2nd Annual
Phillip Law Lecture
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by
The Honourable
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GETTING ANTARCTICA ON
THE DOMESTIC AND GLOBAL AGENDA
I was honoured to be invited to deliver the Second Annual Phillip Law Lecture, in the presence of the great man himself, following on a distinguished inaugural lecture given by the Administrator of the Commonwealth, Hon. Sir Guy Green in 2002. It is an important part of your Antarctic Tasmania Midwinter Festival and I congratulate you for the imaginative program.

I should begin my declaring my Antarctic credentials, such as they are – I was a Shadow Minister with responsibility for Antarctica 1980-83, converted the shadow for the substance from 1983 to 1987, visited Antarctica, courtesy of the Americans in December 1983, confess to never having visited an Australian base, but have maintained a consistent interest and enthusiasm ever since.

I am delighted to see so many people here with whom I worked from the 1980s.

To an audience with far better Antarctic credentials than I have, this may sound like a “coals to Newcastle” speech, where the listeners know far more than the speaker. In any case, I acknowledge the importance of the winter solstice, and its psychological significance: winter is half over, the sun has reached its farthest point north, and will begin migrating south again. The day is of profound importance to expeditioners and their far-away anxious families.

I should also declare my Tasmanian credentials. As Chair of the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority, I spend time in Tasmania every month, mostly in the Tasman Peninsula and we are very conscious that there is simply open water between Port Arthur and Antarctica. Port Arthur is not, strictly speaking, the most remote of the 19th Century British penal settlements, but it must then have been regarded as close enough to the end of the world. In my years as Minister with responsibility for Antarctica, I visited the Antarctic Division frequently, and maintain a close involvement with CSIRO’s Division of Oceanography.

I have a family interest in Tasmania – although, alas, I cannot claim convict ancestry, now very fashionable. The first of my forebears in the colonies was my great great grandmother Abigail McConnon (1816–1882) who arrived in Hobart Town, Van Diemen’s Land in November 1833 on the Scotia with her brother John. Many of John’s descendents are buried in the churchyard at Buckland.

As Pat Quilty reminds us, in the great days of Gondwana, Tasmania and the Ross Sea were adjacent – and the fauna of Tasmania and Antarctica (found in fossil remains) are closely related.

Most important of all are my Phillip Law credentials.
Dr Phillip Garth Law, AC, FAA, FTSE, FRSV was born in Tallangatta, Victoria, on 21 April 1912, educated at Hamilton High School, Ballarat Teachers’ College and Melbourne University. He was a lecturer in physics at Melbourne University 1943–48, specialising in cosmic rays, then became director of the Antarctic Division of the Department of External Affairs from 1949 to 1966. He was Executive Vice President of the Victoria Institute of Colleges 1966–77 and held a number of important part-time offices, including President of the Royal Society of Victoria 1967–69, President of the Melbourne Film Society 1972–92, President of the Victorian Institute of Marine Sciences 1978–80.

I named the Law Base in 1987 and want to pay tribute to Phillip Law for his extraordinary contribution not only to our knowledge of Antarctica but to Australian public life generally.


I launched his important book *Antarctic Odyssey* in 1983.

In the 19th and early 20th Centuries the two great gateways to Antarctica were Hobart, 42.50 South, and Christchurch, 43.30 South.

Hobart was an important supply and resupply base from the outset of Antarctic exploration.

Captain James Cook, in his second expedition to the South Seas in HMSs *Resolution* and *Adventure*, crossed the Antarctic Circle (January 1773), reached 71.10 South and made the first circumnavigation (but some distance from the coastline). He famously predicted that nobody would ever venture further south. He made landfalls on Bruny Island, not far from Hobart, in 1773 and 1777.

In 1831, James Weddell visited Hobart on his second expedition to Antarctica, having sailed 74.15 S in 1824, and finding the Weddell Sea. This was the farthest point South reached by humans until Scott and Shackleton in 1902.

