Resolution on the establishment of Antarctic Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the conservation of Southern Ocean biodiversity

2021/2757(RSP) - 08/07/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 588 votes to 21, with 79 abstentions, a resolution on the establishment of Antarctic Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the conservation of Southern Ocean biodiversity.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA and the Left groups.

Recalling that the ocean is the world's largest active carbon sink, having sequestered over 30 % of the carbon from those emissions, the resolution stressed that the establishment of MPAs covering over 3 million km2 in the eastern Antarctic and the Weddell Sea would create one of the largest marine protection areas in history.

The resolution stressed that Antarctica and the Southern Ocean contain ecosystems and biodiversity of exceptional value and scientific importance, and that the Weddell Sea is key for global ocean circulation and the world's climate.

Negotiations are ongoing in the Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to establish these two new MPAs. The approval of these MPAs would contribute to achieving EU and global commitments on protecting marine biodiversity. According to Parliament, these MPAs should be used as a basis in the global negotiations under the Convention on Biological Diversity in the COP15 UN Biodiversity Conference in Kunming, China.

While expressing it full support for the efforts made by the European Union and its Member States, Australia, Norway, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, United States and New Zealand to establish two new MPAs in the eastern Antarctic and the Weddell Sea in the Antarctic Ocean, Parliament called on the Commission and Member States to intensify their bilateral and multilateral efforts to secure support for the establishment of these MPAs in the forthcoming months.

Recalling the EU's commitment on marine protection to legally protect a minimum of 30 % of the EU's sea area, including strictly protecting 10 % of its seas, Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States together with global partners to strengthen the network of MPAs globally through enhanced management, better spatial planning, evaluations and enforcement in order to increase ecological coherence and connectivity of MPAs.

The resolution highlighted that IUU fishing activities represent a considerable threat to sustainable fishing and the resilience of marine ecosystems and that tourism in Antarctica must be conducted in a sustainable way.