

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR 1983.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 1983

In my opening remarks I referred to the international circumstances which have given an added impetus to the work of the Commission and the Scientific Committee. On the one hand there is pressure on the Antarctic Treaty system reflected in the initiative of Malaysia and Antigua and Barbuda to have an item inscribed on the agenda of the General Assembly to consider the Antarctic and its resources. In their approach to the UNGA, these countries have referred to the Convention.

On the other hand, we have the recent accession to the Antarctic Treaty by the People's Republic of China and India. These are positive developments which should help to ensure that the important progress made by Parties to the Convention in establishing an international regime for the conservation of marine living resources will be recognised by the international community as the best means to achieve this objective.

This is not to suggest that we can afford to relax our efforts to implement the Convention. We must now establish effective measures to protect the Antarctic environment while permitting the rational use of its resources for the benefit of the international community.

The credibility of the Convention will, in large measure, depend upon the speed and effectiveness with which it is implemented. Important progress has been made, as outlined in my opening statement. I am sure we all recognise, however, that a great deal more has to be done. The Convention cannot be regarded as securely established until we have adequate machinery in place for the analysis of data and the assessment of the impact of harvesting and other activities in the Southern Ocean.

After assuming the Chairmanship of the Commission, following the first Hobart meetings, I was impressed by the need for an effort to be made before this session to resolve remaining difficulties in the way of the conclusion of the Rules of Procedure of the Scientific Committee.

In the final stages of the last Hobart meetings, the Chairman of the Commission was requested by Delegations to make an effort to resolve this problem.

I did not under-estimate the difficulties in the way of achieving agreement. The problems which prevented agreement in Hobart last year were complex and reflected a variety of views about the role and function of the Scientific Committee, its relationship to the Commission and the standing of some of its Members.

After an initial effort to identify prospects for agreement by correspondence in a message to Members in November, it appeared that agreement could only be reached if it was possible to have an exchange between Members which might help to clear the air and might make possible redrafting of a consensus formulation of Rule 3 which posed the main problem.

I therefore thought it was desirable to take advantage of the presence in Canberra in April 1983 of a number of our colleagues who attended the Preparatory Meeting of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties. I proposed that some time might be made available for an informal consultation on the Rules of Procedure of the Scientific Committee. All countries which were members of the Commission were invited to participate.

These informal consultations were held and there was an opportunity for a reasonably substantial discussion of the issues and difficulties. I was also able to go over the issues in detail with those members who held particularly strong views on the question.

As a result of this process a consensus among participants was reached on a suggested wording for Rule 3 and a consequent rewording for Rule 9. There was an understanding that in my capacity as Chairman, I would refer this suggested wording formally to Member Governments with the request that they confirm in writing whether the revised text was acceptable.

The response from Members who have already written in response was agreement with the proposed wording and the expression of some relief that this problem might be disposed of. I regret however that I am not yet in a position to report complete agreement within the Commission.

While I have not been able to resolve the problem I am happy to offer my offices for a further effort.

There may be a need for further discussion to ensure all views are canvassed and to reassure any Members who are still reluctant to confirm agreement with this wording.