

ARCTIC COUNCIL SAO MEETING
16-18 MARCH, REYKJAVIK ICELAND
MEETING CODE: SAOIS203_2021_RVK-VIRTUAL1

DOCUMENT TITLE

Continuation of the SAO Marine Mechanism: Chairmanship's concept note

AGENDA ITEM NUMBER

5

SUBMITTED BY

Icelandic Chairmanship

DOCUMENT FILENAME

SAOIS203_2021_RVK-Virtual1_05-A_SMM-Concept-Note-for-Continuation

NUMBER OF PAGES, NOT INCLUDING THIS COVER SHEET

2



Continuation of the SAO Marine Mechanism

Chairmanship's concept note

Introduction

The report of the Arctic Council [Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation II](#) (TFAMC II) was a deliverable to the Rovaniemi Ministerial meeting in 2019. In the report, the primary aims of the SAO Marine Mechanism (SMM) were agreed and ministers approved undertaking the recommendation related to the SMM. During its 2019-2021 Chairmanship, Iceland implemented the [first SMM](#) through a series of [six webinar sessions](#) between 29 September and 29 October 2020, covering four thematic areas: Arctic Marine Strategic Plan; Sustainable Arctic Shipping; Regional Coordination of Marine Issues and Global Commitments; Ecosystem-based management. As requested by the SAO Chair, the SMM format was designed to expose the recommendations and functional needs identified by the TFAMC II without causing disruptions to current and regular activities of the Arctic Council, while continuing to address regularly matters related to coordination of marine work in the Council. Originally, the Chairmanship had planned to organize the SMM as a two-day in-person meeting in conjunction with the March 2020 SAO plenary meeting in Akureyri, Iceland. However, due to the travel restrictions caused by Covid-19, the meeting was postponed and transferred to a month-long virtual series in the fall. The outcomes of the virtual sessions were considered successful in meeting the initial goal of the SMM process.

Feedback from the 2020 SMM webinar series

SAOs and PPs have expressed general satisfaction with the 2020 SMM series and have voiced interest to see the mechanism further developed and continue with an effective arrangement. In its first edition, the SMM has succeeded in highlighting the Council's substantial work, information and knowledge on the Arctic marine environment. It has helped identify some priority areas where the Council has influence and regional competence, and to clarify where enhancements are needed. The SMM's digital format has been described as innovative, practical and inclusive, and could be an option for future arrangements, either on an annual basis or once during each Chairmanship. Continuation of the SMM will require appropriate planning to fit within the routine of other ongoing work of the Arctic Council. With overall agreement that the mechanism should remain a high priority on the Arctic Council agenda in the future, the Icelandic Chairmanship has drafted a proposed way forward for the SMM.

Proposed way forward

Based on the experience and valuable lessons learned from the 2020 SMM edition, the Icelandic Chairmanship recommends that the SMM be continued as a recurrent Arctic Council forum organized through annual meetings during a two-year Chairmanship cycle, initiated by the incoming Russian Chairmanship in 2021-2023. The SMM should form a two-tier sequential process.

The former SMM meeting of the two-tier process should comprise an expert discussion on emerging and challenging Arctic marine issues and aim to identify marine issues that require attention by the Arctic Council. It should be conducted through a virtual format and take place early during the fall of the first year of the Chairmanship. This meeting should be overseen by two Co-chairs, on behalf of the SAOC, appointed by the current Chairmanship and the incoming Chairmanship, respectively.

The second SMM meeting should be arranged to provide a thematic dialogue between marine experts and SAOs and PPs on the priority marine issues identified by the first meeting. It should take place in

connection with the second SAO plenary meeting of the Chairmanship and be chaired by the SAOC. The agenda of the second SMM meeting should be decided by the SAOC in consultations with the Co-chairs of the expert meeting.

The two sequential iterations of the SMM during a Chairmanship would have two distinct purposes and objectives:

- **Setting the agenda:** During the first year, the SMM would be organized to allow marine experts and knowledge holders from Arctic States, PPs, WGs and Observers to deliberate through an online platform and identify emerging issues and future challenges the Arctic Council should focus on. This meeting would also be an opportunity to address recurring matters regarding those TFAMC II recommendations that need to be addressed. The Co-chairs would set the agenda for the meeting after consultation with the chairs of the Council's Working Groups and the SAOs. The outcomes from these expert discussions would be reported back to the SAOs in preparation for the latter SMM meeting.
- **Enhancing guidance:** During the second year, the agenda for the SMM would be shaped by the expert discussions and priorities identified by the first SMM meeting. As recommended by the TFAMC II, these discussions between SAOs and the marine experts would serve to provide strategic guidance on marine issues to the WGs, policy guidance that include priorities for the Arctic Council's work on marine issues, and enhance cooperation and coordination on marine issues in the Council.

The SMM process should be coordinated through the Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS), which will be the secretariat of the SMM. For outreach purposes, the ACS would also develop a communications plan around the SMM adapted to the two-year cycle.

Arctic States would ensure national marine managers participation in the SMM process.

At the end of the Chairmanship, the outcomes from the SMM process would be included in the SAO Report to Ministers and reported to the Ministerial meetings, as recommended by the TFAMC II.