

Statements from Rovaniemi 2018 Observer Special Session: Observer States

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ARCTIC COUNCIL SENIOR ARCTIC OFFICIALS' MEETING BIODIVERSITY IN THE ARCTIC - UK OBSERVER'S STATEMENT

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 *Beyond the Ice*, the newest iteration of its Arctic Policy Framework in April 2018. It reaffirms our continued commitment to helping understand a changing Arctic through our world-class science, and to protecting the Arctic's fragile environment. Conserving the Arctic's biodiversity remains a UK priority, just as it was when we first became an observer to the Arctic Council in 1996.

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

Beyond the Ice complements *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*. Launched by the Government in January 2018, the plan sets out our intention for the UK to be an international champion for the protection of our planet, leading by example on the crucial environmental challenges.

The UK is party to more than 300 treaties and agreements related to protecting and improving the natural world. Many, including the Convention on Biological Diversity and Ramsar, the Convention on Wetlands, are directly relevant to protecting Arctic biodiversity. We will also continue to support activity to protect and conserve specific sites vital to Arctic biodiversity, wherever they are in the world.

The UK's 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 Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has contributed technical input to the work of the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna through the Seabird Working Group and the Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative, and promotes the full implementation of international species action plans for relevant Arctic-breeding waterbirds. The Circumpolar Seabird Group had a mutually beneficial visit to the British Antarctic Survey earlier this year, while JNCC and many other UK based researchers and interest groups shared their valuable work at the recent Arctic Biodiversity Congress.

Internationally, we will continue to provide leadership to develop an ambitious post-2020 international biodiversity strategy and playing an active role in securing a new international agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The UK Government consider 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.

Through its commitment to create a Blue Belt around the UK Overseas Territories and Antarctica the UK has access to a growing body of information relating to management and enforcement in marine protected areas. As individual Arctic States and the Arctic Council consider a pan-Arctic network of marine protected areas we are willing to further share our knowledge and experience to support effective implementation.

As advocates of a science-led, precautionary and ecosystem-based approach to 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*. We intend to fully respect the moratorium and, beyond EU Exit, it is our intention to maintain and build UK involvement in the agreement.

The nutrient-rich waters of the Arctic are critically important for many species of whale. The UK considers the best way to ensure the protection of species reliant on the Arctic environment is to continue our active involvement with international agreements. Two such agreements, the Conservation of Migratory Species and International Whaling Commission work to mitigate the major threats facing these species and their habitats. In addition, the UK Government continues to support strongly the global moratorium on commercial whaling.

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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