

Arctic Council
Input to the Report on Oceans and the Law of the Sea
7 January 2003

Regional co-operation

In the Inari Declaration of 2002, the Arctic Council Ministers, recognizing the international call for increased co-ordination and collaboration particularly at the regional level, agreed to develop a strategic plan for the protection of the Arctic marine environment, under the leadership of the Arctic Council's Programme for the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME). The Arctic Council recognizes that the critical linkages between climate change, resource development, increased ship traffic through the Arctic Seas and emergency prevention and response are key anticipated issues affecting the management of the oceans. In addition, PAME will 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.

Over the past 10 years the Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) has conducted two major assessments of pollution in the Arctic. The latter was launched in the fall of 2002. The assessments document the sources, levels and trends, and effects of a wide range of contaminants, including persistent organic pollutants (POP's), heavy metals, radionuclides, acidifying substances and petroleum hydrocarbons. 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. The level of PCB, for example, in some areas is high enough to affect the health of individual animals in species including polar bears, marine mammals, sea birds and even humans. These circumstances sometimes occur on a local scale, but in some cases may be regional or circumpolar in extent."

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 sources of mercury is an example of a regional contribution to these objectives

The Arctic Council continues its work on the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA). 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. The aim is to have the assessment outcomes finalized by the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in the fall of 2004.

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 some 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.