

*Arctic Council*  
*Input to the Report on Oceans and the Law of the Sea*

***Regional co-operation***

The Arctic Council places high importance on ocean issues, not least because of the large number of people depending on the marine environment for food and income, as well as for their social and cultural identity. The Arctic marine environment is also of great importance to the world as a whole, because of its rich natural resources, unique socio-cultural aspects, economic potential and integral role in climatic processes.

There is mounting evidence that climatic and developmental pressures on the marine environment from shipping, dumping, offshore oil and gas development and land-based activities have been increasing in the Arctic.

***Arctic Marine Strategic Plan***

The Arctic Council is currently working on a strategic plan for the protection of the Arctic marine environment, launched by Ministers one year ago. This new strategy is based on an integrated approach to sustainable ocean management. The aim of the plan is to set priorities. It will not seek to reinvent principles, but develop and link existing ones. The strategy should assist in confronting existing conditions, including pollution, and provide a means to address new and emerging challenges. One such example is the possible opening of new Arctic sea routes, due to melting sea ice.

Through development of the strategic plan, the Arctic Council wishes to take an active role in the regional application of the ecosystem approach. An integrated approach would include partnerships among the different Arctic Council Working Groups, as well as with external partners. It will also provide links to other international initiatives, such as the UNEP Regional Seas Program, the EU Marine Strategy and the London Convention.

In October 2003, an international workshop was held under the auspices of the Arctic Council with the aim of providing a forum for exchanging information and ideas on the drivers of change and trends in ocean management. The main drivers of change identified include climate change and increased economic activity.

The Arctic Marine Strategic Plan is expected to be finalized by the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in fall of 2004.

***Assessment of Petroleum Hydrocarbons in the Arctic***

The Arctic Council has begun a comprehensive and wide ranging assessment of the potential socioeconomic, human health, and environmental impacts of oil and gas activities in the Arctic. The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) Working Group will organize the assessment with added expertise from the other Arctic Council working groups. The planned assessment will focus on: oil and gas activities; social, economic, human health, and sustainable development implications; sources, inputs, and concentrations of contaminants; biological effects of pollutants and disturbance; and environmental status.

### ***Arctic Climate Impact Assessment***

The Arctic Council continues its work on the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), expected to be issued in November 2004. The goal of the ACIA is to evaluate and synthesize knowledge on climate variability, climate change, and increased ultraviolet radiation and their consequences. The aim is to provide useful and reliable information to the governments, organizations and peoples of the Arctic on policy options to meet such changes. Climate variability and change, and more recently, notable increases in UV radiation, have become important issues in the Arctic over the past few decades.

Sea ice reduction and rising sea levels are among the many consequences of a warmer climate, affecting among other things coastal communities, islands, river deltas and harbors. Climate change will also have an impact on species relocation, subsistence lifestyles and human health. Moreover, reduction in permafrost will affect infrastructure, such as roads, airports, buildings and pipelines. Many such changes are already apparent.

### ***Other activities***

The Arctic Council, through its Working Group for the Protection of the Marine Environment (PAME), will continue to support the implementation and further development of the program support elements for the Regional Program of Action for the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (RPA) and will further support the implementation and development of the Russian NPA-Arctic and other National Plans as important components of the RPA.

The AMAP will continue its efforts as regards monitoring and assessing pollution in the Arctic with special emphasis on supporting global cooperation to address Persistent Organic Pollutants and the manmade sources of mercury pollution. The Arctic Council project on the sources of mercury is an example of a regional contribution to these objectives.

In addition, several other projects with direct application to the oceans' agenda are carried out under the auspices of the Arctic Council. The Council's Working Group on Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) has launched strategies and action plans concerning the marine environment, such as Legal Instruments and National Frameworks for Arctic Marine Conservation. A few reports on Seabirds have been published, including Seabird Incidental Catch in the Waters of Arctic Countries and Seabird Harvest Regimes in the Circumpolar Nations. Moreover, CAFF presented its comprehensive status report on Arctic Flora and Fauna - Status and Conservation in 2000, followed by a set of recommendations, in 2002. The Arctic Council Working Group on Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) has also carried out work relevant to the oceans' agenda, such as the Field Guide for Oil Spill Response in Arctic Waters and the Circumpolar Map of Resources at Risk from Oil Spills in the Arctic. Furthermore, the EPPR is developing a Shoreline cleanup assessment technology and, together with PAME, the Arctic Waters Oil Transfer Guidelines.