

CEP IV
Working Paper WP-2
Agenda Item 4g)
United Kingdom
Original: English

Antarctic Protected Areas System
Revision of the Status of Specially Protected Area No 18: North Coronation
Island, South Orkney Islands.

Working Paper Submitted to the Committee for Environmental Protection
by the United Kingdom

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Introduction

Northern Coronation Island (60°33' South, 45°35' West), South Orkney Islands, was originally designated as Specially Protected Area number 18, by means of Recommendation XIII-10 (1985). Proposed by the UK, the site was designated on the grounds that it, “embraces areas of coastal ice-free terrain...with large seabird colonies and lichen-dominated cliffs, and...provides an excellent representative area of pristine ice environment near the northern limit of maritime Antarctica...” and that the area comprises an excellent example of, “.....an integrated coastal, permanent ice and sublittoral ecosystem of the maritime Antarctic environment”.

As required by Resolution 1 (1998), the United Kingdom (UK) has completed a thorough review of the Management Plan for this site.

However, that review has raised a number of questions about the original basis for designation of the site. These fundamental concerns bring into question how best to continue to afford protection to the site, or whether, in fact, protection is required at all.

Review of SPA 18

Attempt to revise the Management Plan for this site has raised a number of key issues:

- Firstly, access to the site is exceptionally difficult. This results from a combination of the rugged terrain, few practical landing points for boat or aircraft, and prevailing poor weather conditions for much of the year (notably very low cloud cover). Consequently few people have ever visited the site. The last recorded visit took place some 25 years ago in 1976/77, although some aerial observations were made in 1997. There is therefore little or no information available for the area. Data to substantiate the values for which the site was originally designated have not been obtained. It is therefore difficult to propose

these values as reasons for continued protection of the site with any degree of confidence: we simply do not know.

- Given the very low level of visitation to the site (and limitations on access), consideration might be given to amending the values of the site and furthering its protection on the grounds that it represents an area inviolate from human interference. An alternative option might be to protect the wilderness values of the site. However, owing to the limited data available, even these options have proved difficult to substantiate. Any such proposal would be largely based on assumptions. In respect of the latter option, there is nothing to suggest that this site has any greater wilderness value than, for example, much of the Antarctic Peninsula. In that respect certain areas of the Antarctic Peninsula may be more deserving of protection (from, for example, adventure tourism) than is Northern Coronation Island.
- Finally, consideration might also be given to protecting the site as a scientific reference area for use in comparative studies. However, the lack of any useful baseline data coupled with the difficulties of access to the area to enable the collection of such data, make this a poor option.

In summary, the North Coronation Island SPA has not been visited for more than 20 years. Very few data are available to substantiate the values for which the site was originally designated. And access to the site is severely restricted. This combination of factors makes the preparation of any meaningful Management Plan extremely difficult.

Options and Next steps

As a result of the above factors, and after careful review, the UK believes there are three options for the future of this protected area.

1. **Maintain the status quo.** Continue with protection of the site as an SPA without alteration of the values to be protected. Amend the Management Plan to meet the requirements of Annex V, whilst recognising the severe limitations in knowledge about the site;
2. **Continue with protection of the site as an SPA,** but amend the values to be protected. Possibilities include, the potential usefulness of the area as a reference and/or wilderness site. But it would be important to recognise that insufficient data are currently available to adequately substantiate such an approach;

3. **Terminate the designation of this SPA** on the grounds that insufficient data are available to justify continued protection of the site.

The CEP is invited to consider these options and to decide on the most appropriate way forward.

Summary

The UK's attempt to revise the Management Plan for SPA number 18 has identified the fact that the original values for protecting this site are largely based on assumptions that cannot be substantiated by available data.

Further, significant physical restrictions on access to the site by both sea and air, make the collection of data extremely difficult.

Consequently, three options on how best to proceed are presented to the Committee for consideration.

Polar Regions Section
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London