

Statements from Rovaniemi 2018 Observer Special Session: Observer States

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SAO Plenary Meeting, Rovaniemi, Finland 1-2 November 2018.

Agenda Item 17.2 - Interventions by Observers : Biodiversity in the Arctic

European Union

(Speaker : *Andreas Papaconstantinou, Head of Unit, Ocean Governance, Law of the Sea, Arctic Policy, Directorate General Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission*)

The European Union is making a positive contribution to protecting Arctic biodiversity in a number of ways.

At the European Union level, two central pieces of EU legislation are important for nature protection. These are the EU's Habitats Directive and the EU's Birds Directive. They are applied directly on the territories of our EU Arctic States and along the routes taken by Arctic migratory birds.

Furthermore, the European Environment Agency will soon update its Marine Protected Areas indicator that is expected to show that the European Union has reached the 10% Aichi target.

On another front, the European Union and its Member States are committed to developing an UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) implementing agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and are actively engaged in the ongoing negotiations at the United Nations.

The recently signed Arctic High Seas Fisheries Agreement for the Central Arctic Ocean will also protect fish stocks in the Arctic before commercial fisheries move into areas previously covered by sea ice.

Under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR) , the European Union supports a structured cooperation at all necessary levels with the Arctic Council to ensure complementarity and to prevent any gaps in the protection of the Arctic marine environment. This includes Marine Protected Areas and ensuring a network of such areas.

Next year's Horizon 2020 Work Programme has a sub-topic entitled "Changes in Arctic Biodiversity". Actions should identify and analyse major drivers and implications of changing biodiversity such as the role of invasive species, and how vulnerable land and/or marine ecosystems are with respect to combined human and natural influences. Actions should assess the ecosystems' responses to both external and internal factors and how these responses are impacting on indigenous populations and local communities at socio-economic level. Actions should also identify adaptation strategies in relation to the changes in Arctic ecosystems.

Moreover, fighting marine litter is one of the focal areas of the European Union's International Ocean Governance agenda.

The driver behind many of the biodiversity threats is climate change and the EU's role in tackling climate change both in the EU and at the global level could make a significant contribution to reducing this threat.

The recent IPCC report testifies to the fact that climate change is not a potential threat for the next generations. Climate change is happening now and it is affecting all of us.

And addressing climate change is not only a political responsibility, but also an opportunity for industrial and societal transformation. It is a chance for economies to become more innovative, secure and ultimately more competitive in the long run.

The European Union is delivering on ambition domestically. The EU framework for cutting emissions by at least 40% by 2030 is complete and additional policies might allow us to achieve even higher reductions.

Needless to say that alarm bells ring louder and louder for the fragile Arctic environment and its biodiversity. The recent Arctic Biodiversity Congress underlined the urgency of the situation. We need to act while there is still time.

The European Union will continue building strong global partnerships that will guarantee that the achievements of cooperation, multilateralism and diplomacy will bring tangible results for our citizens, fully in line with the 2030 Agenda.-
