

8. SOME POLICY ISSUES

This reports deals with the establishment of a scientific program that would respond to scientific challenges in the Antarctic. Recognizing that at least some part of the funding needed to implement such a program would come from federal sources, the question must be asked: What is the federal government's policy on Antarctic matters? The answer is not clear.

The list of initiatives listed in Table II is encouraging, but the resources allocated to follow up on these initial steps have been very modest. More than four years have passed since Canada signed the Environmental Protocol but, other than a review by Department of Justice staff to assess its compatibility with existing Canadian statutes, there has been little progress. The Protocol seems to remain in the domain of the legal community, while the substantive issue in the Protocol (i.e., environmental protection) has been largely ignored.¹² It appears that Environment Canada ought to become more involved, as that department has most of the technical expertise required to implement the Protocol and subsidiary legislation. After signing the Protocol, the next logical steps would be to ratify it and to pass implementing legislation. Ratification can be done rather easily, but preparation of implementing legislation will be a more elaborate and time-consuming process. What are Canada's intentions regarding the Protocol? The answer to this question will be a reflection of how Canada sees itself as a partner in global environmental issues.

In the Arctic, Canada played a key role in the establishment of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), in the development and implementation of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), and, more recently, in the formation of the Arctic Council. In short, it has assumed a leadership role in promoting international science and co-operation and the creation of new structures. What role does Canada see for itself in the Antarctic, were it not so directly affected by developments? Does Canada plan to seek Consultative Party status in the Antarctic Treaty System, thus joining most of our Arctic partners who already participate in Antarctic decision making? Does Canada see itself as a polar or as only an Arctic country?

The scientific issues will be considered by CARPEX, but there are other, political considerations. One is the training of young Antarctic specialists, some from developing countries with a limited tradition and background in polar work. Canada has well-developed, and internationally recognized, environmental assessment procedures; is endowed with a large Arctic territory, and

¹² This could explain why the signing of the Protocol in October 1991 was not mentioned in the Annual Report on the Green Plan.