



Call for massive Antarctic marine reserves

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A new coalition of environmental and conservation groups is calling for a massive area surrounding Antarctica to be protected in marine reserves.

Steve Campbell from the Antarctic Ocean Alliance says the oceans around Antarctica are some of the most pristine in the world and should be protected.

Mr Campbell says the alliance wants the majority of the area put into no-take reserves prohibiting all activity apart from scientific research.

"We do know that it's going to be in order of magnitude greater than anything that has been achieved before," he said.

"The biggest marine reserve in the world at the moment is about 600,000 square kilometres but we know that there are areas around Antarctica which could certainly add up to a lot more than that.

"We've identified about 19 regions around Antarctica where there could be a marine reserve or marine protected areas set up and this would establish a network of areas all the way around the continent of Antarctica and would be put in place for all time we hope."

Mr Campbell says global fishing stocks are fast in decline and that is putting more pressure on the marine resources of the Southern Ocean.

"It's mainly a fishery for krill and for toothfish - both antarctic and patagonian toothfish," he said. "There's also fishing for various other species like skate and icefish," he said.

There's many hundreds who have fished there over the years but the key ones at the moment are Russia, Norway, Korea, New Zealand, UK, Spain.

"They're fishing in some relatively concentrated hot spots, particularly around the Antarctic Peninsula and in places like the Ross Sea, which is probably the most intact marine environment on the planet."

The Antarctic Ocean Alliance was launched last night during the annual meeting of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.

The Convention, which is charged with conserving Antarctica's marine reserves, is set to make a decision by the end of next year on exactly what areas will be protected.

"It's likely to get the support as long as there is some limited fishing that can continue in some areas," Mr Campbell said.

"But also we can make a case for the environmental values of these areas - the values for science and the study of climate change, and indeed the sort of intrinsic value of the areas themselves."

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