Also in 1831 John Biscoe, in the *Tula*, discovered Enderby Land and sailed his damaged ship to Hobart, and liked it so much that he stayed for years, returning to England in 1843. (He died at sea on the way back).

Jules-Sebastien-César Dumont d’Urville (1790–1842) anchored his ships *L’Astrolabe* and *La Zélée* in Hobart in 1839, and the French resupply ship *L’Astrolabe* generally winters in Hobart’s Princes Wharf. In January 1840,
having recruited some matelots in Hobart, he set sail for Antarctica, landing before the month’s end. He called the coastline Terre Adélie, after his wife. Dumont d’Urville had an interesting career, and a tragic end. He had brought the Venus de Milo from Greece to France in 1820 and the exiled Charles X to England in 1830. He and his wife were both killed in France’s first major railway accident, at Meudon.

Sir James Clark Ross (1800–1862) arrived in Hobart in August 1840 and was greeted by his friend, the Governor, Sir John Franklin, himself an Arctic explorer who later died on mission. In 1841 Ross discovered the Ross Sea, Ross Island and the Ross Ice Shelf, and named Mount Erebus and Mount Terror, called for his ships, and Franklin Island, called for his friend. He calculated the position of the south magnetic pole from a magnetic observatory established in Hobart, but ice prevented him reaching the spot.

Carsten Borchgrevink (1864–1934), a Norwegian who attended the same school as Raold Amundsen, explored Antarctic waters in 1895 in the whaler Antarctic. In his second expedition, in the Southern Cross, he wintered on Cape Adare in 1899, the first planned overwintering on the Continent. (In 1898 a Belgian expedition, led by Adrien de Gerlache, had become involuntary winterers).

The Tasmanian scientist Louis Bernacchi (1876–1942), joined Borchgrevink’s expedition as a physicist and astronomer, and was the first colonist to set foot on Antarctica, except perhaps for a Dumont d’Urville sailor or two. He later worked on Captain Scott’s 1901–04 Expedition. Our training camp was named for him. Some formative years were spent in Maria Island. (He is sometimes referred to as the first Australian to land – an anachronism for 1899).

Robert Falcon Scott used Christchurch as his forward base, but he visited Hobart in November 1903 and his sister was married to Governor Sir William McCartney.

Ernest Shackleton also used Christchurch as his base in his expedition in the Nimrod. He trekked down to 88.23 South in January 1909. Shackleton visited Hobart in the Aurora in December 1914 to collect huskies. (Later, I became very friendly with his son Eddie Shackleton, a Labor peer and Minister in the UK).

Raold Amundsen (1872–1928) arrived at the South Pole in December 1911, just one month before the unfortunate Scott. On 8 March 1912 he entered the Hobart GPO to send the telegram that announced his success – a message which was transmitted to the world by Tim Bowden’s grandfather.

The first great name in Australian Antarctic exploration, and one with a strong Hobart connection, was Sir Douglas Mawson.
Professor Sir Douglas Mawson, FRS, FAA (1882–1958), Yorkshire born, father figure of Australian Antarctic research, was the inspirer of ANARE, the Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition. He led two famous research expeditions to Antarctica. The first was an Australian mission which sailed from Hobart in December 1911 and suffered appalling privations until 1914. He also led a British, Australian and New Zealand mission (BANZARE) from 1929 to 1931. As leader of BANZARE he claimed about half Antarctica in the name of King George V. By agreement between Australia and the United Kingdom, most of this British claim became Australia’s responsibility. Australian Antarctic Territory (AAT) was proclaimed in 1936.

In December 1946, Mawson, still professor of geology at Adelaide University, persuaded Ben Chifley’s Labor Government to resume Antarctic exploration.

