



PM/82/108

PRIME MINISTER

British Policy in the Antarctic: Minerals

1. In Memorandum OD(82)51 of 4 June 1982 the Secretary of State for Energy and I consulted colleagues in preparation for the first session of the Special Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting which was held in Wellington from 14-28 June to begin negotiations on an Antarctic minerals regime. Colleagues agreed that we should aim for a regime that paved the way for company action; that the UK should derive some special benefits from its sovereignty over British Antarctic Territory and that the costs of administering the regime should be minimal. We also agreed that we should seek a solution within the Antarctic Treaty framework, and recognised that this would need to be acceptable to both claimant and non-claimant treaty partners. The purpose of this minute is to report the outcome, and to let you know that there will be further rounds of negotiations in 1983.
2. As expected, the meeting reached no substantive conclusions. The main outcome was agreement upon a framework to guide further discussion. With the possible exception of the Soviet Union (and Poland), all delegations showed a readiness to negotiate. But there was no shift in positions, particularly over the crucial question of territorial sovereignty, although most delegations recognised that both claimant and non-claimant States would have to show some flexibility if a regime were to be agreed.
3. The following main points arose from the discussions:
  - (a) the majority of delegations regarded extreme proposals reflecting either hardline claimant or non-claimant positions as being inconsistent with finding a solution within the Antarctic Treaty framework;
  - (b) there were wide differences of view as to how detailed a minerals regime should be;



(c) the Soviet Union's attitude introduced an East/West dimension (related principally to the Soviet wish for access to Western technology and their opposition to any role for private sector companies) to add to the claimant/non-claimant divide in the negotiations.

4. The brief approved by OD for the delegation in the meeting still applies. Our position as set out in paragraph 1 remained intact after the conference and, subject to colleagues' agreement, we shall retain it at the next meeting. The delegation consulted closely with other claimant States, and kept in touch with the position of the US and those other EC delegations represented (France, a fellow claimant, and the Federal Republic of Germany and Belgium, which are both non-claimants). Since the Wellington Conference we have had further consultations with other claimant States in preparation for the next round of meetings, which will take place in Wellington from 17-28 January 1983 and in Bonn in July 1983. I shall report further to colleagues before the Bonn meeting.

5. We can expect more substantive discussions in January than at the previous meeting. Countries have now declared their opening positions. In addition, pressure to conclude an agreement within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty is mounting because of challenges in the UN (most recently expressed by Malaysia) that Antarctica should be treated as part of the common heritage of mankind.

6. The Secretary of State for Energy has seen and agreed to this minute. I am copying it to OD colleagues and to the Secretaries of State for Education and Science, Industry and Environment.

*Handwritten signature*

(FRANCIS PYM)

Foreign Policy & International



16 DEC 1952