

Proposal would dedicate 700,000 square miles to protect Antarctic sea

By Nick Clark, Al Jazeera, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.10.18

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Image 1. A family of emperor penguins hanging out on Snow Hill Island. This island is found in the Weddell Sea in the Antarctic. Photo by Wolfgang Kaehler/LightRocket via Getty Images

This article was written by Nick Clark, a journalist who writes about environmental issues.

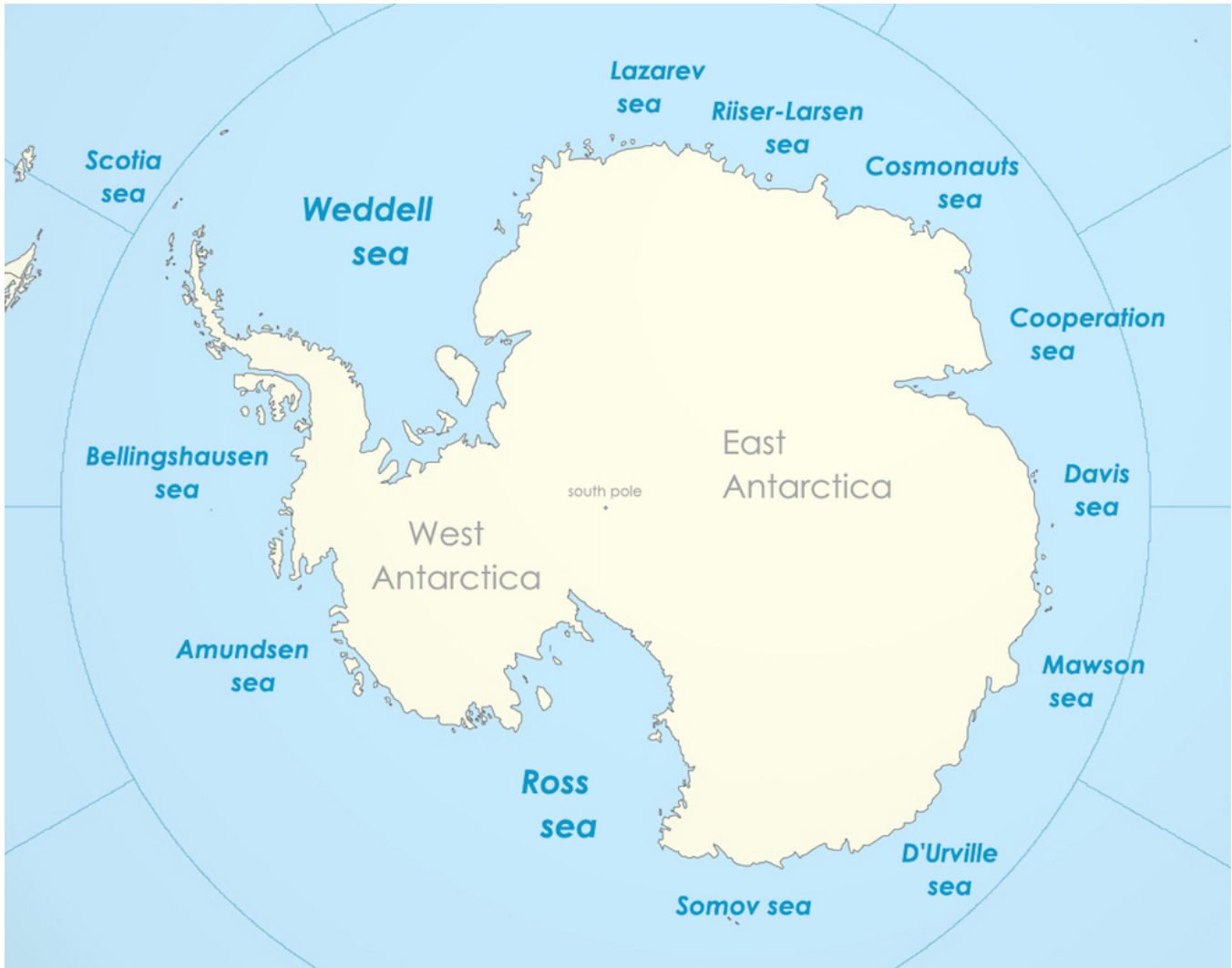
"Looks like an opening at 3 degrees to port. Keep it going dead ahead."

Captain Paul Rudzycki radios down from the crow's nest above the ship.

Around us, a jigsaw puzzle of broken sea ice stretches as far as the eye can see. The occasional iceberg looms in the distance.

The captain guides our way through the ice, the bow of the ship pushing forward toward open water. Here and there a couple of penguins putter about. Leopard seals lie on the ice, raising their heads as we pass.