I never set eyes on Mawson but I had a brief encounter with another significant but not always reliable Polar explorer, Sir Hubert Wilkins (1888–1958). Born in South Australia, he served on Shackleton’s last Antarctic voyage (1921–22) and led an expedition to Grahamsland (1928). He was a pioneer of aircraft and submarines in the Arctic. I met him and his wife in New York shortly before he died. He had called his submarine Nautilus, following Jules Verne’s Captain Nemo and was pleased that the US Navy used the name for its under ice transits of the Arctic.

ANARE was established in Melbourne in 1947 as part of Bert Evatt’s External Affairs Department and Mawson dominated its executive planning committee until he died. ANARE’s first leader was Group Captain Stuart Campbell, who had been Mawson’s pilot in 1930–31 and later became an aviation bureaucrat.

Campbell left in January 1949. He was replaced by Phillip Garth Law, an inspirational hands-on leader until 1966.

Phillip Law (a notorious victim of sea-sickness) made 28 voyages to the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic regions, directed the charting of 4500 kilometres of coastline and has written memorably of his odyssey. He had strong support from R. G. Casey, Minister for External Affairs and for CSIRO, later Lord Casey and Governor General. Dr Law’s influence, like Mawson’s, survived for decades after his retirement from exploration.

ANARE’s first expedition arrived in Heard Island on Boxing Day 1947. The second established a base, appropriately named for Mawson. The second, named for the pioneer navigator John King Davis, followed in January 1957.

It was many years before women were able to visit an Australian station officially – to Macquarie Island 1959–60. As Minister, John Gorton bent the rules to let Nel Law, Phil’s wonderful wife, visit Mawson and Oates Land in 1961. Nella Dan, the longest serving of the Danish ships hired by ANARE, was named for her. There were no women expeditioners on the Antarctic continent until 1976.
The United States, which did not recognise Australia’s territorial claims, took a leading role in The International Geophysical Year (1957–58) and set up the Wilkes base. Wilkes was taken over by Australia in February 1959, renamed Casey, and rebuilt on a new site nearby. Charles Wilkes (1798–1877), an American, led an exploration of Antarctic waters 1838–42, but did not land.

The Law Base (summer only) was built near Davis, in the Larsemann Hills, in 1987 and named by me.

Providing logistic support for the Antarctic bases and Macquarie Island was formidable given their wide geographical spread. None was due south of Tasmania. To illustrate: Mawson is south of Pakistan, Davis south of India, Casey south of Java and Macquarie Island south of the Solomon Islands (or Kamchatka). There are two slices of the AAT. The Western region, the bigger area, has three permanent Australian bases, Russia has three, China and Japan one each. Less scientific activity goes on in the Eastern sector.

In 1959 Australia, dizzy with success after the atomic testing at Maralinga and the Montebellos, advocated Antarctica as a site for nuclear tests and radioactive waste disposal and Sir Garfield Barwick, then Attorney-General, was an enthusiast. R. G. Casey was not. Argentina vigorously objected.

On 28 June 1961 the Antarctic Treaty came in force. Signatories, including the US and USSR, agreed to disagree on territorial claims. Many commentators pointed to the irony that at the depths of the Cold War the only area of agreement was at the coldest place of all.

The USSR insisted that the banning of nuclear explosions and the disposal of radioactive waste material be written into the Antarctic Treaty.

Very few Australian Ministers ever visited Antarctica – and only one of our twenty-five Prime Ministers – John Gorton, although Bob Hawke plans to take a luxury cruise there in December–January next. In 1958 a group of MPs including John Gorton, Sir Wilfrid Kent Hughes and the amazing William Charles Wentworth IV (1907–2003), who died last week, flew down.

Senator Jim Webster, Minister for Science and the Environment, was there in the 1978–79 summer season.

