

Arctic Council Task Force on Oil Pollution Prevention. 4th Meeting, Nuuk, September 10-11, 2014. Summary two-pager.

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Arctic Council Task Force on Arctic Marine Oil Pollution Prevention

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Introduction

At its fourth meeting, hosted in Nuuk, Greenland, the Task Force on Arctic Marine Oil Pollution Prevention (TFOPP) focused on the discussion of the substance and text of the deliverable – the precise title of which is still under discussion – which it will present at the upcoming Ministerial Meeting in 2015 in Iqaluit, Canada. Each delegation has taken on a significant portion of the preparatory work on this deliverable, with overall guidance delivered by the Norwegian and Russian co-chairs.

In their introductory remarks, the co-chairs underlined the need to reach agreement on the legal status of the document, its title and the status under which it will be submitted to the 2015 Ministerial Meeting (e.g., whether it is a signed document or not). Delegates were encouraged to be as concrete as possible in their contributions and to inform the Task Force if there were items that were unacceptable to them.

All eight Arctic States and one Working Group (EPPR) took part. Accredited observers attending the meeting included 4 states: France, Germany, Italy and Japan. In addition, contributions were provided by invited experts from OGP (International Oil and Gas Producers Association), IADC (International Association of Drilling Contractors) and Joint Arctic Command (Greenland).

Discussion of the Deliverable

The discussion opened with statements by the states on the legal status of the document that will be delivered to the ministers in spring 2015. The delegations reached consensus on this issue, agreeing that – due to the limited time remaining – discussion of a non-binding document was preferable. Still, they expressed openness to the possibility of developing a binding agreement at some point in the future. It was decided that the title of the document would be determined at the end of the meeting when the states reached agreement on its structure and components.

Prior to the meeting, the ASC produced a “Unified Document” based on the Russian draft text, which integrated the language and items proposed following the TFOPP III meeting in Ottawa. Although the delegates referred to different parts of the document during the discussion (e.g. “the main part”, “Annex 1”, “Annex 2”), the co-chairs reiterated that all these parts would ultimately become a single, integrated text. They also encouraged the delegates to opt for more general and concise language as being preferable in case of a non-binding document. The states reached agreement on most items of the document; some portions of the text remained bracketed, subject to further legal consultations.

Some particularly noteworthy elements of the day’s discussions included the following.

- The group discussed possible establishment of the Arctic Regulators Forum.
- The group discussed the initiation of a “baseline study” which would endeavor to give an overview of past, ongoing and planned research and development in the field of oil pollution prevention in the Arctic.

- Many states reiterated the importance of avoiding duplication of initiatives currently being carried out elsewhere – for example, within the IMO, WMO, ARHC, or Arctic Council working groups (e.g. CAFF, EPPR, PAME).

Presentations by the invited experts

Several invited experts made presentations on their experiences operating in the Arctic, giving their assessment of the current situation and highlighting some of the measures that could prevent oil pollution in the circumpolar region.

Representatives of the Joint Arctic Command (Greenland, Kingdom of Denmark) described their area of responsibility, including anti-pollution efforts and oil spill recovery operations, as well as ice-breaking and other shipping related activities. They also gave an overview of a study, conducted by the Danish Ministry of Defense, aimed at identification of the areas to be strengthened within their area of responsibility and interest. One of the key recommendations of the study is to enhance international cooperation. To illustrate the Joint Arctic Command's efforts in the sphere of marine oil pollution prevention in particular, the speakers discussed their surveillance system and improved ice charts.

Another study was presented by experts of the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers (OGP). The main goal of the study (initiated by the US National Petroleum Council with the support of some OGP members) is to identify opportunities for technology enhancements that would facilitate prudent development with excellent environmental responsibility.

The IADC (the International Association of Drilling Contractors) representative described efforts of oil companies in Greenland. He focused upon the challenges with offshore petroleum operations in this area, and upon the appropriate actions for spill prevention and contingency planning.

Discussion of the title of the Document

At the conclusion of the meeting, a number of titles were proposed. Delegations agreed to look at the precedents in their practice before making a final decision at the next meeting. However, most of them preferred "Action Plan" ("Strategic/Framework Plan") as the variant mentioned in the Kiruna Declaration.

Next Steps

The delegation of Finland offered to host the next meeting on 24-25 November, 2014 in Helsinki. The co-chairs and several delegations expressed a desire that this would be the final meeting of the Task Force. To ensure that the work of the Task Force can be concluded at the next meeting, delegations were given specific tasks regarding areas yet to be clarified within the document, and were asked as well to clarify all remaining general or legal questions within their national systems, prior to arriving in Helsinki.