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**Working Paper Submitted by
Australia**

DISEASES OF ANTARCTIC WILDLIFE

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AUSTRALIAN WORKING PAPER

Background

1. Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties have for many years recognised the need to keep the Antarctic free of non-indigenous parasites and diseases. ATCM III (1964) adopted Recommendation III-VII (Agreed Measures for the Conservation of Antarctic Flora and Fauna) which requires that all reasonable precautions shall be taken to prevent the accidental introduction of parasites and diseases into the Treaty Area.
2. Annex II (Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora) of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty requires that precautions be taken to prevent the introduction of micro-organisms (e.g. viruses, bacteria, parasites, yeasts, fungi) not present in the native fauna and flora. The Annex also includes the particular requirement that no live poultry or other birds should be brought into the Antarctic Treaty area and that dressed poultry should be inspected for evidence of disease.
3. At ATCM XXI Australia reported serological evidence that suggested Adélie and emperor penguins at some localities had been exposed to Infectious Bursal Disease Virus. In ATCM XXII/IP4 Australia provided information on a proposed workshop on introduction of disease to Antarctic wildlife to be held in Hobart 25-28 August 1998.
4. The outcomes of the *Workshop on Diseases of Antarctic Wildlife* were reported as ATCM XXIII/WP32 and considered by the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP II). CEP II acknowledged the importance of the document and noted that it included several items on which little was known but which could be particularly relevant for the CEP. The committee agreed that an open-ended contact group be formed to present to CEP III an initial report on matters arising from the workshop.

Terms of Reference of contact group

5. CEP II agreed that a contact group was to be formed when all Parties, SCAR and COMNAP have had the opportunity to consider the full report of the Workshop, and should operate under the following terms of reference:

Prepare an initial report for presentation to CEP III outlining practical measures that might be implemented to:

- a) diminish the risk of the introduction and spread of diseases to Antarctic Wildlife; and*
- b) detect, determine the cause, and minimise the adverse effects of unusual wildlife mortality and morbidity events in Antarctica*

6. The terms of reference provided by CEP II could be interpreted broadly. The tasks of the contact group may be better stated as developing practical measures that might be implemented to:

- a) diminish the risk to Antarctic wildlife of the introduction and spread by human activity of infectious disease-causing agents; and
- b) detect and determine the cause of unusual wildlife mortality and morbidity events in Antarctica and reduce the likelihood that human activity may exacerbate these events.

7. Including the phrase *human activity* to the terms of reference makes it clear that the objective is to ensure that human activity does not contribute to disease events. Disease can be introduced to Antarctic wildlife by a variety of natural causes. It is not within the scope of the contact group to suggest ways of reducing the likelihood of disease introduction or spread by natural mechanisms. Similarly, unusual wildlife mortality and morbidity events may have natural causes and the objective should not be to prevent naturally occurring events but to ensure that human activity does not exacerbate them.

8. The phrase *infectious disease-causing agents* limits the scope of the task to consider only disease caused by infectious agents such as parasites and micro-organisms including fungi, yeasts, bacteria or viruses. This qualification is necessary to ensure the contact group is focussed on a specific, achievable objective. Disease may also be caused by environmental stress such as exposure to a toxin, nutritional shortage or a climatic extreme; and by a congenital defect. It is not within the scope of the contact group to consider mechanisms for reducing pollution, preventing nutritional shortage or ameliorating climate change even though they may be caused by human activity and may cause disease. These topics are the concern of other expert bodies within the Antarctic Treaty System and their inclusion would make the terms of reference of the disease contact group unmanageable.

Progress since CEP II

9. The full report on the *Workshop on Diseases of Antarctic Wildlife* prepared by the convenors was provided as Paper No. 32-99 to COMNAP XI in Goa and made available to all COMNAP members via the COMNAP web site. COMNAP XI asked the Antarctic Environmental Officers Network (AEON) to seek comments from its members and provide a coordinated response for comment by COMNAP/SCALOP members. The subject was discussed by COMNAP XII in Japan in July 2000 with the objective of providing a COMNAP consensus view to the CEP contact group.

10. The SCAR Secretariat was provided with multiple copies of the workshop report for distribution among appropriate SCAR members. The Group of Specialists on Environmental Affairs and Conservation were asked by SCAR to provide a coordinated SCAR response to the CEP. The subject was discussed at SCAR XXVI in Japan in July 2000 with the objective of developing a SCAR position to be conveyed to the CEP.

11. The views of both COMNAP and SCAR must be available to the contact group before significant progress on practical measures to address concerns about disease introduction and spread should be attempted.

Recommendations

12. Australia recommends that:

- The CEP note the full report of the Workshop on Diseases of Antarctic Wildlife (Annex A).

- The CEP agree to the following revised Terms of Reference for the open-ended contact group on wildlife disease established by CEP II:

Prepare an initial report for presentation to CEP IV outlining practical measures that might be implemented to:

- a) diminish the risk to Antarctic wildlife of the introduction and spread by human activity of infectious disease-causing agents; and*
 - b) detect and determine the cause of unusual wildlife mortality and morbidity events in Antarctica and reduce the likelihood that human activity may exacerbate these events.*
- The CEP encourage Parties, COMNAP, SCAR, CCAMLR and other expert bodies such as IUCN to nominate relevant specialists to participate in the work of the open-ended contact group.