In 1980, the Joint Parliamentary Public Works Committee, eleven Members and Senators, flew down to review the ambitious rebuilding program for Antarctic bases and had a near miss at the Casey base with an aborted take off by a Hercules LC 130. Committee members included Ted Innes, Jean Melzer, Sandy Mackenzie, Les McMahon, Murray Sainsbury (all of whom lost their seats in 1983), Sir Harold Young and Ben Humphreys.
My visit, in December 1983, was the next, although not to Australian bases, regrettably.


I encouraged MPs to join expeditions, and found room for them on our ships. This led to the establishment of the Parliamentary Antarctic Fellowship which became a useful ‘ginger group’ in Canberra to generate interest in and support of Antarctic causes.

The Australian Antarctic Division’s headquarters remained in Melbourne but in 1973 the Whitlam Government was persuaded by John Coates (then MHR for Denison) and other Tasmanian political activists that it should move to Kingston, near Hobart. It did not actually happen until 1981. When I was Minister, Michael Hodgman maintained a lively enthusiasm for Antarctic activity.

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), with twenty four state members, set up its secretariat in Hobart in 1982.

Phillip Law was my mentor on polar issues. I saw him often because we both lived in Melbourne, shared interests in film and I was a member of the Senate of the Victoria Institute of Colleges when he was the director.

Antarctica was always high on my priorities, although I worried that our heavy financial and physical commitment to rebuilding the Casey, Davis and Mawson bases, a decision made by the Fraser Government, inhibited our capacity for scientific research.

In December 1983 I accepted an invitation by the United States National Science Foundation to visit Antarctica, flying first to Christchurch where the Americans had a forward base. I flew in a C-141 ‘Starlifter’ with two Members of Congress, Jim Jeffords (Vermont) and Hal Sawyer (Michigan), two officials and some US Air Force officers from Christchurch to the important base at McMurdo, on the Ross Ice Shelf. Space was at a premium and there was no room for a minder to accompany me. ‘Operation Deep Freeze’ has by far the greatest scientific capacity in Antarctica, but the United States makes no territorial claim and does not recognize the claims of others.

McMurdo – the Greater McMurdo Conurbation as the wags called it – was in territory claimed by New Zealand.

The initial visual impact of Antarctica was profoundly disorienting, especially after nearly five hours in a darkened plane. I could see ultra violet light tinting the snow. We are so conditioned to brown, green or yellow landscapes that the uniform whiteness seemed shocking.
Australia claims 42 per cent of Antarctica, far more than any other nation. As Minister I was, in law, Administrator of Australian Antarctic Territory, but I never wore a plumed hat. I regretted never having been able to visit our three bases. It would have required four to seven weeks, depending on weather, for the round trip, longer if the ship was beset by ice. I could not afford to be away from Australia so long when my Budget proposals were under constant attack.

We flew from McMurdo to the South Pole in a lumbering Hercules, visited the huge Amundsen–Scott Base, 3000 metres above sea level, and were filmed at the photographic pole, where visitors could drape themselves in their national flag. The temperature was minus 43 degrees Celsius, far colder than when Scott was there in January 1912. By walking briskly round the nearby geographic pole, I could console myself that the 360 degree circuit brought me, at last, into Australian Antarctic Territory, if only for seconds.

One of my greatest experiences was exploring Ross Island. We inspected the Cape Evans hut erected by Captain Robert Falcon Scott, a prefabricated wooden structure miraculously preserved by the ice, full of artifacts and tinned food from the time of his fatal expedition in 1911-12.

Mt Erebus, where an Air New Zealand DC-10 had crashed in November 1979, killing all on board, was pluming behind, and killer whales (Orcinus orca), up to ten metres long, were chasing seals onto the sand. Emperor penguins strutted. The sea was black. The sun blazed. No words or images could express our heart-stopping exhilaration.

The McMurdo Dry Valleys is an ice-free area of 4800 square kilometers. High velocity katabatic winds prevent snow from falling and the landscape resembles Mars. The wind over thousands, probably millions, of years has carved powerful sculptures, ventifacts, from the rock. I photographed scores of them in the Bull Pass and Taylor Valley and sent copies to the sculptor Henry Moore. He was amazed by their stark beauty and invited me to meet him in England to discuss them.

