

# The Western Antarctic Peninsula

The Western Antarctic Peninsula is Antarctica's most biodiverse region. It is home to a myriad of local and migratory species, from the tiniest krill, to the mightiest whales. Its ocean currents and ice help to regulate the earth's climate and our planetary processes.



The Peninsula is struggling under cumulative threats of industrial fishing, climate change and human disturbance, and a tipping point is fast approaching. However, there is hope - we can protect the Peninsula and its wildlife for the future through a Marine Protected Area. The time to act is now.

Learn more at [antarcticanow.org](http://antarcticanow.org) and help us safeguard the Peninsula before it is too late.

# The Western Antarctic Peninsula is home to the greatest number of animals in Antarctica. It is one of the world's last truly wild places, but also one of the most threatened marine wildernesses on earth.

## Why is Antarctica Important?

Antarctica is a global beacon of peace, hope and unity. For the past 60 years, Antarctica has been protected under a Treaty of 54 nations for the benefit of science and collaboration. The Southern Ocean around Antarctica regulates the planet's climate and drives global ocean currents. The ice covering the Antarctic continent stores 70% of the earth's freshwater. The krill in Antarctic waters drive planetary production and influence the carbon sink, but their numbers are declining and they are under threat. While the ground and ice is protected by the Antarctic Treaty, Antarctica's life-giving waters are not included.

## Key Threats to the Antarctic Peninsula

A multitude of threats are combining at once, placing this ecosystem and our planet under increasing pressure:

**Industrial fishing:** Antarctic krill are the keystone prey species of the Antarctic food chain. However, krill are now the target of the largest commercial fishery in the Southern Ocean. It is estimated that krill numbers have declined by more than 80% since the 1970s. Last year, commercial fisheries took nearly 400,000 tonnes of krill from the Antarctic Peninsula, largely for global fishmeal and Omega-3 markets.

**Human Activity:** Tourism is increasing every year; in 2019, more than 50,000 tourists visited the Antarctica Peninsula alone, adding stress to the area and wildlife. While the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) provides guidelines for cruise ships and tourists visiting Antarctica, not all tour operators are IAATO members, thus some sites can receive more than 20,000 visitors per season.

**Climate Change:** The South Pole has been warming at three times the global average over the past 30 years. The Antarctic Peninsula is one of the fastest warming locations on earth. In Antarctica, reductions in sea ice due to a warming climate are causing issues for a multitude of species, including krill which need it to feed and breed. This changing climate compounds all other threats - leading to system collapse.



At least 55 permanent research bases have been established in Antarctica, with increasing infrastructure and movement. While research is crucial to the knowledge and protection of Antarctica, these movements also add an ongoing threat and change to the region.



In the past 30 years, colonies of Adélie and Chinstrap penguins on the Antarctic Peninsula have declined by more than 50%; a decline attributed to reduced sea ice and the harvesting of krill.

**THERE IS HOPE.** The science is clear. We can protect the Western Antarctic Peninsula and its wildlife through the ratification of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). MPAs designate parts of the ocean where human activities are limited or prohibited. In this way, they mitigate threats of degradation, conserve biodiversity, and enforce a more sustainable approach to fishery management.

