

Arctic Council Report

9th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting, 23-25 April 2015, Iqaluit (Nunavut) Canada

Prof. David Johnson attended the 2015 Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting on behalf of ACOPS (Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea www.acops.org.uk/) and GOBI (Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative www.gobi.org/). Permanent Participants and Observers held a separate informal meeting, convened on 24 April 2014 by the Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat, to exchange views on an on-going initiative to establish a '*Funding Mechanism for a Better Arctic*'. Take home messages included the need to advance natural and social science research; common concerns regarding relative sea-level rise; recognition of longstanding efforts on behalf of many Observers; and incentives for future cooperation.

Chaired by Hon. Leona Aglukkaq, Canada's Minister for the Arctic, the meeting of the eight Arctic States, six Permanent Participant organisations and Observers reflected on achievements made during the 2-year Canadian Chairmanship. These include establishment of the Arctic Economic Council (to promote responsible economic development); a recommendation to use traditional and local knowledge more consistently; an initiative on mental wellness across Arctic communities; an 8-year Action Plan to implement the recommendations of the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment and a work plan to improve the status of priority species of Arctic breeding birds along their migratory routes; updated scientific assessments on short-lived climate pollutants and a framework for action to reduce black carbon and methane emissions; and an action plan to prevent marine oil pollution in the Arctic (see below).

<http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/canadian-chairmanship/1021-thematic-articles-highlighting-arctic-council-accomplishments-under-the-canadian-chairmanship>

Ministerial statements reflected on the Canadian Chairmanship and emphasised the role of the Arctic Council achieving peaceful cooperation over two decades whilst noting the threat of current geopolitical tensions. Key aspects included the enhanced capacity of Permanent Participants; oil pollution prevention and planning; use of best available technology and practices; commitments to mitigate black carbon and methane; food security; and Arctic tourism potential. Statements from Permanent Participants emphasized the importance of the AEC, concerns about geopolitical tensions and specific resource issues (e.g. mining proposals on Saami land), and capacity building. The interim status of the EU as an 'Ad Hoc Observer' was noted and a review of the contribution of Observers generally was confirmed as necessary. Ministers adopted the 2015 Senior Arctic Officials Report (setting out progress by Task Forces, Working Groups and

Initiatives to strengthen the Arctic council) and signed an Iqaluit Ministerial Declaration (Annex 1).

Technical and scientific progress of specific interest to ACOPS included:

Task Force on Oil Pollution Prevention (TFOPP) in the Arctic was constituted to recommend an action plan and cooperative arrangements on oil pollution prevention. The resulting Framework Plan for Cooperation on Prevention of Oil Pollution from Petroleum and Maritime Activities in the Marine Areas of the Arctic – although not a legally-binding document – fulfills the Task Force’s mandate by offering a route forward for cooperation among the eight Arctic states on prevention of oil pollution to the marine areas of the Arctic due to activities in two key sectors: maritime activity and petroleum activity. The plan focuses in many areas on enhancing exchange of information among the participants to the Framework Plan.

In its details, the Framework plan addresses such themes as:

- Development of an overview of measures for improved safety in petroleum activity;
- Promotion of standardization activities within the sphere of petroleum activity;
- Strengthening of cooperation between national regulators of petroleum activity;
- Strengthening of cooperation on maritime traffic monitoring and management;
- Improvement of maritime services, including navigational charts and met-ocean forecasts; and
- Reduction of risks associated with the use and transport of heavy fuel oil.

Implementation of the Framework Plan is left in the hands of the appropriate and competent national authorities in each State. As part of the Framework Plan, the Arctic states intend to promote cooperation between their competent national authorities on issues concerning the prevention of Arctic marine oil pollution from petroleum activities. Dialogue has already begun between the relevant Arctic regulators with the purpose of formalizing a future cooperation.

Task Force for Action on Black Carbon and Methane was formed on the basis that short-lived climate pollutants disproportionately affect warming in the Arctic. Chaired by Canada and Sweden it built on technical work undertaken by the Arctic Monitoring Assessment Programme and the Arctic Contaminants Action Program. The Framework developed represents action-orientated high-level

commitment but is not legally binding. A case to strengthen cooperation authored by UNECE is at Annex 2.

The Assessment of oil and gas activities 2007, prepared by AMAP Working Group, compiles prevailing knowledge about oil and gas activities in the Arctic region to the middle of the decade, in order to present a holistic assessment of the environmental, social, economic and human health impacts of oil and gas activities in the Arctic. Main findings were that in the marine environment, oil spills are the largest threat, while responding to major oil spills remains a challenge in remote, icy environments. As a follow up, the EPPR Working Group delivered a report to the AC Ministerial meeting in 2013 on oil pollution prevention. A Task Force on Oil Pollution Prevention took this forward and gathered best practice in managing acute oil spills. Furthermore the oil industry has provided improved knowledge about methods and effects through two Joint Industry Projects (JIPs).