We also visited New Zealand’s Scott Base and the beautiful Lake Vanda, a glacier.

I recently found a memorandum that I wrote in 1984 reflecting my anxieties about what strategic direction we should be taking in Antarctica.
ANTARCTICA [1984]

Five main options – and a variety of in-between positions.

1. Minimalist

Get out altogether, abandon all territorial claims – leaving our previous Antarctic performance as a glorious memory, to be brought to mind as we examine Mawson’s countenance on the $100 note (something to be preferred to the utter desolation of John Tebbutt’s countenance on the other side, looking – as Robert Haupt remarked – as if he had just been told that his favourite dog had died as a result of eating his favourite Rembrandt). We could, perhaps, adhere to the Malaysian concept of ‘the common heritage of mankind’ and reserve our position on future participation in a minerals regime. Withdrawal would be an extreme position but it does have some logical rigour in it. The Americans at the National Science Foundation told me, in their usual crisp way, in Washington, in January this year: ‘Australia must either piss or get off the pot’. We ought to face up to the implications of this. Would a complete withdrawal generate a major political backlash – or frontlash, which is worse? – or would it be greeted with massive indifference, like the silence of the White Continent itself? I don’t know. I have been trying to stimulate public debate on our future role, if any.

We do face a massive credibility gap in Antarctica, claiming so much (42% of the whole) and performing so little.

2. ‘Free Market’

This is an Antarctic variant of the ‘leave it to the market’ theory – leave our participation to the private sector. If Antarctic bureaucrats can’t ‘pick winners’ down there, perhaps individual expeditions, like David Lewis and William Blunt – or Dick Smith – can produce better value for money. This neo-Friedmanite approach has some powerful, if clandestine, support. It has seductive appeal at first because it must be conceded that a short expedition, largely run by volunteers and with a limited objective can produce spectacular returns and add to our knowledge of the area at low cost.

It can also, and often does, lead to TV films, articles and other material which achieves wide coverage. It points out a dilemma: slow, steady methodical work spread over years, even decades, may produce massive volumes of reports at high expense but low public recognition, creating problems of supply, housing and maintenance which the short-term project – and I want to be careful not to suggest denigration in any way – is able to avoid. So the short term project – like Project Blizzard, aimed at preserving or restoring Mawson’s Hut at Commonwealth Bay in the Eastern Sector – can achieve spectacular and observable results at virtually no public cost. This raises the complaint – if private expeditions can do so much for so little, why isn’t there more to show for the Commonwealth’s long term effort? This is unfair – but it is understandable: we are making a major contribution to increased understanding of climate and marine environment but the results may take decades to assess. I could also point out that Phillip Law was able to achieve prodigies with his first ANARE expeditions with what seem now to be ludicrously small amounts of money because he started with a zero base.
I do see some merit in the argument that we are spending perhaps 85% of our largest figure and appear to be achieving very little – if we went to 100%, the output would probably double or treble. Our effort is a bit like trying to jump across a chasm – it is fine if you can get to the other side in one jump, but you can’t stop half way. Incidentally, I have liberalised our approach to private expeditioners. We assist where we can – but they need to be warned that our resources are stretched so thinly that if a disaster occurs, we may be powerless to assist. They must assume full risk themselves.

3. Steady State

This is the present situation – comparatively little input and comparatively little output. Should it be allowed by more of the same? Theoretically, we could keep on doing this until 1991 when the Antarctic Treaty comes up for renewal. I don’t know that it helps us very much to hang on to our claim – assuming that this is what we want and as I have said several times, it seems a very expensive way of doing very little.

Still it avoids the possible – remote – political odium, which might result from taking firm action either way.