We're a little way east of the Antarctic Peninsula. We're hoping to reach the 64th parallel, an imaginary line that runs east-west around the bottom of the globe. It crosses the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. This line marks the beginning of what could be the largest protected area on Earth.



Not many ships travel this far south. Little is known about what lies beneath the surface. Our ship, the Arctic Sunrise, is operated by the environmental group Greenpeace. It has already had to turn back once this Antarctic summer.

But we make steady progress. After 48 hours of nudging and retreating, the ship eventually breaks through to the isolated zone.

Nothing has changed in what we see across the enormous icescape. It's an important moment for the Greenpeace campaign team.

"I checked on the satellite," says campaign leader Will McCallum. "There's one other ship with us here in this entire space across the Weddell Sea."

"People Want This To Happen"

We're just on the fringes of the proposed protected zone in the Weddell Sea. The area covers nearly 700,000 square miles. The proposal is part of a growing push for large-scale protection of the world's oceans.

On the other side of Antarctica is a body of water known as the Ross Sea. Last year, a huge part of it became a Marine Protected Area.

The Weddell Sea proposal was put forward by Germany. It is backed by the European Union, a group of countries that work together to cooperate in trade and other matters. The proposal will come up for discussion in October. That's when the governments responsible for the conservation of Antarctic waters will meet in Hobart, Australia.

It is important that we protect the world's oceans, McCallum said. It will help "ensure the health of our seas" and limit the effects of climate change.

McCallum points to the Greenpeace petition backing the Weddell Sea proposal. It has already collected more than a million signatures. "This campaign seems to have gripped the public imagination," he said. People care about Antarctica and its amazing wildlife and they "want this to happen."



Special Interests

Of course, there are many groups with special interests that would like the Weddell Sea proposal to fail. One example is the krill fishing industry.

Under the terms of the proposal, no fishing would be allowed. Nor would any kind of direct human activity such as oil drilling or deep sea mining be permitted.

It's hard to imagine any human influence here. The Arctic Sunrise gently pushes through a sea of ice heading back toward the Antarctic Peninsula. It is one of the only ships in an unexplored sea. This beautiful area could not feel any more isolated or remote.

Of course, that's the point of the campaign. Activists want to protect the Weddell Sea now, while it's still in good shape, with an amazingly rich ecosystem.

As we go, the clouds morph and change shape and color. They become a marvelous, unworldly painting across the evening sky at the ends of the Earth.

Quiz

1 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-9].

Select the paragraph that MOST CLEARLY shows that reaching the Weddell Sea is a challenge.

- (A) Around us, a jigsaw puzzle of broken sea ice stretches as far as the eye can see. The occasional iceberg looms in the distance.
- (B) We're a little way east of the Antarctic Peninsula. We're hoping to reach the 64th parallel, an imaginary line that runs east-west around the bottom of the globe. It crosses the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. This line marks the beginning of what could be the largest protected area on Earth.
- (C) But we make steady progress. After 48 hours of nudging and retreating, the ship eventually breaks through to the isolated zone.
- (D) "I checked on the satellite," says campaign leader Will McCallum. "There's one other ship with us here in this entire space across the Weddell Sea."

2 Read the paragraph from the section "Special Interests."

It's hard to imagine any human influence here. The Arctic Sunrise gently pushes through a sea of ice heading back toward the Antarctic Peninsula. It is one of the only ships in an unexplored sea. This beautiful area could not feel any more isolated or remote.

What conclusion can the reader make based on this paragraph?

- (A) It is not common to see human activity in the Weddell Sea area.
- (B) Now that the Weddell Sea has been discovered, more people will go there.
- (C) Many ships competed to explore the Weddell Sea first, and the Arctic Sunrise won.
- (D) The Weddell Sea will need to be added to maps so others can get there.

- 3 One MAIN idea of the article is that a proposal has been made to protect a large area of the Weddell Sea.

What is another MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) Last year, part of the Ross Sea became a Marine Protected Area.
- (B) Penguins and leopard seals live in the Antarctic Peninsula.
- (C) The Weddell Sea is located at the 64th parallel.
- (D) Some people support the proposal, while others do not want it to pass.

- 4 Read the paragraph from the section "Special Interests."

Under the terms of the proposal, no fishing would be allowed. Nor would any kind of direct human activity such as oil drilling or deep sea mining be permitted.

How does this paragraph support a MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) It explains how companies make money in the Antarctic Peninsula.
- (B) It explains what activities would be banned by the proposal.
- (C) It explains what types of fish live in the Weddell Sea.
- (D) It explains how oil drilling and deep sea mining are harmful.