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Pew Applauds U.S. Decision to Co-Lead on Southern Ocean Marine Protected Areas
Special climate envoy John Kerry announces key support for much-needed conservation efforts

WASHINGTON—The Pew Charitable Trusts today praised the U.S. government for joining efforts to secure marine protected areas (MPAs) in Antarctica’s Southern Ocean.

Special presidential climate envoy John Kerry announced today that the U.S. would join the European Union, the United Kingdom, Australia, Norway, and Uruguay in pushing for the designation of the East Antarctic and Weddell Sea MPAs—which would protect over 3 million square kilometers of the Southern Ocean.

These two MPA designations by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Living Resources (CCAMLR) would also move the world nearly 1% closer to achieving the goal of protecting 30% of the global ocean, called for in 2016 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Research shows that MPAs can help vulnerable marine ecosystems build resilience to climate change by eliminating additional stresses such as fishing and that networks of MPAs also help species adapt to climate change by creating protected pathways for migrations and range shifts.

In 2009, CCAMLR became the first international body to commit to creating an ecologically representative network of MPAs, following recommendations from the 2002 United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development. Two years later, its member governments agreed to a framework for creating such a network and identified nine regions for future MPAs. Since 2011, CCAMLR has designated two MPAs in Southern Ocean waters: the Ross Sea and South Orkney Islands.

Andrea Kavanagh, director of Antarctic and Southern Ocean work for The Pew Charitable Trusts, issued the following statement:

“The Southern Ocean is one of the last great wilderness areas on the planet. And in a year in which we mark the 60th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty entering into force, two years after it was signed in 1959, the Southern Ocean’s fate continues to affect us all. Its cold deep currents not only carry nutrients to feed many of the world’s fisheries, but they also regulate heat distribution around the globe. And its waters store carbon in ways we have just begun to understand.

“Protection of the Southern Ocean is the kind of nature-based solution needed to make marine ecosystems more resilient in the fight against global climate change. We welcome the news that the U.S. is joining the other countries leading the charge for designation of two MPAs in the Southern Ocean.”