in expanding and maintaining observation efforts in Antarctica, including the Southern Ocean, recognising the role that integrated and sustained observations play in answering key scientific questions, from predicting sea level rise to understanding ecosystem response to environmental change;
 - iv. Facilitate the efficient collection and sharing of scientific information and encourage work to increase data comparability;
 - v. Undertake and support science that will inform the effective protection and conservation of Antarctica; and
 - vi. Promote the designation of a fifth International Polar Year.
- c. Ensure effective management of activities in Antarctica, including by:
- i. Encouraging the further establishment of a representative system of Marine Protected Areas;

- ii. Enhancing the efforts of logistics operators to cooperate in order to reduce the environmental impact of scientific and nongovernmental activities;
 - iii. Ensuring sustainable fishing practices and a responsible fishing industry, in order to minimise impacts on non-target species and, in particular, to avoid sea-bird and marine mammal bycatch; and to combat illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing activities;
 - iv. Noting the anticipated continued growth in tourism and any adverse environmental impact that some activities may have;
 - v. to ensure that tourism is conducted strictly in a safe, environmentally responsible manner, including through the implementation of all tourism-related Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting Measures; and
 - vi. Continuing to enhance search and rescue cooperation and facilitating the improvement of hydrographic charting and navigation systems in Antarctic waters, promoting coordinated efforts and data sharing among national hydrographic institutions.
3. Encourage our parliaments to adopt, where appropriate, additional national legislation contributing to the full and effective implementation of the Antarctic Treaty System.
4. Encourage all parliamentarians from Antarctic Treaty Parties to endorse and support this statement.

Signed by:

James Gray, UK

The Rt Hon Baroness Pauline Neville-Jones, UK

Generoso Maraia MP, Italy

Senator Massimo Vittorio Berutti, Italy

Senator Patricia Bovey, Canada

Mélissa Hanus MP, Belgium

Jean-Marc Delizée MP, Belgium

Chen Lifeng MP, China

Hubert Julien-Lafférière MP, France

Jacques Maire MP, France

Eirik Sivertsen MP, Norway

Andrew Bayly MP, New Zealand

Congressman Vitor Hugo, Brazil

Keith Pitt MP, Australia

Warren Snowdon MP, Australia

First Deputy Speaker Åsa Lindestam, Sweden

Hamza Dag MP, Turkey

Rumeysa Kadak MP, Turkey

Roman Hryshuk MP, Ukraine