

# Memorandum to Senior Arctic Officials

## 24/9/2018 for information and guidance

### Thematic discussion: biodiversity in the Arctic

2018-11

#### Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF)

Arctic Council Secretariat

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Memorandum to Senior Arctic Officials 24/9/2018

## Thematic discussion: biodiversity in the Arctic For information and guidance

This memo provides background to the *Thematic discussion on biodiversity in the Arctic* at the SAO meeting, Nov 1-2, Rovaniemi. The SAOs will discuss how the Arctic Council should through implementation of the recommendations from the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA) advance conservation, inform decisions and engage people in the coming years.

The memo provides an overview of the ABA; the role of Arctic Council Working Groups (WG) and other stakeholders in implementation of the ABA recommendations. This memo may be revised based upon the outcomes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Arctic Biodiversity Congress on Oct 9-12 whose purpose is to:

- Advise CAFF on national and international implementation of the [ABA policy recommendations](#) and on any changes to future phases of the [Actions for Biodiversity 2013-2021](#)
- Consider and report on how the Arctic has fared in relation to the [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)'s Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020](#), the [Aichi Targets](#) and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#)

### Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA)

The Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) WG of the Arctic Council released the ABA at the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting in May 2013. Involving some of the world's leading experts the ABA synthesizes scientific findings on status and trends in Arctic biodiversity. This major circumpolar effort

- provided a much-needed description of the state of biodiversity in the Arctic;
- provides a baseline for use in global and regional assessments of Arctic biodiversity which will inform and guide future Arctic Council work;
- provides up-to-date knowledge gathered from scientific publications supplemented with insights from traditional knowledge holders;
- identifies gaps in the data record;
- describes key mechanisms driving change; and
- presents science-based suggestions for action on addressing major pressures on Arctic biodiversity.

The ABA is comprised of a comprehensive, peer-reviewed [scientific assessment of Arctic biodiversity](#), a [synthesis document](#); and a [Summary for Policy Makers](#) aimed at making the science accessible for decision-makers and identifying actions to address key findings.

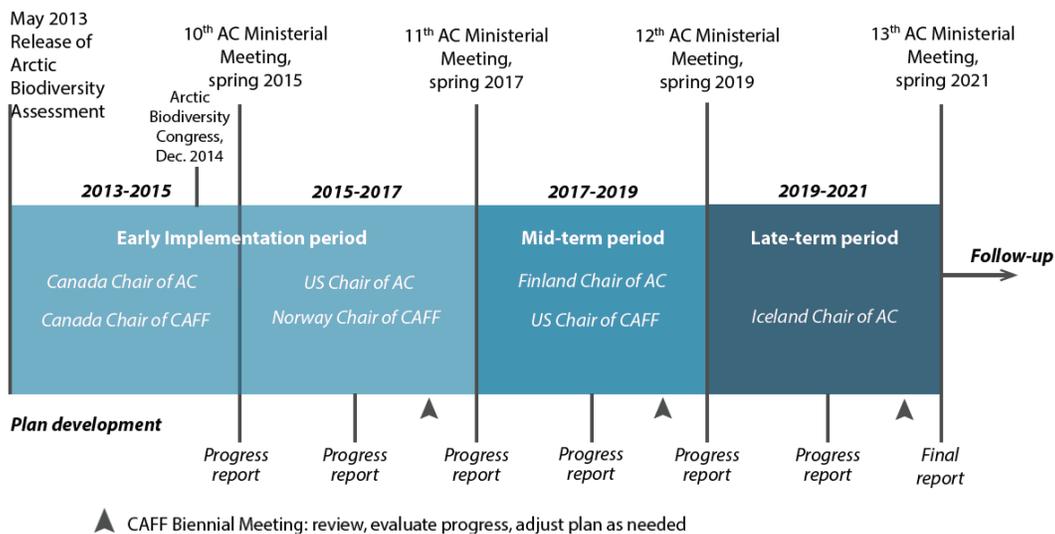
### Actions for Arctic Biodiversity, 2013-21 ([Action Plan](#))

The Report for Policy Makers presents 17 recommendations (**Annex 1**) addressing the nine key findings of the ABA (**Annex 2**). In the Kiruna Declaration, the Arctic Council Ministers noted:

