



Region's future 'chance for NZ to lead

A New Zealand diplomat who helped open the Ross Sea fishery 16 years ago – and now wants an end to fishing there – has suggested new ways the country could lead the way in protecting what is known as “the last ocean”.

Stuart Prior, the former head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Antarctic Policy Unit, was keen to see New Zealand become a “gateway” and lead the development of an Antarctic industry based on non-invasive use of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

Mr Prior said this could mean new partnership opportunities with Australia and other interested countries.

He feared there was a risk that decision-making on the Ross Sea could be dominated by Northern Hemisphere powers – a concern which underpinned a 1999 special government meeting at Scott Base.

New Zealand could hold another such meeting to discuss science, conservation and management, and could also encourage science leadership in the Ross Sea and sub-Antarctic by supporting new initiatives, he said.

Christchurch's role as an “Antarctic gateway city” could be further promoted by clustering science, education, heritage and tourism activities around the city.

“This would turn Christchurch into a polar science focal point and a must visit international tourism destination,” he said.

“In practical terms there is a whole Antarctic industry we can develop on the basis of the breathtaking natural resources on our doorstep.

“This is our chance to establish a new leadership role for New Zealand based on knowledge and creativity – think of James Cameron and *Avatar* or *Madagascar* for the sales potential of Antarctica and its natural world.”

Mr Prior believed there was an opportunity for New Zealand to “regain the initiative” and confirm its leadership role as an Antarctic power.