



Arctic Council SAO Plenary meeting
25-26 October 2017, Oulu, Finland
Meeting code: SAOFI201

Document Title

The Work of the Arctic Council on Pollution Prevention

Agenda item number

7

Submitted by

Finnish Chairmanship

Document filename

SAOFI201_2017_OULU_07_The-Work-of-the-AC-on-Pollution-Prevention

Number of pages, not including this cover sheet

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The Work of the Arctic Council on Pollution Prevention

Background

In accordance with the Arctic States' commitment to protect the Arctic environment, the Arctic Council Working Groups carry out a multitude of activities. These include assessments and recommendations on environmental pollution as well as implementation of concrete actions to reduce and prevent pollution in the Arctic region.

- AMAP monitors and assesses the status of the Arctic region with respect to pollution - e.g. persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals, radionuclides, acidification and petroleum hydrocarbons - and climate change issues by documenting levels and trends, pathways and processes and effects on ecosystems and humans, and by proposing actions.
- ACAP aims to reduce pollution of the Arctic environment by developing and implementing practical demonstration projects to reduce pollution.
- CAFF is working to harmonize and integrate efforts to monitor Arctic flora and fauna. CAFF's Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (2013) found that pollution from both long-range transport and local sources threatens the health of Arctic species and ecosystems and recommended a range of actions to reduce the threat of pollutants to Arctic biodiversity.
- EPPR contributes to prevention, preparedness and response to environmental emergencies, including unintentional releases of pollutants, such as oil spills.
- PAME addresses non-emergency pollution prevention of the Arctic marine environment via its various projects to enhance clean shipping and maritime safety and promote best practices in resource exploration and development.
- SDWG's work includes projects that address pollution from human settlements and economic activities in the Arctic.

From the current other subsidiary bodies of the Arctic Council, the EGBCM deals with two short-lived climate pollutants, black carbon and methane. Black carbon is also a serious air pollutant and health stressor. Short-lived climate pollutants are a cross-cutting theme covered also by AMAP and ACAP. AMAP prepares scientific assessments on SLCP emissions, concentrations and impacts in the Arctic and ACAP facilitates projects on reducing the emissions.

Fairbanks Ministerial Declaration

The Fairbanks Ministerial declaration includes several paragraphs about pollution prevention:

4. Note the discussions within the International Maritime Organization on the use and carriage of heavy fuel oil by ships in Arctic waters and the assessment of associated risks, and **decide** to provide expertise and information developed through the ongoing work of the Arctic Council for consideration by those involved in Arctic shipping matters, including at the International Maritime Organization,

5. Note that the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic has entered into force, **recognize** its important role in ensuring the protection of the Arctic marine environment

from oil pollution incidents, **welcome** operational exercises and reports in support of its implementation including the database on Arctic response assets, and **encourage** their continuation,

11. Note with concern the increasing accumulation of marine debris in the Arctic, its effects on the environment and its impacts on Arctic communities, and **decide** to assess the scope of the problem and contribute to its prevention and reduction, and also to continue efforts to address growing concerns relating to the increasing levels of microplastics in the Arctic and potential effects on ecosystems and human health,

14. Recognize the vital importance of healthy Arctic communities, homes and peoples [...], **welcome** reports [...] on access to safe water and sewer services, and **encourage** continued work on these issues,

15. Further recognize the vital importance for human health of a healthy natural environment in the Arctic, **welcome** the advancements made to reduce pollutants, such as dioxins, furans, heavy metals, as well as black carbon, and **encourage** continued work on these issues at all levels,

16. Look forward to the entry into force of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, **encourage** prompt and effective implementation of the Convention by the parties, which is important in our efforts to reduce mercury contamination in the Arctic, **welcome** continued progress in the implementation of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and **welcome** the work on Chemicals of Emerging Arctic Concern, addressing new potential persistent organic pollutants and other pollutants,

23. Note again that the Arctic is warming at more than twice the rate of the global average, **note** with concern that the pace and scale of continuing Arctic warming will depend on future emissions of greenhouse gases and short-lived climate pollutants, **reiterate** the importance of global action to reduce both greenhouse gases and short-lived climate pollutants to mitigate climate change, and **call** for the Arctic Council to undertake additional analyses to contribute to the assessment reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and continued collaboration with all levels of governments,

24. [...] note the importance of the continued work of the Expert Group on Black Carbon and Methane, **recognize** the gains that some industries have already made in reducing the emissions and intensity of greenhouse gases, including methane, and **underscore** the important role of industry in fostering innovative technologies to contribute to further reductions in greenhouse gases and short-lived climate pollutants,

The Way Forward

The Working Groups and the EGBCM are invited to present their recent and planned activities in pollution prevention. The SAO meeting is invited to give feedback and guidance to the WGs in their activities on pollution prevention.

Bearing in mind the tasks from the Fairbanks declaration as well as the on-going Arctic Council long-term strategy work, the SAOs may wish to discuss:

- Where should the Arctic Council focus its pollution-related work: e.g. should the focus be on emission inventories or impact assessments, what specific issues should be addressed?
- How could the implementation of Arctic Council's recommendations on pollution be further facilitated?
- How could successful pilot projects that reduce or prevent pollution be best replicated?
- Are there some specific target groups to which communication about Arctic pollution should be focused?