



For immediate release

International parliamentarians warn of potentially catastrophic effects of climate change on Antarctica at inaugural meeting in London

Parliamentarians from 13 countries – including Brazil, China, Turkey and the United Kingdom - gathered in London this week to discuss how parliaments can help protect Antarctica from climate change.

A consensus statement signed by all 19 parliamentary delegates at the Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly declared that, as a group of parliamentarians from Antarctic Treaty Parties, they:

*'Note with concern the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate, which **highlights the profound effects of climate change on Antarctica's ecosystems and the potentially catastrophic effects of Antarctic ice loss on global sea level;***

With the Antarctic Treaty System under increasing pressure to address new challenges, the inaugural Assembly provided an opportunity for parliamentarians, rather than governments, to learn more about Antarctica and press their legislatures to support and prioritise the work of the Treaty.

Although not all parties to the Treaty were able to send parliamentary delegates to London, the new Russian Ambassador, His Excellency Andrei Kelin, contributed to the conference statement, along with representatives from several other Embassies.

Both the statement and conference sessions shone a spotlight on the impact of climate change on biodiversity in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. A presentation by Professor Steven Chown from Monash University in Australia,



showed how global warming is allowing invasive species to thrive in Antarctica, South Georgia, and the sub-Antarctic islands. He explained that ordinary house mice can be found eating albatross chicks alive in their nests on some islands.

Plastics, fisheries and tourism were other themes of the conference, with the parliamentarians 'reinforcing international cooperation on pollution issues, including plastics, that affect the Antarctic environment'.

They also noted the anticipated continued growth in tourism (seaborne tourism is expected to increase by 40% in the 2019-20 season) and its potential impact on the Antarctic ecosystem, committing to 'ensuring that tourism is conducted strictly in a safe, environmentally responsible manner' in accordance with the Antarctic Treaty.

Sir David Attenborough sent his apologies for not being able to attend the APA due to filming commitments, and commented:

"It is a very worthwhile initiative and I hope that your deliberations will produce results which will help preserve and enhance the great White Continent. The challenges we face in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean are both alarming and urgent, and I call on your parliaments and governments to work together to act decisively and collectively for the preservation of the continent."

James Gray, Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions commented:

"I am delighted with the success of the inaugural Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly and the really extensive statement that we have produced. Such a diverse group of nations - including Russia and China - and such a large group of parliamentarians coming together to address climate change in the Antarctic, sends an important message to governments around the world."



"I hope that this is the first of many Antarctic Parliamentarians Assemblies that will be held in the future, and the next one is already scheduled for 2021 in the Southern Hemisphere."

First Deputy Speaker Åsa Lindestam from the Swedish delegation said:

"It is a great achievement that we managed to agree on this important issue. Now our task is to step up the work on climate change in our parliaments. It is so important to continue the dialogue between parliamentarians and scientists."

Eirik Sivertsen MP, Norway, commented:

"The melting Antarctic will have dramatic consequences for the world, especially through sea level rise. The science is clear and we need to act now to mitigate the most dramatic consequences."

"With so many changes happening so fast, I'm very happy that we have called for a fifth International Polar Year. It would facilitate a large scientific programme and an international joint effort, focussing on both the Antarctic and the Arctic."

Andrew Bayly MP, New Zealand, said:

"We all came together to celebrate the signing of the inspired Antarctic Treaty; a living document that was written simply, but has proved to be flexible and stood the test of time. It was a privilege to be part of this inaugural event and to know that, in our own small way, we have recognised a milestone in Antarctica's history and have the opportunity to be part of its future."

Contact

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About the Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly

The very first Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly took place on 2 – 3 December at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) on Whitehall, London.

The Assembly was timed to coincide with Antarctica Day and the 60th Anniversary of the signing of the Antarctic Treaty, on 1st December 2019.

Parliamentary delegations were invited from the 54 signatory countries of the Antarctic Treaty to take part in discussions and debates about subjects ranging from climate change and the melting Antarctic ice sheets, to the increase in polar tourism and protecting Antarctic biodiversity.

Participating countries include:

- Argentina
- Australia
- Belgium
- Brazil
- Canada
- Chile
- China
- Ecuador
- France
- Italy
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Russian Federation
- Sweden
- Turkey



- Ukraine
- United Kingdom

There were 19 parliamentary delegates, representing 13 countries. See full list on conference statement.

The UK delegation was formed of The Rt Hon Baroness Pauline Neville-Jones from the House of Lords, and James Gray (Conservative MP for North Wiltshire, currently standing for re-election in the same constituency in 2019).

The first day featured presentations from scientists and experts from countries as diverse as Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Brazil, as well as Lord Ahmad, UK Minister for the Polar Regions and Dame Jane Francis, Director of British Antarctic Survey. For the full programme, speaker abstracts and biographies, visit <https://www.antarcticparliamentarians.com/>

The Assembly was established by James Gray, Chairman of the APPG Polar Regions, and was inspired by the [Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians](#). Mr Gray believed that a similar forum was needed to raise parliamentarians' awareness of issues affecting Antarctica.

The Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly was organised and hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions, with funding from the Mamont Foundation and in-kind support from the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the British Antarctic Survey, and advice from the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research.

About the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions

The APPG Polar Regions was set up in 2015 with the purpose of informing members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords about issues affecting both the Arctic and the Antarctic.



It was founded by James Gray, and the APPG Polar Regions is one of the most active all-party parliamentary groups, with 133 members from both Houses.

The Group is considered a thought-leader on polar issues and attracts in excess of 450 subscribers from international organisations outside of parliament.

The APPG holds monthly meetings in the Houses of Parliament, inviting expert speakers such as Sir David Attenborough, leading scientists from British Antarctic Survey (BAS), the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI), National Environmental Research Council (NERC), and covering topics as diverse as geo-politics, defence, biodiversity, climate change and exploration.

The Group Secretariat was run by Dr Duncan Depledge until early 2019, when he left to take up a research fellowship at Loughborough University. Sophie Montagne replaced him in March 2019, and was a former member of the British Army's Ice Maidens – the first female team to ski across Antarctica.