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New Zealand and the Antarctic Treaty 1945 to 1961

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Abbreviations

AAT	Australian Antarctic Territory
AJHR	Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives
CSAGI	Comité Spéciale de l'Année Géophysique Internationale
FID	Falkland Islands Dependency
FIDS	Falkland Islands Dependency Survey
ICSU	International Council of Scientific Unions
IGY	International Geophysical Year
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
NA	National Archives
NZAS	New Zealand Antarctic Society
NZPD	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates
SCAR	Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research
TAE	Trans Antarctic Expedition

Preface

This thesis studies the making of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, and New Zealand's involvement in this process. From 1945, when international attention increasingly focussed on Antarctica and its associated disputes, through to the negotiation, signing and eventual ratification of the Treaty, the nature of New Zealand's participation in Antarctic affairs underwent considerable analysis and adaptation. This thesis concentrates on New Zealand's perception of its Antarctic interests during the period under review, and how these influenced the development of New Zealand's role as a key player in Antarctic affairs.

This study relied heavily on the records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (formerly External Affairs) for its primary information. Some of these files, as noted in the bibliography, are available at National Archives in Wellington. The majority, however, are restricted files to which I was granted access by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I would like to thank those people from the Ministry who were so supportive and forthcoming with their help and advice, and made this information available to me. However, the interpretations and conclusions based on these files are my own. In particular, I thank Stuart Prior, Head of the Antarctic Policy Unit; Rosemary Banks, Director of the Information and Public Affairs Division; Elizabeth Beaufort, Director of the Information Services Division; Graeme Eskrigge; and the staff of the MFAT library.

Acknowledgments are also due to my supervisors, Dr James Watson and Professor Barrie Macdonald. I gratefully thank them for their support, advice, critique, time and knowledge. Without their continuous interrogation of my work I would have learnt very little, and would still be struggling to craft some semblance of a thesis from the great amorphous mass of information with which I began.

Introduction

In 1959 Antarctica was set apart from the rest of the world by the creation of a uniquely non-militarised, nuclear-free continent dedicated to scientific research for peaceful purposes. The unprecedented agreement that enabled this to occur was the Antarctic Treaty, signed on 1 December 1959 by Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Antarctic Treaty has been heralded as “one of the most successful international treaties”,¹ and “one of the bolder and better products of modern diplomacy and law making”.² It has also been described as “an *ad hoc* arrangement”,³ and “the diplomatic confirmation of the existing state of affairs”.⁴ For New Zealand, the Antarctic Treaty was an important means of protecting its interests concerning the Antarctic continent.

This thesis investigates the making of the Antarctic Treaty, and the role that New Zealand played in this process. From the Treaty’s origins around 1945, until its conclusion in 1959, New Zealand developed from an uncertain and reluctant Antarctic power to become a key player in Antarctic affairs and a significant participant in the Antarctic Treaty negotiations. Through examination of the evolution of New Zealand’s Antarctic interests, the thesis will illustrate an important and previously neglected aspect of the development of New Zealand’s independent foreign policy. In tracing the development of the Antarctic Treaty, this thesis also highlights the specific New Zealand perspective on the questions of internationalisation, sovereignty and the tensions and alliances of the Cold War.

New Zealand has been called the “Gateway to the Antarctic”.⁵ The close proximity of the continent meant New Zealand established an early connection with Antarctica, and

¹ Peter J. Beck, *The International Politics of Antarctica*, (New York, 1986), p. 61.

² Christopher Beeby, *The Antarctic Treaty*, (Wellington, 1972), p. 3.

³ F.M. Auburn, *Antarctic Law and Politics*, (Bloomington, 1982), p. 4.

⁴ F.M. Auburn, *The Ross Dependency*, (The Hague, 1972), p. 43.

