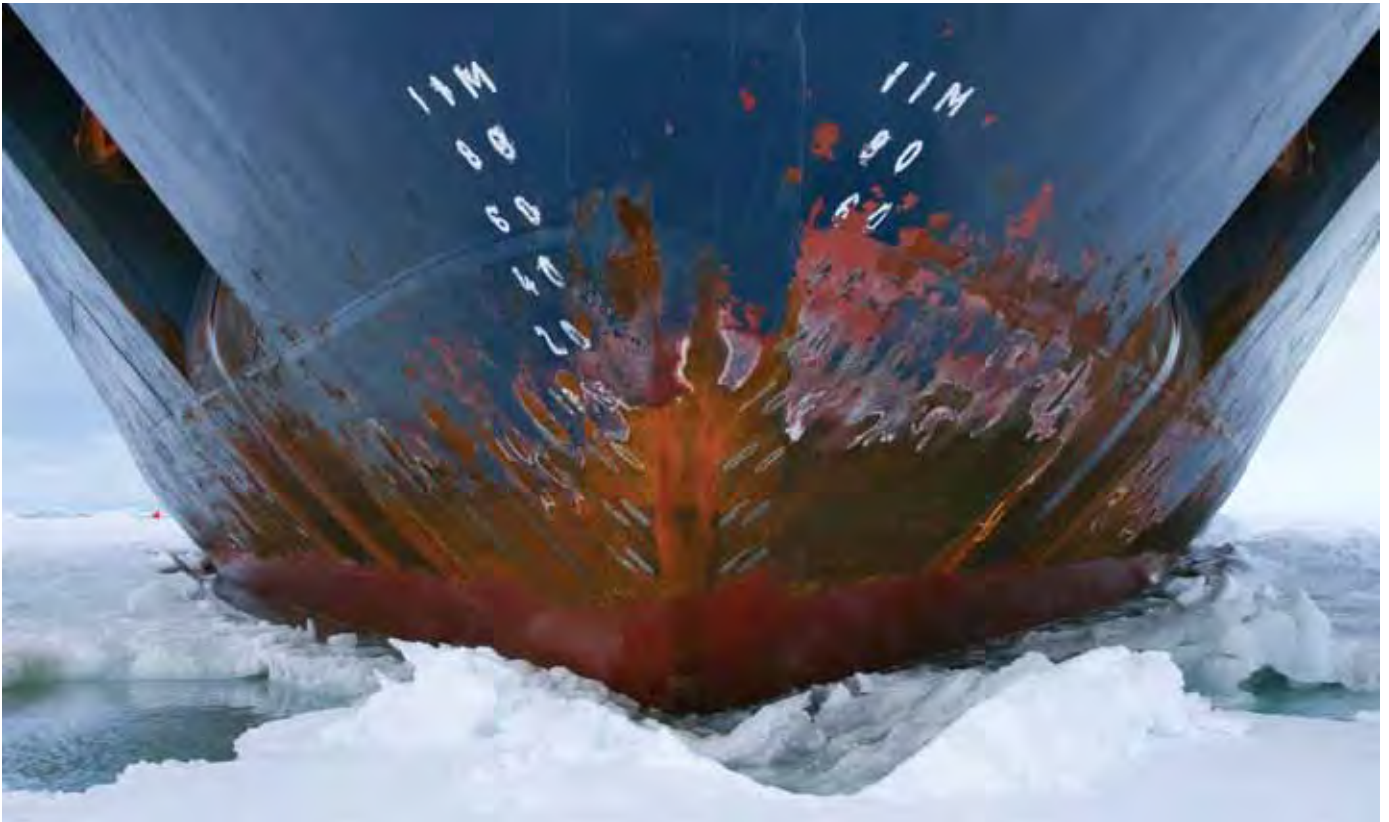


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**ICE BREAKER:** Heavy oil ban to help save pristine environment

## Boost for Antarctic protection

Treaties target risks from oil and tourism.

**F**ederal parliament's Treaties Committee has recommended that Australia ratify two international agreements aimed at boosting the protection of the pristine Antarctic environment.

The committee has supported an amendment to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships. The amendment prohibits the use and transport of heavy fuel oils in Antarctic seas.

"Heavy fuel oil pollution poses a particular risk in the cold, pristine Antarctic environment," committee chair Kelvin Thomson (Wills, Vic) said.

"Now is the time to act to stop growing cruise ship activity in the Antarctic from increasing the risk to the Antarctic environment."

Heavy oil spills from ships cruising Antarctic waters occurred in 2007 and

2008. Due to the extreme weather conditions in the region, such spills pose a significant environmental hazard as oil decomposition is very slow. Clean up costs are also significantly higher.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority will be responsible for enforcing standards through port inspections and by liaising with international partners to ensure ships registered in other countries are complying with the standards.

Without Australian ratification of the treaty amendment, ships carrying heavy fuel oils could operate unregulated in the Antarctic and this could have significant financial and environmental consequences for Australia.

In supporting the amendment, the committee expressed concern that a large proportion of vessels will be exempt from the new standards. These

include vessels engaged in search and rescue operations and ships owned and operated by governments, such as naval vessels, auxiliaries and research vessels. The committee said the Australian Maritime Safety Authority should monitor the number of exempt ships carrying heavy fuel oils in the region to see whether the provisions of the exemption need tightening.

The committee has also supported three amendments to the Antarctic Treaty, to specifically guard against the impacts of encroaching tourism. The amendments will establish an environmental liability regime so that those operating in the Antarctic have enough funds to repair environmental damage they have caused. They will also require tourist operators in the Antarctic to have contingency plans and insurance to pay for medical emergencies occurring in the region. They will also require mandatory regulations relating to health and safety, previously self-imposed by the tourism industry. •

### LINKS

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