



ARCTIC ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS' MEETING UK OBSERVER'S STATEMENT

Exploring Common Solutions for the Arctic Environment

The United Kingdom 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.

The UK published its refreshed UK-Arctic Policy Framework in April 2018. *Beyond the Ice* reaffirms our continued commitment to helping to understand a changing Arctic through our world-class science and to protecting the Arctic's fragile environment, just as we did when we first became an observer to the Arctic Council in 1996.

We recognise that Arctic stewardship rests with the Arctic States and the indigenous peoples of those States, and continue to support their efforts to ensure a sustainable future for the region. As such, *Beyond the Ice* set out the UK's approach towards the Arctic based upon the three central principles of respect, cooperation and appropriate leadership.

Beyond the Ice also complements *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*. Launched by the UK Government in January 2018, the plan sets out how the UK will address its impact on the planet through domestic and international action.

We will continue to lead by example on the crucial environmental challenges. Whether reducing our carbon emissions and marine plastic pollution, leading international action to develop an ambitious post-2020 international biodiversity strategy and playing an active role in securing a new international agreement for conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Safeguarding the environment from unnecessary pollutants and chemicals is essential if we are to ensure a healthy, safe and productive Arctic. The UN Minamata Convention on Mercury is an important global treaty to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury. The UK completed ratification on 6 April 2018 to become the 91st Party to the Convention.

Carbon pollution from coal is a leading contributor to climate change, which is a particular menace in the Arctic. Reducing global coal consumption should be a vital and urgent priority for all countries and states. That is why the UK and Canada jointly launched the Powering Past Coal Alliance, a coalition of Governments and civil society aiming to support the global phase-out of coal across the power sector. The UK was one of the first countries to commit to ending unabated coal power generation by 2025, we hope to inspire others to follow suit.

As momentum for reducing marine plastic pollution is growing, the UK is committed to working internationally and domestically 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.

We are also driving global leadership and ambition through the Commonwealth. In April 2018, the Prime Minister announced that the UK, together with Vanuatu, would co-lead the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance on marine plastic pollution, calling on other

Commonwealth nations to pledge action to eliminate avoidable single-use plastic waste. The UK has pledged up to £66.4m to boost research and innovation to support other Commonwealth countries in achieving their aims under the Alliance.

Domestically, we have introduced litter reduction strategies to reduce marine debris including one of the world's most comprehensive bans on microbeads in personal care products. The Government has also announced that we will introduce a deposit return scheme for drinks containers and a ban on the sale of plastic straws, plastic drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England. Nevertheless, we want to go further to encourage responsible practices using appropriate incentives and regulation. As such, the UK Government's 25 year Environmental Plan commits us to achieve zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042.

The UK Government considers that the best way to deliver universally accepted marine protected areas in areas beyond national jurisdiction would be through the new Implementing Agreement under UNCLOS. In support of this, the UK will continue to work with other Contracting Parties and the Arctic States through OSPAR to improve and extend the protection offered by marine protected areas.

As advocates of a science-led, precautionary and ecosystem-based approach to the establishment and management of any new and emerging fisheries in the Arctic region the UK welcomes the recently negotiated *Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean*. The UK intends to fully respect the moratorium, and hopes to accede to the agreement as an independent coastal State once we have left the European Union.

The UK has consistently been in the forefront of international maritime regulatory developments that aim to significantly reduce the risk of Arctic pollution. We maintained strong involvement in finalising the environmental aspect of the Polar Code through the International Maritime Organisation and Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment group, and intend to be a prominent voice in discussions at the IMO on the development of measures to reduce risks of use and carriage of heavy fuel oil as fuel by ships in Arctic waters.

The links between the UK and the Arctic are not limited to our climate systems and marine areas. Our proximity to the Arctic means that our shared biodiversity includes many migratory birds. Tens of thousands of volunteer counters, working with multiple government and non-government organisations have, over the last 70 years, collected comprehensive information on the status of Arctic waterbirds when they come to the UK in winter.

The UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has contributed technical input to the work of the Seabird Working Group and the Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative. JNCC also promotes and encourages the full implementation of international species action plans for relevant Arctic-breeding waterbirds. We are pleased that the JNCC and other UK based researchers and interest groups were able to share their work at this week's Biodiversity Congress.

In conclusion, we are determined to leave our natural environment in a better condition than we found it. We will continue to take domestic action to reduce negative impact on the planet and play a prominent role in the range of international fora that will shape the Arctic environment. We will push for further research and action to understand how the Arctic environment is changing, and ways to protect and adapt to ensure a sustainable future for generations to come.

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