An additional complication for us has been the enormous cost of our massive rebuilding program – a program which began in the 1979-80 season, was due to run for 10 years (now extended to 15 for the last work – Davis), with a total expenditure of $75m in 1984 dollars. But building is not an end in itself in Antarctica, in the way that science is. The rebuilding program was the result of what I think was a poor policy choice: we had an option of following two possible models:

1. Flexible Transport/Short Term Expeditions/Poor Quality Housing

or

2. Inflexible Transport/Long Term Expeditions/High Quality Housing.

In the first you put your money in planes and airstrips, in the second you put it in buildings.

The Americans chose the first option. We chose the second. The Americans can be back in civilization in 36 hours and although many stay for quite lengthy periods, they have the psychological assurance of being able to get out on demand. It also makes it easier to bring down senior scientists for quick journeys, which cut off any feeling of isolation from the larger scientific community. But if you don’t think you need stay for long it doesn’t matter too much if you have a sauna or ‘Holiday Inn’ quality accommodation.

However, if you are there for a 15 month stretch (as our expeditioners are) without prospect of a reprieve, then the quality of accommodation becomes central. The need for building workers and construction materials then locks up the limited space available on the already inflexible transport system.
McMurdo would never win a good housing award: environmentally and architecturally it is the pits. Every Quonset hut in the US service has been at risk for years! But Americans do great science there.

On the other hand, we have the best buildings in Antarctica by far: we would win an Age design award by default. But we haven’t been able to afford great science and an adequate transport system as well. You can’t afford both – and I think we made the wrong choice. As Professor David Caro said in his 1984 Mawson Lecture at ANZAAS:

Of the eleven nations with stations on the Antarctic continent, 7 own and operate at least two ships suitable for operations in ice. France, New Zealand and Australia rely on chartered ships.

Russia, the USA, Argentina and New Zealand use air transport to fly both people and supplies to Antarctica.

A few years ago, Australia used two chartered ships but has no air link at all. If a supply ship gets stuck in ice, we call for help from the United States or Russia. If an expedition member becomes seriously ill, he may have to be flown out first by Russian helicopter and then by an American aircraft to New Zealand. The lack of air transport reduced the amount of time, which scientists can spend in Antarctica in summer and makes it difficult for senior scientists, who cannot spend too much time away, to get there at all.

Like the penguins, we cannot fly.

4. **Cut and Lift**

This is the Phillip Law option: reduce the size of our claim, recognising that the area is unmanageably large, taking account of geopolitical realities and lifting the activity in the reduced claim. We have three bases in our claim, the Soviet Union has four [now three]. In our ‘Eastern Sector’ claim, on the New Zealand side of the French slab, we have no activity at all. The Russians and Japanese have traversed our area far more than we have. For sending meteorological information we rely on the Russians. For sending and receiving telephone calls (I made the first commercial one, to Casey, recently) we depend on the Japanese. We were too poverty stricken to take part in the Second International Biological Expedition (SIBEX) marine exploration in January 1984.

We could sell one of our bases to East Germany (they are in the market) or to China. The Russians are probably over-supplied. There is a certain recognition of realpolitik in the Law plan – but it may have the effect of destabilising the Treaty System and needs very careful examination.

5. **Maxima list**

This would involve hanging on to our 42% but acting as if we were serious about Antarctica. We would need to raise our scientific performance as strongly recommended by ARPAC (Antarctic Research Policy Advisory Committee) and put in a flexible transport system – our own ship (our first) and landing strips. It would also imply some commitment to activity in the Eastern Zone.
Paradoxically, our territorial claim has a trusteeship element in it: the ‘common heritage’ idea of the Malaysians while superficially attractive, actually poses the strongest threat to the environmental integrity of the region.

Some shrewd observations about morale and management failures were published anonymously by an unidentified insider using the witty pseudonym I. C. White.

