

Statements from Oulu 2017 Observer Special Session: Observer States

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UK OBSERVER'S STATEMENT ON POLLUTION PREVENTION IN THE ARCTIC

Mr Chairman, Senior Arctic Officials, Permanent Participants and fellow Observers

The UK would first like to renew its support for the work of the Arctic Council and our commitment to finding opportunities to work in partnership on common goals and issues and to assisting in maintaining peace and stability in the region.

While the first UK-Arctic Policy Framework was published in 2013, our commitment to the Arctic Council goes back to its inception in 1996. We plan to publish a refreshed version of the Framework in the coming months. Although we do not expect significant changes in the UK's approach, what I highlight today will form a small part of the updated Framework.

As the Arctic's nearest neighbour, the UK cares deeply about how rapid changes are impacting the Arctic region and the implications of a changing Arctic for the rest of the world. We have a long-standing record of collaborative scientific research in the Arctic, including with many of our fellow observers here today. We contribute to pollution prevention in a number of Arctic Council Working Groups, particularly PAME, AMAP, CAFF plus the Expert Group on Black Carbon and Methane – our national report will be submitted by the end of this year.

Consistent with the UK's commitment to the Paris Agreement, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has reaffirmed the importance of tackling the global challenge that is climate change.

The UK was the first country in the world to set legally binding emission reduction targets. The 2008 Climate Change Act commits the UK to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% from 1990 levels by 2050. Our recently published Clean Growth Strategy sets out how over £2.5 billion will be invested to support low carbon innovation – a common theme in yesterday's discussion.

As a transboundary matter, the UK is committed to working domestically and internationally to combat marine litter that causes harm to our global oceans and

seas. Through OSPAR, the UK and Contracting Parties have developed and are implementing a Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter.

Domestically, we have introduced litter reduction strategies, such as reducing the volume of single use plastic bags and will soon introduce legislation to ban microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products – stopping billions of tiny pieces of plastic from entering our seas every year. Furthermore, we want to improve understanding of types of marine litter, its distribution, sources and impacts. Research is underway. Our evidence will be available to the Arctic Council to help inform future policies on marine litter in the Arctic Ocean.

Reducing mercury contamination in the Arctic and globally is of great importance to us. As an active participant in the first COP 1 of the Minamata Convention, the UK helped to develop UN policy on the international regulation of mercury. We expect to ratify the Minamata Convention in early 2018.

The UK has consistently been at the forefront of international regulatory developments that aim to significantly reduce the risk of Arctic pollution. We maintained strong involvement in finalising the environmental aspects of the Polar Code through the IMO and PAME and the ongoing discussions regarding the impact on the Arctic of emissions of Black Carbon from international shipping.

We have long implemented the Anti Fouling Convention and were strong proponents of the recent proposal for its extension. We are in the process of developing the necessary legislation to incorporate the Ballast Water Convention into UK law at the earliest opportunity.

We strongly supported the reduction of the global cap on the sulphur content of fuel used by shipping and are ready to implement this cap in 2020. In a clear indication of our intent, our Minister for Shipping recently announced a UK commitment to develop low and eventually zero emissions shipping, to address the overall environmental impact of the sector. We are also working proactively in the current IMO negotiations on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In conclusion, we will continue to play a prominent role in the range of international fora which may have an effect on the Arctic environment and will push for further research and further action to tackle pollution and protect the fragile Arctic environment.

26 October 2017