⁵ L.B. Quartermain, *South From New Zealand: An Introduction to Antarctica*, (Wellington, 1964), p.

acquired significant interests in developments there. The most essential consideration for New Zealand was its security interests. This included preventing the militarisation of the continent and its possible use as a staging point for hostile military activities. New Zealand was also concerned to avoid the use of Antarctica as a testing range for nuclear or conventional weapons. A fundamental aspect of New Zealand's security interests involved ensuring the predominance of New Zealand's allies on the continent, and preventing international conflict, particularly cold war hostilities, from being extended to the Antarctic. New Zealand had a territorial interest in the Antarctic, as it claimed jurisdiction and administrative authority over the Ross Dependency, a sector of Antarctica between 150° West and 160° East longitude. At first, the validity of this claim was highly questionable. This meant that New Zealand was anxious to avoid undue attention being given to the nature of its Ross Dependency claim. New Zealand also worked towards some international agreement that would remove the burden of substantiating the claim.

New Zealand also had important scientific and economic interests in Antarctica which were linked closely together, as the continent's exploitable resource potential required considerable scientific investigation before it could be accurately assessed. Meteorology was particularly relevant to New Zealand, because of the continent's influence on New Zealand weather patterns. New Zealand participation in scientific endeavours in the Antarctic was reliant on collaboration with other nations, in particular the United States, and fostering such collaboration was another factor in New Zealand's Antarctic policy. A further interest for New Zealand was national prestige and concerns for international opinion. For most of the period under review, New Zealand was an enthusiastic supporter of United Nations participation in an Antarctic treaty. Despite some differing views on the extent of United Nations authority that was desirable, New Zealand consistently showed concern for General Assembly opinion and sought for, at least, United Nations recognition of an Antarctic settlement. In the interests of national prestige, New Zealand was eager to retain its status as an original Antarctic claimant nation, and to avoid criticism over its poor record of activity in the Ross Dependency. New Zealand also wished to confirm its alliances with the Western powers, and to avoid association with the communist and

anti-colonial blocs which might have been regarded as discreditable by those Western Powers.

The structure of the thesis is essentially chronological, beginning with an account of New Zealand's historical connections with Antarctica. From the eighteenth-century voyages of Cook, New Zealand had provided a regular harbour for Antarctic explorers and scientists. New Zealand was entrusted with a direct interest in the continent with the creation of the Ross Dependency in 1923, but it will be seen that no direct action was taken to confirm or assert the claim to this territory. Nevertheless, New Zealand recognised a number of interests in Antarctica in these early years, and some of them continued to influence policy through to the signing of the Antarctic Treaty.

Chapter Two, covering the years between 1947 and 1956, illustrates the rise of internationalisation of Antarctica as a theme for New Zealand policy. This decade also saw the beginnings of a move in wider New Zealand foreign policy, away from an imperial alliance with the United Kingdom, to a recognition of the United States as an important strategic ally. This trend is clearly seen in New Zealand's Antarctic policy of the period. Chapter two also investigates increasing concerns over the validity of New Zealand's claim to the Ross Dependency.

A new urgency entered Antarctic affairs in 1956, as planning for the International Geophysical Year of 1957-58 intensified. Chapter Three follows New Zealand reactions to the increased international attention on the Antarctic, and highlights the differences of approach between Sidney Holland's National government and Walter Nash's Labour government. This was also a time when, to some extent, New Zealand took on the role of mediator between the United Kingdom and the United States, initiating consultation between the two nations that developed into the preliminary negotiation of the Antarctic Treaty.

In mid-1957 the twelve nations that participated in the Antarctic activities of the International Geophysical Year began a series of negotiations towards a settlement of the problems in Antarctica. Chapter Four examines New Zealand's approach to these

discussions, its impact on the drafting procedure and its priorities regarding the provisions of the Treaty. This chapter also explores New Zealand's tendency to refrain from prematurely supporting proposals that might be shunned by its allies. An important deviation from this hesitant approach was New Zealand's advocacy of full internationalisation of Antarctica through the United Nations, and its willingness to relinquish territorial sovereignty over the Ross Dependency to an international regime.

