

The Arctic Council and the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic

The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum for addressing many of the common concerns and challenges faced by the Arctic states; Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States.

The Council is a unique forum for co-operation between national governments and indigenous peoples. Six international organizations representing many Arctic indigenous communities have the status of Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council and are involved in the work of the Council in full consultation with governments. The indigenous populations in the Arctic are represented by:

Aleut International Association
Arctic Athabaskan Council
Gwich'in Council International
Inuit Circumpolar Conference
Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North
Saami Council

The Indigenous Peoples Secretariat of the Arctic Council helps Arctic indigenous organisations to work together through the Arctic Council.

Observers to the Arctic Council include European non-arctic countries, international organisations and NGOs.

History

New opportunities for Arctic circumpolar cooperation emerged in the late 1980s during the final reformist phase before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Environmental cooperation was identified as a first step in promoting comprehensive security in the region. The eight Arctic countries adopted an Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) in 1991. Five years later, in 1996, Foreign Ministers of the Arctic states agreed in the Ottawa Declaration, to form the Arctic Council with a mandate to undertake a broad program to include all dimensions of sustainable development.

Founding documents of the Arctic Council

Objective

The Arctic Council is a regional forum for sustainable development, mandated to address all three of its main pillars: the environmental, social and economic.

A key element

From the beginning, Arctic governments and indigenous peoples joined together to make environmental monitoring and assessment a key element of the Arctic Council's agenda. Groundbreaking reports have been prepared and have attracted global attention to the state of the Arctic environment. The approach of the Council encourages continuous dialogue among scientists, policy planners, Arctic residents and political level decision-makers. The decision-making of the Council is heavily based on the

scientific work done under the umbrella of the Council and also influenced by the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples.

Governance

Decisions within the Arctic Council are taken at meetings of Foreign Ministers or their designates of the member states and the political leaders of the Permanent Participants. Ministerial meetings are held every two years. The chairmanship of the Council and accompanying Secretariat rotates among member states. Between the ministerial meetings, the operation of the Council is administered by the Committee of Senior Arctic Officials, composed of representatives of foreign ministries of the member states and representatives of indigenous peoples as Permanent Participants' of the Arctic Council. Its meetings are prepared by the Arctic Council Chair and normally take place in the country of the Chair.

Arctic Council Rules of Procedure

The basic responsibility for the implementation of regional policies lies with the states and their sub-regional administrations. Co-operation within the Arctic Council establishes a common knowledge base, spreads information on best practices and lessons learned and has an important role in the development of policy recommendations for national, regional and local leaders.

Working Groups

The scientific work of the Arctic Council is carried out in five expert working groups focusing on such issues as monitoring, assessing and preventing pollution in the Arctic, climate change, biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, emergency preparedness and prevention in addition to the living conditions of the Arctic residents. The Working Groups main tasks are as follows:

The Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG)

The Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Barrow, Alaska in 2000, approved a strategic framework document on sustainable development. With this foundation for further cooperation, the SDWG started developing the economic, social and cultural aspects of sustainable development.

The Arctic states have declared their commitment to improving human conditions in the Arctic and to building capacity to help the inhabitants adapt to new realities. The Council encourages among other things continued cooperation on health issues, including assessment of the relationship between pollution and health. It gives special attention to the children and youth of the Arctic with the aim of preparing young people to actively participate in the sustainable development of the region. Recently, the Council undertook to produce an Arctic Human Development Report (ADHR), a comprehensive assessment of human conditions in the circumpolar region, due to be completed in the autumn of 2004.

The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP)

Significant monitoring and assessment of pollution in the Arctic is performed under the auspices of the Arctic Council. This work is important in identifying pollution risks and their impact on Arctic ecosystems and in assessing the effectiveness of

international agreements on pollution control, such as the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

Over the past 10 years, the Working Group has conducted two major assessments of the state of pollution in the Arctic, the second of which; Arctic Pollution 2002, was issued in October 2002. The reports document the sources, levels and trends, as well as the effects of a wide range of contaminants, including, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), heavy metals and radionuclides. The main conclusions of these assessments are that:

"In comparison with most other areas of the world, the Arctic remains a clean environment. However, for some pollutants, combinations of different factors give rise to concern in certain ecosystems and for some human populations. These circumstances sometimes occur on a local scale, but in some cases may be regional or circumpolar in extent."

Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME)

The Arctic marine environment is of great importance to the states of the Arctic region and the world as a whole. It holds some of the most important seas for commercial fisheries in the world, has unique socio-cultural aspects, economic potential and an integral role in climatic processes. Climatic and developmental pressures on the Arctic marine environment from shipping, dumping, offshore oil and gas development and land-based activities are increasing.

PAME addresses policy and non-emergency pollution prevention and control measures related to the protection of the Arctic marine environment from land and sea-based activities, including marine shipping, offshore oil and gas development, land-based activities and ocean disposal.

In recognition that existing and emerging activities in the Arctic warrant a more coordinated and integrated strategic approach to address the challenges of Arctic coastal marine environments, Arctic Council Ministers requested the PAME Working Group to lead the development of an Arctic Marine Strategic Plan (AMSP). The purpose of the AMSP is to guide Arctic Council activities related to the protection of the Arctic seas. An ongoing PAME activity is the Regional Programme of Action (RPA), which addresses urgent pollution problems in the Arctic marine environment stemming from land-based activities.

Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF)

CAFF aims at promoting the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of living resources. Effective conservation of many circumpolar species and other natural resources requires close cooperation with non-arctic states. There is a need for enhanced monitoring of biodiversity at the circumpolar level, fully utilizing traditional knowledge, to detect the impacts of global change on biodiversity and to enable Arctic communities to effectively respond and adapt to those changes. The Working Group has published a substantive overview report on biodiversity and conservation in the Arctic, including marine areas, titled Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna.

Emergency, Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR)

The Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) Working Group exchanges information on best practices for preventing spills, preparing to respond to spills should they occur, and practical response measures for use in the event of a spill. EPPR is not a response agency. The work is focused mainly on oil and gas transportation and extraction, and on radiological and other hazards. Expanded use of natural resources (oil, gas, and mining) and growth in tourism will lead to new and more frequently used navigation routes. This calls for new efforts to enhance the security of marine transport, prevent emergencies or respond to them effectively, including smooth cross-border assistance among neighboring states. The EPPR Working Group has developed a number of tools including an Environmental Risk Analysis of Arctic Activities, a Circumpolar Map of Resources at Risk from Oil Spills in the Arctic, a Field Guide for Oil Spill Response in Arctic Waters, and Source Control Management approaches for selected facilities.

Special Initiatives

Arctic Council Action Plan to Eliminate Pollution of the Arctic (ACAP): The Arctic states have declared their readiness to cooperate to reduce pollution in the Arctic. As a direct follow-up of the AMAP monitoring and assessment work, the ACAP was set up to address the sources identified by AMAP. The Plan involves several priority projects to reduce pollution in the Arctic, including projects on cleaner production and control of PCBs, obsolete pesticides and dioxins, all of which are priority pollutants under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). New chemicals are making their way into the Arctic food chain, such as brominated flame retardants. The ACAP working group has recently begun to develop recommendations with regard to these contaminants.

<http://acap.arctic-council.org>

The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA): Climate variability and change is high on the Arctic Council's agenda. The Arctic States note with concern the ongoing warming of most of the Arctic and recognize that the impacts of global climate change can have major consequences in the Arctic. The Arctic Council's project on the assessment of the consequences of climate variability and change, the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), examines present status and possible future impacts of climate change and variability and UV radiation on the environment and its living resources; on human health, and social and economic activities, as well as possible adaptations and responses. The assessment and related policy recommendations was presented at the Ministerial meeting in Reykjavik, November 2004.

Co-operation with international organisations

The Arctic Council cooperates with international organisations. One example is the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), where the Arctic Council had a role in placing the problem of mercury pollution on the agenda. The Arctic Council has contributed to the development of the new European Union's Second Northern Dimension Action Plan, and has, among other things, encouraged the EU to work with the Council in an effort to combat long-range transboundary pollution. The Council also participates actively in the regional implementation of the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development.