

The formation of an Antarctic Treaty

"It is in the interest of all mankind that Antarctica shall continue for ever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and shall not become the scene or object of international discord". - Antarctic Treaty.

Twelve at the start

In 1959, at the height of the cold war, a dozen countries managed to produce a short international agreement to co-operatively govern Antarctica, in a way that encouraged scientific endeavour and environmental protection. The resulting Antarctic Treaty has been one of the most successful international agreements ever made.

Since then the original twelve have been joined by another 36 countries, 28 of whom have active scientific research programmes in Antarctica. These countries meet annually and together agree how to manage the region, with decisions being binding on them all.

However since 1959 new challenges have arisen resulting in new agreements on

- commercial sealing and fishing
- mineral resource activities
- environmental protection.

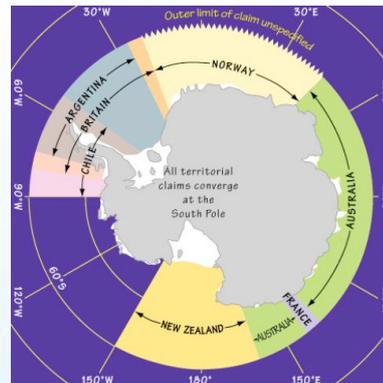
The original 1959 Treaty and the later agreements are together known as the Antarctic Treaty System, an agreement that applies to the Antarctic continent and the surrounding Southern Ocean.

The IGY produces a Treaty

During 1957 - 1958 an international scientific programme was undertaken in Antarctica, timed to coincide with a period of maximum sun activity. Called the International Geophysical Year (IGY) included a significant amount of Antarctic research to investigate the region's influence on global weather, atmosphere and oceans.

From 1956 to 1958 twelve nations co-operated in this major programme; the seven claimant nations plus Belgium, Japan, South Africa, USA, and USSR. At this time many of today's Antarctic bases were established including those at the South Pole, the Pole of Inaccessibility and the South Geomagnetic Pole. The research and the level of co-operation were so successful during this IGY that a discussions were held to defuse the political tensions surrounding Antarctica at the time. With this in mind, on May 2, 1958, the United States issued an invitation to the other eleven IGY countries to negotiate a treaty to give the basic principles of IGY a legal and lasting effect. The result was that in Washington D.C. on December 1, 1959 the Antarctic Treaty was signed in four languages (English, French, Russian and Spanish) and entered in to force on 23 June 1961. No end date for this remarkable, international document has been requested.

Adapted from material by *Neil Gilbert, Antarctica New Zealand* by *Donald Reid, iMatters.co.nz* in association with *Gateway Antarctica, University of Canterbury*.
Image: Australian Antarctic Division.



All territorial claims to Antarctica have been set aside by the Antarctic Treaty

Short and to the point.

The treaty itself has just fourteen articles or key points, which include

- Activities of a military nature are prohibited.
- The exchange of scientific personnel, scientific data, research and logistics plans are required
- Nuclear explosions and the disposal of radioactive waste are prohibited
- Any treaty nation is allowed to inspect the facilities and installations, aircraft and vessels of any other nation, and must give advance notice of any expeditions and activities below sixty degrees south.
- Regular meetings must occur between treaty nations to exchange information, consult on matters of common interest, and to develop recommendations for their governments.

Although all fourteen articles apply to the land and ice shelves below sixty degrees south, there are also separate sealing and fishing agreements for the oceans in this area.

Fish and Minerals

Today there are 48 Antarctic Treaty nations divided into two groups

- Consultative Parties which have voting rights under the Treaty because they carry out substantial research in Antarctica or have established Antarctic bases there
- Non-Consultative Parties, which are Treaty signatories and are allowed to participate in meetings, but cannot vote.

Interest in being an Antarctica Treaty signatory grew rapidly in the 1980's when commercial fishing and mineral recovery became a possibility, with some countries rapidly building new Antarctic bases and developing science programmes. However this interest waned in the early 1990's with the Environmental Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty which prohibits mining in Antarctica.

Research task

Using exactly 140 characters for each, explain any two of the following four terms:

- The cold war
- IGY
- Sixty degrees south
- Antarctic Treaty nation.