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## South Korea says 'NO' to the protection of the Earth's ecosystems

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I participated to the 27<sup>th</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources held in Hobart, Tasmania of Australia between 27 October and 8 November 2008. CCAMLR, the abbreviation of this commission, entered into force in 1982 to conserve all the fauna and flora living in Antarctica and around the continent's seas. Only the contracting members can fish in the Antarctica seas, in other words, the Antarctic Southern Ocean. South Korea is one of the major fishing nations catching tooth fish, namely 'Mero' (around 800 tons a year) ice fish and krill (40,000tons a year).

It is necessary to know the sad history of exploitation of Antarctic living resources to understand why CCAMLR was created. The official year when humans first discovered Antarctica was 1819. Yet even earlier, from around 1784, European hunters started to catch fur seals in the area like South Georgia Island. On one occasion, it was recorded that 14,000 fur seals were butchered in just 5 weeks by these merciless humans. After commercially valuable seals were almost driven to extinction, whales became another victim and were slaughtered in great numbers (about 1,500,000 whales). Humans continued to deplete one species after another such as elephant seals, seals, penguins and various fish species until the 1980s. Antarctica has been exploited for more than two centuries by humans. Mindful of this history, there was a growing concern that harvesting of Antarctic krill by USSR in the early of 1980s could damage the Antarctic marine ecosystem that led to the conclusion of the CCAMLR convention in 1982 to protect globally all the marine living resources of Antarctica.

With this historical background, CCAMLR Commission discusses in detail management issues for each species such as resources assessment, fishing area, non fishing season, and catch limit and then adopts conservation measures. All CCAMLR decisions are taken by consensus, so if just one member opposes, a conservation measure cannot be adopted.

This year's meeting of the CCAMLR Commission was so disappointing from the perspective of environmental protection. That's because Korea, Japan, and China

blocked agreement on having a '100% scientific observer on board krill vessels' measure until the end. In fact, all other fishing vessels in the Southern Ocean have to place scientific observers on board, but krill vessels are exempted from such an imposition, and the level of observer coverage has been left to individual countries and companies to decide. So far, Korea's fishing industry for krill has never placed observers on board, while the other krill fishing countries are deploying voluntarily or have deployed, at one time, observers such as Chile, Uruguay, Norway and even Japan.

The purpose of having scientific observers on krill vessels is to obtain scientific data of sufficient quantity and quality in order to figure out the impacts of krill fishing by humans on the Antarctic marine ecosystem centered on krill. It is safe to say that there is no species in the Antarctic marine ecosystem which is free from dependence on krill—from giant whales to small fishes. It is krill which is the basis of the Antarctic marine ecosystem.

It is difficult to fully understand the mechanism of marine ecosystems with the scientific knowledge of today. Due to this fact, more efforts are needed to ensure precautionary protection. 100% scientific observer coverage on krill vessels is thus a logical necessity until this knowledge gap is filled. The Korean government and fishing industry now face a crossroad of choices to be made. One choice is just to follow the myopic road of short-term profit, or the other is to cooperate with the Earth community's effort to conserve ecosystems. Don't you have any intention to reconcile Korean national interests with long term conservation of the Earth's ecosystems by voluntarily placing scientific observers on Korean krill vessels with 50% coverage to start immediately for next year?