Antarctica

Treaty goes to wider forum

Canberra

THE members of the Antarctic Treaty now seem reconciled to the prospect that the future of the treaty will be debated by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, most probably towards the end of November. The underlying issue is whether exploration and possibly exploitation of Antarctica should rest with the signatories of the Antarctic Treaty or be thrown open to a larger group of states.

At the meeting of the non-aligned nations in Delhi, India, earlier this year, there were several expressions of discontent about the alleged exclusiveness of the Antarctic Treaty. The issue was raised in the UN General Assembly on 14 October by the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato Musa Hitam, who denounced the treaty as "restrictive and exclusive". Malaysia's contention is that Antarctica, like the deep ocean bed, should be regarded as part of the "common heritage of mankind" and should be made accessible to all nations irrespective of "their economic and scientific development and capabilities".

Malaysia's objections have to some extent been undermined, however, by the admission of India and Brazil as full members of the Antarctic Treaty on 12 September, in time to take part in the regular consultative meeting of the treaty members held in Canberra from 13 to 27 September. The two countries have qualified by means of scientific expeditions to Antarctica, India in the past two seasons and Brazil in 1982-83.

In a new departure, representatives of states that have signed the treaty but which have not been admitted as "consultative parties" on the basis of their demonstrated

interest in Antarctica were present in Canberra as observers. Conspicuous among these was China, which has established a national committee for Antarctic research, which is thinking of applying to join the Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research (SCAR) organized by the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and which seems to seek the status of a consultative party.

The views of the existing parties to the treaty on the forthcoming UN debate are probably accurately represented by the statement by Mr Bill Hayden, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the opening of last month's meeting. The Antarctic Treaty is "alive and well", he said, and any attempt at renegotiation would "introduce uncertainty and confusion into a region of hitherto unparalleled international cooperation".

The most likely outcome of the first UN debate next month is that the secretary-general will be asked to carry out an investigation and to report back next year. What happens afterwards is an open question.

Vimala Sarma

Correction

Mr Barrie Jones, Minister of Science and Technology in the Australian Government, denies that he had sought opinions on the future of the Australian National Animal Health Laboratory "from private individuals and the bureaucracy without discussion with CSIRO", as reported in *Nature* on 22 September (p264). In a telegram to our Canberra correspondent, Mr Jones says "This is not true". His statement is gladly accepted. — Editor, *Nature*

UK higher education

Public sector's brownie points

WHILE British universities consider how they might fit in more students at no extra cost, non-university colleges have been told they may loosen their belts a little. Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education and Science, is proposing to give polytechnics and colleges of advanced further education £20 million over and above what they had been planning to spend next year. Their number of students will be increased only slightly above the total implied by a major planning exercise by the National Advisory Body for local authority higher education (NAB).

The extra cash seems to be a reward for good behaviour, as defined by the Department of Education and Science. NAB had been asked to plan for the academic year 1984-85 on the basis of a level budget. Its response was, broadly, to maintain student access and to complain about the decrease in the unit of resource (education planning jargon for expenditure per full-time student equivalent). This course was the opposite from that taken two years ago by the University Grants Committee.

Now the strategy seems to have paid off. NAB's student total, about 257,000, was more than the Department of Education and Science (DES) had hoped for and was within an ace of its notional target. NAB has now been asked to find places for an extra 2,000 students next year, the direct cost of which will be only £4 million. The increase, says DES, will ensure orderly rationalization and preserve the 11.7:1 staff/student ratio that is recommended by the department's inspectors. Total expenditure in the sector will now amount to £580.5 million.

Despite the tonic of the extra £20 million, it will still be necessary for polytechnics and other colleges to lose "significant" numbers of lecturers, and NAB's overall objective remains to concentrate resources into the major institutions. Details will be finally agreed next month. The chief departure from its original plan is that NAB has partially backed away from its policy of diverting resources away from South-East England.

Without the latest increase for the local authority maintained sector, its unit of resource would have fallen by rather more than 13 per cent in two years. By effectively reducing the differences in support for universities and other colleges, DES will have managed to contain the demographic peak in student demand in 1984 and 1985 at little extra cost: the £20 million which is now expected to go the non-university sector is comparable with the savings made if, as expected, universities manage to comply with a request from the University Grants Committee to find space for an extra 5,000 students next year.

Tim Beardsley

An exhibition at Heslington Hall, University of York, celebrates the centenary of the animal artists Charles Maurice and Edward Julius Detmold. "Cockatoo and Monkey", shown above, was painted by Edward Julius in 1924. The exhibition is in York until 18 November, at the University Art Gallery in Nottingham from 25 November to 17 December and at the British Museum (Natural History) in London from 6 January to 4 February 1984.