



**SANFORD LIMITED  
SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD**

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**Sanford To Back NZ-US Ross Sea Protection If Tougher Rules Put On Fishing Vessels**

[Sanford Limited](#) has advised the New Zealand Government of its support for the [NZ-US joint proposal](#) to create the world's largest Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Ross Sea in return for tougher rules for vessels approved to fish outside the MPA.

It's hoped the proposal could be approved in July when it will be discussed at a specially convened session of the [Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources](#) (CCAMLR) being held in Germany. If agreed the [area to be protected](#) under the NZ-US proposal is almost nine times the size of New Zealand and the no-take area for fishing is six times the size of New Zealand.

Ahead of that meeting, Sanford is warning that the number of vessels in the Ross Sea is increasing each year (up 30% last year) and CCAMLR currently has no mechanism for capping the number of vessels or ensuring that ships and crews are equipped to [safely operate in the ecologically sensitive and dangerous environment](#).

Sanford's Managing Director, Eric Barratt said the company's support for the MPA is conditional on the Commission implementing five changes to strengthen the assessment of vessels before they are approved to fish in the non-MPA areas of the Ross Sea.

The five changes will improve the ways in which the fishery and fishing vessels are managed and operated in the area in order to reduce the risks to the environment. The changes Sanford is seeking from CCAMLR are:

1. Minimum [Ice Class](#) standards for vessels (Ships with an Ice Class have a strengthened hull to enable them to navigate through sea ice).
2. Minimum Safety and Inspection standards for vessels.
3. Vessels Failing to Comply with CCAMLR requirements should be excluded.
4. Contribution to science and research to be a key consideration in the vessel approval process.
5. Licensed vessels to meet the [Marine Stewardship Council](#) standard for the [Ross Sea Toothfish Fishery](#).

"The establishment of this large MPA will significantly reduce the available fishing areas and therefore the rules around the approvals, numbers and operations of vessels must be strengthened."

Sanford will be seeking support for these changes from other like-minded fishing companies in the hope they will lobby their governments for the best outcome from the NZ-US MPA proposal.

Eric Barratt says the company supports the 2.27 million square kilometre protected marine area in the Ross Sea. "But the creation of this MPA must go hand in hand with enhanced oversight of fishing operations outside that area in order to realise MPA's full environmental benefits."

“This critical debate has been missing from CCAMLR’s Ross Sea protection discussions to date. With Total Allowable Catch (TAC) tonnage remaining the same, the increase in vessel numbers heightens competition for fishing areas dramatically increasing potential risks to the environment, to vessels, and to crew.”

Mr Barratt says the changes Sanford wants CCAMLR’s support to apply to vessels approved to fish outside the MPAs have been carefully considered with the aim of providing ‘workable solutions that will considerably reduce risk to the environment, improve fishery and research outcomes by further ensuring sustainability of the resource while increasing vessel and crew safety.’

The five changes Sanford is seeking are outlined in detail below.

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#### **Condition 1: Protection of the Environment – PERMIT ICE CLASS VESSELS ONLY**

At present there is no requirement for vessels authorised to fish in the Ross Sea to be classified as suitable and safe for use in sea ice conditions. Sanford proposes that all vessels authorised to fish in the area must be a minimum of Ice Class 1C. Fishing in the Antarctic area is inherently more risky than fishing in ice-free waters. A number of near misses have occurred already with non-Ice Class vessels being trapped by ice requiring emergency assistance. Most of these vessels have been built to operate in tropical water fisheries and are not equipped to handle sea ice, freezing air temperatures, and [extreme polar weather conditions](#). Although there is at present no CCAMLR requirement for any vessel authorised to fish in the Ross Sea Region to be classified for operations in ice, individual flag states such as New Zealand assess vessel suitability as part of their licensing procedure. Such assessments and requirements need to be globally applied to all vessels in CCAMLR waters.

