Appendix C
Glossary

Abatement: Reducing the degree or intensity of or eliminating pollution

Accession (to a treaty): The act whereby a state accepts the offer or the opportunity to become a party to a treaty already negotiated and signed by other states. The conditions under which accession may occur and the procedure involved depend on the provisions of the treaty.

Adoption (of a treaty): The formal act by which the form and content of a proposed treaty text are established. As a general rule, the adoption of the text of a treaty takes place through the expression of the consent of the states participating in the treaty-making process. Treaties that are negotiated within an international organization will usually be adopted by a resolution of a representative organ of the organization whose membership more or less corresponds to the potential participation in the treaty in question. A treaty can also be adopted by an international conference that has specifically been convened for setting up the treaty, by a vote of two-thirds of the states present and voting, unless, by the same majority, they have decided to apply a different rule.

Advisory opinion: A non-binding opinion on any legal question given by the International Court of Justice at the request of the UN General Assembly or other authorized organs and agencies of the United Nations. In the exercise of its advisory functions, the Court is guided by rules applicable in contentious cases.

Agreement: The term “international agreement” embraces the widest range of international instruments, referring both to binding treaties and to political commitments, both oral and in writing. More narrowly, there has been a general tendency to apply the term “agreement” to bilateral or restricted multilateral treaties. It is employed especially for instruments of a technical or administrative character, which are signed by the representatives of government departments but are not subject to ratification.
Air pollutant: Any substance in air that could, in high enough concentrations, harm man, other animals, vegetation, or material. Pollutants can include almost any natural or artificial composition of matter being airborne. They may be in the form of solid particles, liquid droplets, gases, or in combination of these forms.

Air pollution: The presence of contaminants or pollutant substances in the air that do not disperse properly and interfere with human health or welfare, or produce other harmful environmental effects.

Air quality standards: The level of pollutants prescribed by regulations that may not be exceeded during a specified time in a defined area.

Amendment: A subsequent change or modification of the terms of a legal instrument, such as a treaty.

Anadromous: Fish that spend their adult life in the sea but swim upriver to freshwater spawning grounds to reproduce.

Aquifer: An underground geological formation, or group of formations, containing usable amounts of ground water that can supply wells and springs.

Arbitration: A process for the resolution of disputes. Binding decisions are rendered by an impartial arbitrator or panel selected by the parties.

Atmosphere: The mass of air surrounding the earth, composed largely of oxygen and nitrogen.

Biodegradable: The ability to break down or decompose rapidly under natural conditions.

Biomass: All of the living material in a given area—often refers to vegetation. Also called “biota.”

Biosphere: The earth and its atmosphere.

Biotechnology: Techniques that use living organisms or part of organisms to produce a variety of substances that can be used to improve plants or animals, for medicine or for industry.

Brackish water: A mixture of fresh and salt water.

Bubble: A system under which existing pollution sources can propose alternate means to comply with a set of pollution controls; under the bubble concept, sources can control more than required at one emission point where control costs are relatively low in return for a comparable relaxation of controls at a second emission point where costs are higher.

Carcinogen: Any substance that can cause or contribute to the production of cancer.