

EIGHTH SESSION OF THE
SPECIAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON ANTARCTIC MINERALS RESOURCES
HOBART, 14 TO 25 APRIL 1986

PRESS RELEASE BY CHAIRMAN

Countries which are party to the Antarctic Treaty met in Hobart for two weeks from 14 April to continue the process of discussions begun in 1982 aimed at developing an international regime to regulate any future minerals activity in the Antarctic.

The Chairman of the meeting, Mr Chris Beeby of New Zealand, commented that the discussions in Hobart had been marked by the constructive and dynamic spirit that characterised the Antarctic Treaty system and had so successfully fostered international co-operation in the Antarctica for more than twenty-five years.

"The purpose of the negotiations," Mr Beeby said, "is to strengthen the Antarctic Treaty by ensuring that if mineral activities in Antarctic ever take place they do not threaten either the peace and stability that the Treaty has maintained or the Antarctic environment."

He explained that the regime under discussion would cover all phases of mineral resource activities and would provide detailed principles, procedures and mechanisms, including in every phase the requirement that any activity be subject to an environmental impact assessment.

"No exploration or development activity in Antarctica would be permitted," he said, "unless and until there is a specific finding, following independent scientific advice, that it does not constitute a threat to the environment."

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"It is essential," he explained, "that we reach agreement on these detailed measures for ensuring the stringent protection of the Antarctic environment well before pressures for mineral activities develop." In that regard he noted that the harsh climate, technological difficulties, tough environmental safeguards and, generally, the very high operating costs made it doubtful whether minerals activity in Antarctica would ever be of commercial interest.

"The Antarctic Treaty countries," Mr Beeby said, "also hoped that the negotiations would help to foster international co-operation in Antarctica. For that reason they had committed themselves to the principle that, as in the case of the Antarctic Treaty itself, membership of the proposed regime would be open and all nations who accepted the obligations of the regime would have the right to undertake approved minerals activity. They had also", he noted, "made a public commitment that a basic consideration in drawing up the regime was that it must not prejudice the interests of all mankind in Antarctica."

"In Hobart, there has been an increased momentum to the negotiations - we have found a more flexible and effective way of advancing," Mr Beeby said. "Discussions here have again focussed on the central issues in the negotiations, namely the composition, functions and decision-making procedures of the institutions of the proposed regime as well as the question of participation in minerals activity. Good progress has been achieved in the search for solutions to what are very complex and difficult issues, requiring the balancing of different positions and interests. Headway has also been made in examining a number of important legal issues which need to be addressed in the proposed regime, including compliance, enforcement, inspection and monitoring", Mr Beeby said.

In conclusion, Mr Beeby thanked the Australian Government and the Government of the State of Tasmania for the warm welcome delegates had received in Hobart, for the excellent meeting arrangements and for the generous hospitality provided. "This meeting was an important milestone in progress towards the successful conclusion of an Antarctic minerals regime", he said.