*"... with concern that Arctic biodiversity is being degraded and that climate change is the most serious threat, welcomes the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment, the first Arctic-wide comprehensive assessment of status and emerging trends in Arctic biodiversity, approves its recommendations and encourages Arctic States to follow up on its recommendations, and instructs Senior Arctic Officials to ensure that a plan for further work under the Arctic Council to support and implement its recommendations is developed, and that a progress report is delivered to the next ministerial meeting." (Arctic Council 2013)*

The *Actions for Arctic Biodiversity, 2013-21* (Action Plan), an 8-year implementation plan informed by the results of the first Arctic Biodiversity Congress and discussions with Arctic Council countries, Permanent Participants, WGs, Task Forces, and Observers, is in response to this directive. It is a living document that is reviewed and updated every two years. The plan is not meant to be exhaustive or to replace WG work plans; rather it is complimentary, emphasizing specific actions that address ABA recommendations.

The Action Plan is organized in two-year implementation periods, corresponding to the cycle of rotation of the chairmanship of the Arctic Council. Each period finishes at a Ministerial Meeting where the focus and deliverables for the next phase are reviewed. This delineation of phases was selected to assist with aligning priorities, resource allocation, and reporting within the Arctic Council.

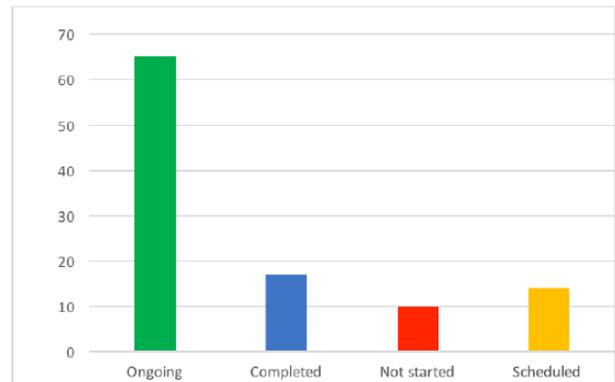


Regular progress reports guide adjustments in the suite of implementation actions over the lifetime of the plan to achieve greater impact, meet new challenges, and take advantage of opportunities that arise. Priorities identified in previous phases will continue to be acted upon where relevant and new actions will be added based on strategies and plans developed in previous implementation periods. The reporting framework includes:

- Annual reports: on progress towards implementation of the Action Plan;
- Biennial reports: a more in-depth evaluation every second year to review progress and guide revisions as necessary for the following two-year period;
- Final report: which will include recommendations for follow-up, to be delivered for the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in 2021.

## Implementation Progress

There has been significant progress towards implementation of ABA recommendations. Progress achieved reflects how the ABA and the Actions Plan has provided clarity on issues affecting Arctic biodiversity and sharpened focus on how the Arctic Council should respond. Two reports ([2015](#); [2017](#)) on progress towards of implementation have been completed with a third being prepared for the May 2019 Arctic Council Ministerial.



The *Actions Plan* contains 107 actions, and at the Fairbanks Ministerial (2017) of these:

- 17 had been completed;
- 65 were initiated and ongoing;
- 10 planned for 2013-17 had not started; and
- 14 were scheduled for 2017-21.

See [2017 progress report](#) for further information.

## Engagement

The reporting and evaluation component built into the *Actions Plan* has facilitated engagement of Arctic Council bodies in reporting on ABA implementation. This increasing engagement can be seen in the growing number of cross-cutting initiatives between Arctic Council bodies working on tasks identified in the *Actions Plan*. Thirty tasks in the 2013-17 period entailed involvement of more than one Arctic Council body.

Cross-cutting tasks focused initially on technical issues, e.g., as in the pooling of expertise to identify [areas of heightened sensitivity to shipping](#) (AMAP, CAFF, SDWG). However, it has evolved to include policy orientated activities, such as the CAFF and PAME work on the *Arctic Invasive Species Strategy and Action Plan (ARIAS)*.

The numbers of organisations and non-Arctic states engaged in tasks identified in the *Action Plan* has grown significantly. For example, in the Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative (AMBI) over 19 non-Arctic states and over 19 organisations have been engaged, ranging from attending meetings, hosting meetings, sitting on project flyway committees, exchanging letters, and providing resources. This reflects an understanding that implementation of the some of the ABA recommendations also require action by non-Arctic states, stakeholders, and international organizations.