In the 1985–86 summer season, I sent my friend Stephen Murray-Smith to Antarctica on the MV Icebird with the title of Ministerial Advisor, commissioning him to report on how things were actually being run, with some assessment of morale. Inevitably he became known as Schmitt (or Murray–Schmitt) der Schpy. But it led to excellent articles for The Australian, a private report to me, which was acted on, and a fascinating book which appeared posthumously, with illustrations by Jan Senbergs, Sitting on Penguins: People and Politics in Australian Antarctica (Hutchinson, 1988).

In the period 1983–87, my major concern was that our Antarctic spending ($40 million per year) was overwhelmingly dominated by spending on construction, transport, infrastructure and overheads, leaving only $4 million for research.

I became increasingly preoccupied with Greenhouse, ozone depletion and Southern Oscillation (El Niño) and marine biota issues, and Antarctica contributed vital information on all four. Drilling long ice cores revealed a history of climate change and atmospheric composition for centuries and the hole in the ozone layer was first detected by British observers in Antarctica. Hobart is carrying out vital work on the Southern Oscillation and biota at IASOS (Institute of Antarctic and Southern Oscillation Studies) at the University of Tasmania.

As Minister, my Antarctic priorities were to improve morale, encourage more scientific work, commission an Australian built ship, the MV Aurora Australis, ensure that women had opportunities as scientists, medics and officers in change, and improve morale. I often visited the Antarctic Division’s headquarters at Kingston and talked to the bases by telephone and attended ANARE functions. I commissioned artists to visit Antarctic and encouraged Members of Parliament and Senators to become expeditioners. This led to a Parliamentary ‘ginger group’, the Antarctic Parliamentary Fellowship. David Caro and John Lovering gave valuable scientific advice and Gillian Triggs wrote a farsighted report on the legal complexities of our Antarctic activities. I was delighted to get funding for the publication of detailed maps setting out the major discoveries found on our transverse expeditions.

Losing Antarctica in July 1987 following the restructuring of departments was a serious blow to me, but in 1988 when the international Antarctic Place Names Commission approved the naming of Barry Jones Bay in the Larsemann Hills area it cheered me up.
In 1989, Bob Hawke, backed by Paul Keating, worked with France to scuttle the proposed Convention for the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resources (CRAMRA), which had been patiently negotiated by New Zealand, then took the lead in proposing the Madrid Protocol (1991) which designated Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science. Gareth Evans and Graham Richardson, who had not been consulted, were shocked and thought that Hawke's idea was mission impossible. However, Hawke used Jacques Cousteau's immense prestige and influence to get French support and a miracle was achieved. International agreement in June 1991, overcoming objections by the US, UK and Japan.


Having agreed to the Convention only in June 1988, Prime Minister Hawke in 1989 did a complete turn around, saying that Australia would not sign and ratify the Convention - much to the annoyance of the other signatories, especially the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan and New Zealand. Hawke now said that the Antarctic environment was extremely fragile and important to the whole global ecosystem. Nobody would dispute that. Any mining in Antarctica, he added, would always be dangerous, even ‘catastrophically’ so. In this respect the Minerals Convention was, Hawke said, ‘basically flawed’. Close cabinet colleagues like Graham Richardson and Gareth Evans were shocked at the time by Hawke’s sudden volte-face...

This change brought me, as Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade, into direct disagreement with the Prime Minister, which was conducted robustly during an overseas visit on which I accompanied Mr Hawke to Paris, London and Washington, in June 1989.

One night I remember was on 21 June 1989 in Bob and Hazel Hawke’s suite at the Hyde Park Hotel. We had attended a dinner at the Mansion House, given by the Lord Mayor of London. A few of us had gathered in the suite to plan the next day. Hawke suspected Gareth Evans and senior officials like myself were not fully behind his change of policy on Antarctica. Evans had told the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, who was firmly opposed to the changed Australian position, that if the new Hawke policy failed to gather adequate support then we would go back to the Minerals Convention. Hawke regarded this as undermining his position. As voices rose and Hawke showed criticism on Gareth Evans, me and Kim Beazley, who was also visiting London, Hazel Hawke appeared in a dressing gown, asking what was going on and how she could be expected to sleep. Her intervention may well have saved the situation, as it brought the heated discussion to an end.