Chapter Five is centred on the Washington Antarctic Conference that finalised the Treaty, and explores New Zealand's interests going in to the Conference - the specific provisions that were favoured and the general concerns that lay behind the New Zealand position. This chapter deals with the two most disruptive issues of the conference; nuclear testing and developmental explosions; and the right of other nations, not active in Antarctica, to become party to the Treaty. The immediate aftermath of the Treaty negotiations is also briefly considered, in particular the New Zealand parliamentary debate on the Antarctic Bill, New Zealand's instrument of ratification of the Antarctic Treaty; and some evidence of New Zealand's continuing concern over validating the Ross Dependency claim.

Existing literature relevant to this thesis can be taken in three groups: works on Antarctica and Antarctic Law of a general, international nature; works on New Zealand foreign affairs; and works specific to New Zealand in the Antarctic. In the international work, F.M Auburn's *Antarctic Law and Politics* (1982), and Peter J Beck's *The International Politics of Antarctica* (1986), are prominent. Auburn's work has a definite legal slant, and "...examines the framework of the Antarctic club of nations, stressing current issues."⁶ It is a "...review of [the Antarctic System's] working during the first twenty years of the system..."⁷ and places particular emphasis on the national interests of South America, the Soviet Union and the United States. With regard to New Zealand's role in the Antarctic, Auburn clearly identifies the paucity of direct, claim-supporting action by New Zealand authorities. He makes

⁶ Auburn, *Antarctic Law and Politics*, p. vii.

⁷ Auburn, *Antarctic Law and Politics*, p. vii.

repeated reference to what he regards as the weakness of New Zealand's position in Antarctica, and speaks of New Zealand as "...the most lukewarm of the countries having a declared stake in the continent",⁸ and as a "reluctant claimant"⁹. Auburn also gives considerable space to New Zealand's active relationship with the United States in Antarctica.

Beck's work, *The International Politics of Antarctica*, is

...a descriptive and interpretive essay designed to examine Antarctica's international political role from the perspectives of the Antarctic past, present and future through the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach on account of the alliance of political, legal, economic, scientific environmental and other themes characteristic of the continent's affairs.¹⁰

In this eclectic work, which focuses on the Antarctic since the signing of the Antarctic Treaty, Beck discusses New Zealand's internationalisation proposals and, from this, raises the issue of doubts as to the New Zealand Government's commitment to the Ross Dependency claim. He finds the sovereignty positions of both New Zealand and the United Kingdom to be ambiguous, and groups New Zealand with Australia and Norway as the nations most criticised over their failure to give sufficient fiscal backing to territorial claims.

There is a noticeable absence of information on the Antarctic Treaty and New Zealand's role in the Antarctic in New Zealand foreign affairs literature. Where these issues are mentioned, it is largely in the context of Walter Nash's term as Prime Minister and his personal interest in Antarctic matters. The Antarctic Treaty is also referred to in a disarmament context, highlighting its importance as the first nuclear test-ban agreement, making Antarctica the first nuclear-free region in the world. Roderick Alley's essay on disarmament in *New Zealand in World Affairs* vol. 2 (1991), makes brief mention of the Antarctic Treaty. Malcolm McKinnon's *Independence and Foreign Policy: New Zealand in the World Since 1935* (1993) includes Antarctica with the nuclear debate and recognition of Communist China as

⁸ Auburn, *Antarctic Law and Politics*, p. 186.

⁹ Auburn, *Antarctic Law and Politics*, p. 94.

¹⁰ Beck, *The International Politics of Antarctica*, preface.

issues indicative of the second Labour government's foreign policy of 'loyal dissent'.¹¹ McKinnon comments on Nash's internationalisation proposals:

New Zealand had no significant interests in the Ross Dependency, was ill-placed to guard what interests it had and made a claim which neither of the superpowers recognised: internationalisation had something to commend it.¹²

Of work specific to New Zealand in Antarctica, Quartermain's *South From New Zealand* (1964), *South to the Pole* (1967), and *New Zealand and the Antarctic* (1971) deal mainly with accounts of early exploration and research in Antarctica. *New Zealand and the Antarctic* is a detailed account of New Zealand field activities to the end of the 1960s, and has a 'frontier spirit' feel. Quartermain refers to "...the valour - and the sacrifice - of the pioneers..."¹³ and conveys the harsh conditions in which 'our men' battled to break new ground - physically and scientifically. One might infer from this that primary New Zealand interests in Antarctica were exploration, scientific research and prestige.

