



# Mark Carwardine's **AT A GLANCE...**

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## THE ANTARCTIC TREATY

### WHAT IS THE ANTARCTIC TREATY?

The Antarctic Treaty is an international agreement to ensure that "Antarctica shall continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and shall not become the scene or object of international discord". Governing the region south of latitude 60°S, it was signed on 1 December 1959 and came into force on 23 June 1961. The original Treaty was surprisingly short and succinct (printed on just a few pages of A4) but it has since evolved into the wider Antarctic Treaty System, which includes various add-on agreements covering environmental protection and other issues.

### WHO OWNS ANTARCTICA?

No one and everyone. The continent has no native or permanent human population, so there is no natural sovereignty, but seven countries have logged competing (and, in some cases, overlapping) territorial claims: UK, France, Norway, New Zealand, Australia, Chile and Argentina. The Treaty cleverly preserves the status quo by setting aside existing territorial claims and refusing to allow new ones.

### WHAT ELSE DOES THE TREATY DO?

It stipulates that military activities are prohibited (although military personnel and equipment may be used for scientific research or other peaceful purposes); it guarantees freedom to conduct scientific research and requires that results be made widely

available; it prohibits nuclear explosions and the disposal of radioactive waste; and it ensures that all Antarctic stations, and all ships and aircraft operating in the region, are open to inspection by designated observers from any Treaty nation.

### WHAT ARE THE ADD-ON AGREEMENTS?

To expand the remit of the original Treaty several add-on agreements have been adopted over the years: the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals, the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (which controls commercial fisheries in the Southern Ocean), and the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (which replaced an earlier agreement called the Agreed Measures for the Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora).

### WHAT ABOUT MINERAL EXTRACTION?

A fifth agreement – the Convention on the Regulation of Mineral Resource Activities in Antarctica – was finalised in 1988. But negotiations were protracted and it never entered into force. Ultimately, though, it led to The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, which was signed on 4 October 1991. This designates Antarctica as a 'natural reserve devoted to peace and science', sets out some of the toughest environmental legislation ever



Leopard seals and other marine species are protected by the Antarctic Treaty.

and establishes an indefinite ban on commercial mineral prospecting and extraction.

### HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Treaty currently has 53 signatories, 29 of which are so-called Consultative Parties (countries, such as the UK, that have demonstrated an interest in Antarctica by conducting substantial research there). There is an annual meeting to discuss issues and progress new ideas (non-Consultative Parties are invited to attend, and may contribute to discussions, but cannot participate in decision-making). Unanimous approval is required for any new measures to become effective.

### WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED?

A number of specialised bodies assist, including the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research and the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators, as well as others such as the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition and the World Meteorological Organisation.

### IS THE TREATY EFFECTIVE?

Yes. It's not without its critics but it is widely recognised as one of the world's most successful international agreements. It has achieved strong environmental protection for Antarctica, gives priority to scientific research, and maintains the spirit of peaceful cooperation. 🐧

**THE TREATY ASSURES FREEDOM TO CONDUCT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND REQUIRES THAT RESULTS BE MADE WIDELY AVAILABLE"**

**MARK CARWARDINE** is a frustrated and frank conservationist.

● Every month he demystifies some of the most important issues affecting the world's wildlife and assesses the organisations that protect it.

● Find out more about the Antarctic Treaty: <http://bit.ly/2b13Llq>