In 2013, the eight member states of the Arctic Council signed *the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic*. This is a legally binding agreement between the Arctic states, strengthening cooperation, coordination and assistance amongst Arctic states in preparing for and responding to an oil spill. It does not contain binding operational standards or implementing clauses. EPPR has developed operational guidelines to the Agreement and is also tasked to maintain these guidelines. Canada arranged the first exercise related to the Agreement in 2014. The report and proposed follow up actions are discussed within EPPR. The US will arrange the next exercise during their chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

EPPR conducted, as a first step for a *Circumpolar Marine Environmental Risk Assessment*, a scoping workshop in November 2013. Based on the output of the workshop and further discussions within EPPR, it was decided to conduct a Circumpolar Oil Spill Response Gap Analysis, as a useful first step to a comprehensive Circumpolar Marine Environmental Risk Assessment. EPPR was also requested by IMO to develop a global *Guide oil spill response in ice and snow conditions*. The Guide was developed in 2013-2014 and a final draft was submitted to IMO in January 2015. An Arctic version of the guide is finalized and will be a delivery from EPPR to the 2015 Ministerial meeting.

EPPR has developed an Arctic ERMA (*Environmental Response Management Application*). ERMA is an online mapping tool that integrates both static and real-time data, such as Environmental Sensitivity Index maps, ship locations, weather, ocean currents, and more in a centralized format for environmental responders and decision makers. This allows for high-impact and fine-resolution visualization of data for solving complex environmental response and resource

issues. The final deliverable is the online mapping site: <https://erma.noaa.gov/arctic/erma.html>. Arctic ERMA can also be accessed from the Arctic Council/EPPR website: <http://www.arctic-council.org/eppr>

EPPR workshop oil in ice November 2013. The workshop was arranged by the Norwegian Polar Institute in cooperation with EPPR and Norwegian Coastal Administration. The purpose of the workshop was to focus on pros and cons of the use of dispersants under Arctic conditions, logistical challenges including the operative window for dispersants, existing and ongoing initiatives related to these topics, such as the OGP JIP and environmental strains and the Arctic ecosystems. As a result of the workshop, three recommendations were developed:

- 1) Prevent oil from reaching the marginal ice zone at certain seasons, with special focus on multiple year ice with important habitat functions.
- 2) Facilitate operational measures through identifying areas where dispersants can be used at low risk.
- 3) Adapt a regional approach to use of dispersants, based on national policy.

Finally, EPPR arranged a workshop in December 2014 titled *Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) for Emergency Response in the Arctic*. The goals of the workshop were to learn about recent operational trials of using UAS in Arctic Environments for emergency response; to discuss requirements for UAS for oil spill response activities, and to outline opportunities to improve the utility of UAS technologies in Arctic Environments (NB. Text above on EPPR is drawn from an update by Norway to the OSPAR Commission OIC 15/8/3. A summary of EPPR work can be found at Annex 3).

The full SAO Report providing details of all deliverables is available on-line at: <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/document-archive/category/604-declaration-sao-report>

US Secretary of State John Kerry then set out a commitment for the 2-year US Chairmanship of the Arctic Council based upon three inter-connected themes: tackling climate change; ocean safety, security and stewardship; and economic and living conditions for those living in the Arctic. The Arctic is warming faster than any other region, an unprecedented change with knock on effects placing the resilience of Arctic communities in jeopardy. The US consider it important to help prepare Arctic communities for future change and advocated an enhanced digital elevation map, better predictions and smarter collective responses. Black carbon is 2000 times more potent than carbon dioxide, covers sea ice, absorbing solar radiation like a heat absorbing blanket. A direct link was made between climate issues affecting the Arctic and UNFCCC COP21 in Paris scheduled for

December 2015. Ocean acidification implications were also identified as a key concern. The US pledged to progress the Framework for a pan Arctic network of MPAs. This framework aims to inform the development of MPAs and networks of MPAs that are located within the national jurisdiction of Arctic States. The framework offers guidance, it is not legally binding, and each Arctic State pursues MPA development based on its own authorities, priorities and timelines. The US will also pursue a Regional Seas Programme for the Arctic to improve cooperation and share best practices and promote joint pollution preparedness and response exercises. For Arctic peoples the US advocated water security, tools to improve mental health, an improved telecommunications infrastructure, sustainable economic development and expanding access to new and clean renewable technology.