Christopher Beeby's work *The Antarctic Treaty* (1972) is a brief but comprehensive work that considers "...how the Treaty came to have the shape it does and its significance, especially for New Zealand, and [indulges] briefly in some speculation about its future."¹⁴ Beeby outlines the events leading up to the 1959 Washington Conference, then describes the provisions and significance of the Treaty, and finally questions the future prospects of the Treaty. As a key New Zealand player in the Treaty system, Beeby gives specific insight into New Zealand interests in both Antarctica and the Treaty. He points out that it was assertive British imperialist policy that began New Zealand's sovereign involvement in Antarctica, and that the United Kingdom made clear to the New Zealand Government the commercial and strategic importance of the Ross Dependency.

¹¹ Malcolm McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy: New Zealand in the World Since 1935*, (Auckland, 1993), p. 140.

¹² McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 143.

¹³ L.B. Quartermain, *New Zealand and the Antarctic*, (Wellington, 1971), p. 239.

¹⁴ Beeby, *The Antarctic Treaty*, p. 4.

Auburn's *The Ross Dependency* (1972) focuses primarily on the question of sovereignty in the Ross Sea area. Auburn has a view of New Zealand's interests in the Antarctic that is considerably narrower than other commentators. He holds that "Economic resources, and nothing else should be the reason for New Zealand activities in the Ross Dependency".¹⁵ He finds scientific research too expensive to be a justifiable reason for New Zealand Antarctic activity; and critically states that:

New Zealand can have little strategic interest in Antarctica when it has difficulty catching fishing vessels off its own coasts. International prestige may be a large factor in U.S. and U.S.S.R. Antarctic operations, but surely a small country such as New Zealand can find more productive ways of impressing world public opinion?¹⁶

A central theme of Auburn's book is that New Zealand missed the opportunity to ensure the validity of its Ross Dependency claim through a determined and concentrated administrative and diplomatic effort.¹⁷ In regards to the Antarctic Treaty, Auburn's account of the lead up to the signing is brief and general:

The success of this effort [the IGY] at international scientific co-operation coupled with the potential danger of increased conflicts with the establishment of many permanent bases, led to informal negotiations, and the signing of the Treaty in 1959.¹⁸

Much of the remainder of the book examines the legal position of New Zealand in the Ross Dependency, with considerable attention being given to United States activities.

In the context of this existing body of work, this thesis will address issues previously neglected concerning New Zealand and the Antarctic Treaty. None of the reviewed secondary literature has looked in detail at the creation of the Antarctic Treaty from the perspective of New Zealand's role in this process. Close analysis of New Zealand's evolving Antarctic interests will illustrate that it had a significant and substantial stake in Antarctica, and that this made New Zealand an influential participant in the making of the Treaty. The manner in which New Zealand

¹⁵ Auburn, *The Ross Dependency*, p. 1.

¹⁶ Auburn, *The Ross Dependency*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Auburn, *The Ross Dependency*, pp. 1, 2.

¹⁸ Auburn, *The Ross Dependency*, pp. 35-6.

conducted its Antarctic policy, often seen as reluctant and uncommitted, will be looked at with regard to the considerations and motives behind this policy, to provide new insight into the hesitancy and apparent lack of concern for retaining the Ross Dependency that was characteristic of New Zealand's Antarctic approach.

The majority of commentators identify New Zealand most strongly with its support for the full internationalisation of Antarctica. The full extent of New Zealand's internationalist stance will be assessed, including the incentives and priorities behind such a policy and the differing approaches of successive governments and prime ministers. A new perspective on New Zealand's international relations and foreign affairs, from the unique sphere of Antarctic interests, will be provided by this investigation of New Zealand's role in the creation of the Antarctic Treaty.