Also, I had attended a small working breakfast on 18 June 1989 with Bob Hawke, John Bowan, a Foreign Affairs officer seconded to Hawke’s staff, the late Jacques Cousteau and his son, Jean-Michel, at the elegant Hotel Maurice in Paris. Hawke was later to argue that Cousteau had agreed with his proposition that Antarctica should become a nature reserve and that mineral exploitation should be totally outlawed for all time.
My recollection, which I recorded at the time, was different. Jacques Cousteau certainly endorsed the idea in principal. But, he added reflectively that in time – I think he said in fifty years – if the world was running out of energy sources and technology had reached a point at which mining could be conducted without damage to the environment, then the issue might need to be reconsidered. Nevertheless Hawke was determined to press this issue and said he had succeeded in using Cousteau’s influence with Socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard and President Mitterrand. France declared it would support the Australian attitude and that it also would not sign the Minerals Convention.

In my time, Hawke kept his enthusiasm for Antarctica well concealed. Barry Cohen reminds me that when we tried to persuade him to make a Prime Ministerial visit to his Antarctic territories in 1984 with the two Barrys, this was robustly rejected as a waste of his time. Hawke never visited Antarctica but retains a passionate interest.

However, it was pleasing that in 2003 he rightly identified his work in securing international agreement to preserve Antarctica from mineral development as one of his greatest achievements.

In 1991 an Antarctic CRC was created in Hobart and I am delighted that the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems CRC was successful in the 2003 bids.

In 1997 COMNAP (Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs) established its base in Hobart. Seven nations involved in Antarctica use Hobart as a forward base. Antarctica contributes $93 million annually to Tasmania’s economy. There can be little doubt that Hobart is the world’s leading centre for Antarctic research, science and logistics.

Phillip Law, following in the steps of Douglas Mawson, created the scientific base for Australia’s significant Antarctic claim. Even now, we fail to grasp the significance of their heroic work, so important for Australia, for our region and for the great globe itself.

At a time of profound pessimism about the future of international institutions, when the United Nations is threatened by a revival of nationalism, hegemonic power and the clash of civilisations, that Antarctica remains a model, indeed, the model, of international co-operation, of how nations can work together in pursuit of knowledge, understanding how systems work, and how we can preserve environment, biota and climate for universal, permanent benefit.
Tourism on Antarctica has been increasing dramatically in the past twenty years, from a few thousand people in 1985 to more than 40,000 in 2007. The growing numbers are having a negative effect on the pristine environment of the South Pole. To combat this, researchers from Holland’s Maastricht University have come up with a possible solution: limit the number of tourists allowed to visit and auction the vacations to the highest bidders. Many environmental protection agencies agree that there is a need to protect the frozen wilderness from the damage created by modern tourism. Antarctica is the Secretary of State John Kerry on a frozen section of the Ross Sea near Scott Base, Antarctica, on Saturday. Mr. Kerry has made conservation efforts a central part of American diplomacy, but Donald J. Trump’s administration may reverse course. Credit...Mark Ralston/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images.

Antarctica is unique as it is an isolated landmass with no permanent human settlements surrounded by a wide, cold and stormy ocean. There are few people who can perceive the benefits of Antarctica who also have clear opinions based on personal experience of the continent. The whole of mankind benefits from this isolated continent and its ecosystems that few will ever visit personally. Antarctica is the last and largest unspoiled wilderness area on Earth. It is a reminder of what the planet was like before the influence of man, its unspoiled beauty has inspired people since it was first glimpsed. It has huge expanses of the most pristine oceans on earth with an enormous variety and quantity of marine life, much of which is only found in Antarctica and no-where else.