

Address on Behalf of the Australian Government

**OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY FOR THE COMMISSION FOR THE
CONSERVATION OF THE ANTARCTIC MARINE LIVING RESOURCES**

By the Hon. Michael Hodgman, M.P., Minister Assisting in Industry and Commerce

Hobart, 25 May 1982

Your Excellencies, Ministers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is my great privilege, on behalf of the Australian Government, to welcome you all to Hobart – Australia's most beautiful state capital city – and which also comprises the Federal Electorate of Denison which it has been my honour to represent in the Australian Parliament since 1975. Many of you will have travelled great distances to Hobart, Tasmania, and I hope that your stay here and in the Commonwealth of Australia generally, will be most pleasant and rewarding. Some of you are no strangers to this historic and beautiful city. It is my particular pleasure to welcome back to Hobart distinguished representatives who visited our city during the conference in Canberra in 1980 when the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources was concluded and also those of you who were present at the Preparatory Meeting held here in Hobart last September.

Today is, without doubt, a most historic occasion. It is the first meeting of the Commission which is established by the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. The launch of the international Commission today is the culmination of seven years hard work by the Antarctic Treaty nations and is an achievement of which all of you can be justly proud. Today's historic meeting signifies the beginning of the practical realisation of the unique conservation regime which is embodied in the Convention. The Commission is charged with the task of developing and implementing that regime. The fact that you are embarking on this important task so soon after the conclusion of the Convention is a clear indication of the commitment of all participating countries to work for the early attainment of the objectives set out in the Convention itself.

It gives me particular pleasure, both as Federal Member for Denison and as a minister in the Australian Government, that Article XIII of the Convention prescribes that this Commission and its international secretariat will be permanently based here in Hobart, Tasmania. For me, this

achievement brings to reality a dream and a vision for which I and others have worked assiduously for nearly a decade.

The elaboration of a Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, which countries represented here today concluded in Canberra just two years ago, presented both new challenges and new and exciting opportunities. It presented challenges because the task facing those countries who have traditionally been concerned with Antarctic affairs was to devise a regime for the off-shore areas of Antarctica which would permit international co-operation, notwithstanding the differences which exist about the political and legal status of some of these waters.

It was also a challenge because, perhaps for the very first time, the Antarctic Treaty partners were called upon to deal with issues which raised in a most direct way vital questions relating to the exploitation of resources. Further, it was a challenge to the commitment of the Antarctic Treaty system to its goals of conservation at a time when international interest in the harvesting of the living resources of the Antarctic was on the increase.

It seems to me – and to the Australian Government – that these challenges also present new opportunities. The growing perception of the need to regulate the future exploitation of all the living resources of the great southern oceans provides an opportunity to the Antarctic Treaty system to demonstrate that it is truly equal to that task. The Antarctic Treaty partners have a record of which they may be justly proud, reaching back over the past twenty years with respect to their demonstrated concern and commitment to protect and preserve the living resources of the land mass of Antarctica. They have also, in the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals, 1972, extended their concerns into the marine areas. But the opportunity that now presents itself requires a commitment to conservation needs of a kind not previously encountered.

The history of the uncontrolled harvesting which has occurred in the past and is seen in the depletion of the whale population, has provided the opportunity to reassess our actions and to manage the resources so as to ensure – to the utmost of our collective ability – continued harvesting in the future whilst at the same time conserving the wild life of the region. It provides a unique chance to show that control mechanisms can be devised, and put in place, before harvesting reaches a point where it could raise risks for the harvesting of krill and dependent species. In no other region of the world are the inter-relationships between species so direct or the risks of uncontrolled harvesting greater than they are in the Antarctic Southern Ocean.

The conclusion of the Convention is a clear indication that your governments were willing – and are willing – to meet these challenges and to grasp these opportunities. You must now carry this important task forward, with skill, with determination and with commitment, through the work of the

Commission. Your presence here today is eloquent testimony of your desire to do so expeditiously. Your presence is also testimony that the spirit of international co-operation in often difficult times, which has been so marked a feature of the Antarctic Treaty system over the 22 years of its existence, will hold good for the future.

We are also greatly honoured to have present at this opening ceremony representatives of a range of inter-governmental and other scientific and specialist organisations with a competence and responsibility with relation to the subject matter covered in the Convention. The lively interest taken in the process of negotiating the Convention and in establishing the Commission by qualified scientific and conservation bodies, is another mark of the broader international interest which is being shown in your work. Antarctic Treaty partners cannot expect to operate free from public scrutiny. Indeed the eyes of the world are on you today. The international community, which has tacitly accepted the role of the Consultative Parties to the Antarctic Treaty for two decades, will increasingly look to those parties to hold themselves accountable for the quality and expertise of their performance. From that point of view as well, the way in which this international Commission will approach its work will be of great interest well beyond the confines of the grouping of nations which have traditionally interested themselves in Antarctica.

Australia was greatly honoured when, at the May 1980 diplomatic conference, you selected this nation and this city of Hobart as the site for the Commission's headquarters. The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources is the first international and inter-governmental organisation to have its permanent headquarters located in Australia, and it is singularly appropriate that Hobart, with its long history of association with the Antarctic should be the home of the Commission.

Many of you will know that Hobart has also, in recent years, become the focus of Australia's own Antarctic and Southern Oceans research effort. The Commonwealth and State governments have co-operated closely in providing suitable accommodation for the first headquarters and you will all have an opportunity to see the premises which have been selected when they are officially handed over later this week.

Your Excellencies, Ministers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, both personally and on behalf of the Australian government, I wish you every success in this the first – and indeed historic – meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. I trust and pray that the spirit of goodwill which has brought you here from every part of the globe will reward your efforts as you commence your duties of trusteeship and guidance, of management and advice, for the benefit of Mankind. I wish you Godspeed as you now proceed to commence the very important work with which this international Commission is charged.