#### **Condition 2: Vessels Safety and Crewing Standards Need to be Significantly Strengthened.**

There is an urgent need to set and enforce minimum safety standards for vessels operating in Antarctic waters. Although there are no agreed international agreements currently in place to govern the safety of fishermen and fishing vessels within the Convention Area most CCAMLR Members have either ratified or signed the [Antarctic Environmental Protocol \(AEP\)](#), part of the Antarctic Treaty System of which CCAMLR is also an integral part. Article 3 of the Environmental Protocol requires Members to plan and conduct activities so as to limit adverse impacts on the Antarctic environment. In the absence of any current standards for assessing the suitability of fishing vessels for the area, rating the training and ability of fishing crews to uphold environmental standards, assessing the vessel and crew capability for emergency response or to specify minimum standards for safety equipment aboard vessels, even partial conformance with the AEP is problematic. Setting and enforcing practical standards for vessel safety equipment, crew training and emergency response capability (including regular practical emergency drills and processes to overcome language barriers for all crew) is a required condition for Sanford. One Korean Vessel ([Insung No 1](#)) has already sunk in the Ross Sea in 2010 with the tragic loss of 22 lives. The Korean Government investigation into the sinking quoted: *“Language barriers between the multinational crew members also harmed their survival chances.”*

**Condition 3: Failure to Comply with Fisheries and Environmental Conservation Measures Should Result in Vessels being Removed from the Fishery.**

Each year CCAMLR imposes various [research requirements](#) on vessels authorised to fish in the Ross Sea. These research requirements relate to the tagging and release of a certain percentage of toothfish as well as biological information collected on toothfish and many by-catch species. There are other environmental and management measures governing the fishery intended to protect seabirds, reduce impacts on bycatch species, and mitigate the effects of fishing and navigating on the environment. For example, all fish waste and catch is required to be retained on board so as not to attract seabirds and vessels are required to move on to other grounds if by-catch exceeds certain nominated levels. While all vessels are required to carry two observers a number of vessels consistently fail to meet reporting and research requirements and contravene other measures. With the numbers of vessels in the fishery escalating annually and no current mechanism in place by CCAMLR to cap this increase, the most obvious mechanism is to allocate licences to those vessels providing good research information (see 4 below) and refuse licences to those vessels contravening conservation measures or misreporting. Sanford strongly urges the adoption of such a mechanism by CCAMLR.

**Condition 4: Incentives for additional effort contributing to science and fishery management.**

A smaller number of vessels and flag states have consistently undertaken additional research providing detailed and important ecosystem information such as predator-prey relationships, all food webs (using isotopes from flesh samples), feeding studies on toothfish and other species, detailed biological examination of bycatch species, and the comprehensive collection of benthic fauna to support bottom impact studies in the area. For the past two years one of Sanford's vessels has been involved in an extensive CCAMLR sponsored research survey of pre-recruit toothfish providing valuable information on the future potential of the fishery with the majority of the project cost being borne by the company. While some are contributing significantly to the underlying science governing the fishery and complying fully with all regulations, many are not. This, in effect, means that currently a small group of vessels (and respective CCAMLR Members) are effectively 'carrying' the remainder of the fleet in respect to research contributions. Sanford would like to see incentives in place to encourage those who are contributing and sanctions/exclusion from the fishery for those not contributing.

**Condition 5: Vessels Authorised to Fish should be Marine Stewardship Council Certified**

The [Marine Stewardship Council](#) has certified the [Ross Sea Toothfish Fishery](#) for the client group (a sub set of the vessels) operating in the area recognising, rewarding sustainable fishing practices by those operators and acknowledging the CCAMLR management framework. [MSC Certification](#) comes with additional responsibilities and requirements for vessel operators and 'raises the bar' higher than the standard CCAMLR requirements set for exploratory fisheries. The MSC programme reviews the best available science and an MSC fishery must demonstrate sustainable fish stocks, effective management, and minimal environmental impact. Such MSC certification is very important in key American and Asian markets providing [consumers with certainty and confidence](#) that the fish comes from an independently certified sustainable fishery.

Currently less than half the vessels operating in the Ross Sea Toothfish Fishery are MSC certified. Sanford urges CCAMLR to encourage all vessels authorised in the Ross Sea to match these higher standards and join the MSC group.