

Welcome Korea's First Abroad Environmental Protection Area

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A specially preserved area will be designated in the Antarctic under the leadership of Korea. The Ministry of the Environment recently unveiled the plan, in which the Korean government will designate a penguin habitat nearby the King Sejong Station as special preserved area, to the general public. Among 18 countries who own stations in the Antarctic, 15 countries have designated 67 specially-preserved areas and taken good care of them. This plan is very encouraging because it is Korea's first attempt at managing a concrete program for the protection of the global environment. In addition, this is Korea's first time to specify a specially-preserved area on foreign soil, and is doing this area the honor of treating it as the 21st national park of Korea. The sovereignty of the Antarctic continent cannot be taken over by any other country, but it can be claimed as a national park or as a national area for nature conservation which the Korean government will protect at her own risk.

The history of the Antarctic ecosystem reflects the human history of overhunting to the point of extinction. In the 19th century, European countries started to hunt whales in the Antarctic, and consequently whales became an endangered species. Following that, the Steller's sea cow, the sea lion, and a species of penguin were listed as endangered one-by-one. There have been attempts at carrying out nuclear tests and disposing of nuclear waste in the Antarctic during the Cold War. Some countries who believed there to be rich mineral resources on the Antarctic continent struggled for interests as well. However, the efforts of scientists and environmentalists have resulted in the Antarctic being reborn as a common place for all mankind, thanks to the Antarctic Treaty, which prescribes the continent's use only for pure science. At the end of 1990, the Madrid Protocol, which stopped the exploitation of mineral resources, was adopted by the Treaty and steps to protect the Antarctic ocean ecosystem were arranged. Particular efforts were made in CCAMLR--the Convention for the Conservation of the Antarctic Marine Living Resources--and it is recognized as the only international environmental protection treaty that stands on the basis of the unique ecosystem's characteristics. It designates the border of the protection where the cold Antarctic waters meet the warmer waters flowing down from the tropics, not by artificial means.

Lately, environmentalists have been concerned about many elements which threaten the Antarctic ecosystem. Large Antarctic sightseeing vessels from the United States congregate in the Antarctic so that habitats of the native life are being threatened. **In addition, the Krill population, which is the heart of Antarctic food chain, has shown a huge decline due to global warming making glaciers shrink. Scientists say that 80% of the original total amount of Krill has vanished and the populations of native**

penguins and whales, which prey on Krill, are also falling off. Korea's Krill-fishing industry in particular has been rising steadily over the last five years, and Korea became the country that caught the most Krill in the world last year. A problem exists because Krill is being used and wasted as bait for sea fishing. Based on this account, scientists and environmentalists have suggested consolidating protective measures, some of which would be a subdivision fishing area, and boarding scientific observers on Krill vessels.

There's also an opinion within the scientific community asking for the designation of a protective area in the Antarctic ocean, centering around the location where lots of habitats have been gathering. This measure is already under discussion in CCAMLR, but Korea, which is now fishing the most Krill, has taken a negative attitude. In solving environmental problems, it is the responsibility of developed countries to show consideration for underdeveloped countries, and the current progress is not acceptable anymore. The Antarctic exhibits a typical case of the environmental crisis which is all over the world. Therefore, the Korean government's plan for a specially preserved area in the Antarctic can be evaluated as a symbolic effort, which shows that Korea has put priority on starting to solve the environmental problems of the earth. The Korean government now has to think twice about the construction of a 2nd base, which would increase the burden laid on Antarctic environment, and consider a joint ownership of another country's base. Not only this, people should realize that they don't have to use Krill as bait, with the protection of the Antarctic ecosystem in mind. It's time that the country which produced the Secretary-General of the U.N., following WHO, to show what leadership is to the world.