## Further information:

- [2017 Progress report](#) on implementation of ABA recommendations
- [Actions for Arctic Biodiversity, 2013-21](#): implementing the ABA recommendations
- Actions for Arctic Biodiversity: [website](#)
- Arctic Biodiversity Assessment: [website](#)

## ANNEX 1: ABA Recommendations

### Climate change

- 1) Actively support international efforts addressing climate change, both reducing stressors and implementing adaptation measures, as an urgent matter.
- 2) Incorporate resilience and adaptation of biodiversity to climate change into plans for development in the Arctic.

### Ecosystem-based management

- 3) Advance and advocate ecosystem-based management efforts in the Arctic as a framework for cooperation, planning and development.

### Mainstreaming biodiversity

- 4) Require the incorporation of biodiversity objectives and provisions into all Arctic Council work and encourage the same for on-going and future international standards, agreements, plans, operations and/ or other tools specific to development in the Arctic.

### Identifying and safeguarding important areas for biodiversity

- 5) Advance the protection of large areas of ecologically important marine, terrestrial and freshwater habitats, taking into account ecological resilience in a changing climate.
- 6) Develop guidelines and implement appropriate spatial and temporal measures where necessary to reduce human disturbance to areas critical for sensitive life stages of Arctic species that are outside protected areas, for example along transportation corridors.
- 7) Develop and implement mechanisms that best safeguard Arctic biodiversity under changing environmental conditions, such as loss of sea ice, glaciers and permafrost.

### Addressing individual stressors on biodiversity

- 8) Reduce stressors on migratory species range-wide, including habitat degradation and overharvesting on wintering and staging areas and along flyways and other migration routes.
- 9) Reduce the threat of invasive alien/non-native species to the Arctic by developing and implementing common measures for early detection and reporting, identifying and blocking pathways of introduction, and sharing best practices and techniques for monitoring, eradication and control.
- 10) Promote the sustainable management of the Arctic's living resources and their habitat.
- 11) Reduce the threat of pollutants to Arctic biodiversity.

### Improving knowledge and public awareness

- 12) Evaluate the range of services provided by Arctic biodiversity in order to determine the costs associated with biodiversity loss and the value of effective conservation in order to assess change and support improved decision making.
- 13) Increase and focus inventory, long-term monitoring and research efforts to address key gaps in scientific knowledge identified in this assessment to better facilitate the development and implementation of conservation and management strategies.
- 14) Recognize the value of traditional ecological knowledge and work to further integrate it into the assessment, planning and management of Arctic biodiversity.
- 15) Promote public training, education and community-based monitoring, where appropriate, as integral elements in conservation and management.
- 16) Research and monitor individual and cumulative effects of stressors and drivers of relevance to biodiversity, with a focus on stressors that are expected to have rapid and significant impacts and issues where knowledge is lacking.

- 17) Develop communication and outreach tools and methodologies to better convey the importance and value of Arctic biodiversity and the changes it is undergoing.

## Annex 2: ABA Key findings

- 1) Arctic biodiversity is being degraded, but decisive action taken now can help sustain vast, relatively undisturbed ecosystems of tundra, mountains, fresh water and seas and the valuable services they provide.
- 2) Climate change is by far the most serious threat to Arctic biodiversity and exacerbates all other threats
- 3) Many Arctic migratory species are threatened by overharvest and habitat alteration outside the Arctic, especially birds along the East Asian flyway
- 4) Disturbance and habitat degradation can diminish Arctic biodiversity and the opportunities for Arctic residents and visitors to enjoy the benefits of ecosystem services.
- 5) Pollution from both long-range transport and local sources threatens the health of Arctic species and ecosystems.
- 6) There are currently few invasive alien species in the Arctic, but more are expected with climate change and increased human activity.
- 7) Overharvest was historically the primary human impact on many Arctic species, but sound management has successfully addressed this problem in most, but not all, cases.
- 8) Current knowledge of many Arctic species, ecosystems and their stressors is fragmentary, making detection and assessment of trends and their implications difficult for many aspects of Arctic biodiversity.
- 9) The challenges facing Arctic biodiversity are interconnected, requiring comprehensive solutions and international cooperation.