



## WWF'S STATEMENT FOR THE 2021 REYKJAVIK ARCTIC COUNCIL 12<sup>TH</sup> MINISTERIAL MEETING

The May 2019 Rovaniemi Ministerial Meeting could not agree on a joint ministerial declaration, which was observed as an important rupture in over two decades of Arctic Council cooperation. The Icelandic Chairship set out a rich programme of priorities for the two-year cycle, building on the Finnish Chairship's achievements and addressing many of the pressing challenges for the Arctic. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, globally and in the Arctic, resulted *inter alia* in the Council's switching to a fully virtual mode and affecting its ability to take bold and agile policy directions. Yet, a rapidly warming climate, and increasing appetite for industrial development continues to threaten the Arctic's vulnerable nature and people. Notwithstanding the global challenges of the pandemic, WWF urges all Arctic Council members and Permanent Participants, supported by observers, to commit to a strong Reykjavik Ministerial Declaration that works to confront the Arctic's most pressing challenges. We highly welcome the expected adoption of the Arctic Council's Strategic Plan. After many years of supporting development and adoption of such a plan, WWF believes it can bridge diverging programmes of rolling chairships, working groups and structures, and produce more cohesive outcomes for the Council, and the Arctic.

In the years leading up to 2030 it is extremely important that the global community take urgent and decisive steps to put forth a New Deal for nature and people by ambitiously reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing effective conservation of marine, coastal and terrestrial biodiversity, and implementing the global Sustainable Development Goals. The Arctic Council, under the leadership of the Russian Chairship, must strive to reflect the Arctic's realities and needs in emerging global commitments, and consequently implement all these global commitments within the Arctic, its governance mechanisms and the pursuit of sustainable development.

WWF strongly encourages Arctic states to commit to ambitious targets to halt the global climate crisis. After shying away from using the term "climate change" in the past years, the Arctic Council's Ministerial Declaration must now demonstrate a clear determination to lead on reducing climate change in line with the Paris Agreement targets. To this end, Arctic states should increase ambition in their Nationally Determined Contributions, significantly reduce their carbon emissions by 2030, work together to achieve a truly carbon neutral Arctic by 2050, and assume, as a block, a leadership role in the international climate negotiations.

As the rapid change in the Arctic amplifies industrial pressures in the region, Arctic countries should commit to decarbonize their economies and reduce their impact on the Arctic environment by:

- reconsidering any new oil developments
- phasing out the use of fossil fuels and redirecting fossil fuel subsidies to support clean energy projects;
- developing a zero-emission strategy for Arctic shipping; and
- utilizing COVID-19 stimulus to incentivize green technologies, support renewable energy projects, sustainable infrastructure and green jobs creation.

Within the next two years, the Arctic Council should deliver a new Action Plan for Arctic Biodiversity that provides a framework for cooperation on biodiversity conservation. Such a plan must align with the emerging Convention on Biodiversity's post-2020 framework that presents a New Deal for nature and people. Arctic-specific indicators should be established to enable the assessment of Arctic biodiversity, its resilience to rapid climate change, and its conservation in the global context.



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To strengthen resilience of Arctic marine life and meet global biodiversity targets, WWF produced ArcNet, a proposed network for marine conservation in the Arctic Ocean that prioritizes marine life and the important contributions they make to the well-being of nature and people around the world. WWF urges the Arctic Council to support ArcNet's ocean-scale ambitions.

Developing a clear path forward to help manage and govern the Central Arctic Ocean should be given a priority under the Russian Chairship. In connecting with the global process of protecting biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) and the anticipated designation of Arctic Marine Protected Areas network, the Arctic Council must take clear actions to ensure continuity of the SAO Marine Mechanism policy guidance. Coherent implementation of ecosystems-based management in the Central Arctic Ocean is needed during the forthcoming Russian Chairship and beyond.

Arctic states should take clear actions to recognize Indigenous Peoples as equal partners in stewarding the region and managing its resources. They should also ensure the best available scientific evidence, Indigenous Knowledge and local knowledge is used to strengthen adaptation and resilience to climate change, particularly in biodiversity conservation, ecosystem management, spatial planning, improving human livelihoods and infrastructure development.

WWF stands committed to accompany the Arctic Council, the Arctic countries and peoples on a journey that ensures all life in the region has the needed resilience to face present and future challenges. The Arctic is too precious for the people living here, but in fact for the whole of humanity, to be transformed into a playground of economic or military competition and exploitation. 25 years ago, the Arctic Council was established to assure stewardship of the values this unique part of the world holds; the next 25 years will experience unprecedented changes that will test whether the objectives of the Council's founders can prevail.