

REPORT: SAO PLENARY MEETING

Reykjavik - VIRTUAL1

16-18 MARCH 2021

Final report

[Link](#) to meeting documents

[Link](#) to pre-recorded videos



ARCTIC COUNCIL

1. Introduction

1.1 Opening remarks

The SAO Chair (SAOC) welcomed delegates to the third and final plenary meeting of the Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) during the Icelandic Chairmanship (2019-2021), organized primarily in a virtual format due to pandemic-related travel restrictions.

Iceland's Foreign Minister, Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson, joined the meeting to give opening remarks. He noted the record attendance of the meeting, with over 200 delegates registered. He congratulated the Council for achievements made over the last two years despite challenging conditions brought on by the pandemic in the latter year, highlighting the SAO Marine Mechanism (SMM) and the International Symposium of Plastics in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic Region virtual events. He thanked Arctic Council delegates for the cooperation and coordination throughout the last two years and noted the valuable contributions and work underway, which sends a message that the Arctic Council is adaptable, solutions-oriented, and open-minded when faced with a crisis.

1.2 Approval of the agenda

The second draft agenda was approved as presented, with the amendment that under agenda item 7.3, Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) Working Group had withdrawn the "2021 SAMBR Update: Marine Mammals," slated for SAO consideration as a Ministerial deliverable. The item would subsequently be taken up intersessionally.

2. Arctic Council Secretariat annual report 2020

Background and discussion

The director of the Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS) presented the [2020 annual report](#), including [financial statement and auditor's report](#) that give an overview of the Secretariat's operations. Despite the pandemic changing working conditions with notably fewer in-person events and travel, the ACS together with the Icelandic Chairmanship adapted and found new digital ways to ensure the Council could continue its operations almost without delays and cancellations.

The ACS comprises 14 staff members based in Tromsø, three of which took up their posts in 2020: Jessica Cook as PR Officer, Nina Ågren as EPPR executive secretary and Rosa-Máren Magga as IPS advisor. Former IPS advisor, Alona Yefimenko, changed positions to advisor at the ACS to work on activities related to the Arctic Council's 25th anniversary.

The ACS director referred to the Icelandic National Audit Office (INAO) review of the ACS and its conclusion that the Secretariat is operating well and has successfully met the objectives since its establishment. Some of the INAO report's recommendations were implemented in 2020, while work on those remaining will continue into 2021 and reported in the next annual report. She further noted communications efforts undertaken have increased the Council's digital footprint. Notably, the launch of the updated Arctic Council website, new Instagram presence and the creation of a coherent visual identity for the Council and its subsidiary bodies, were highlighted as successful communications initiatives.

The ACS operated within its budget for 2020. The accounts show a deferred income in 2020 that amounts to over 4.4 million NOK because of currency gains (against the USD), combined with significantly reduced travel costs due to the pandemic. This deferred income has been deducted from States' contributions for 2021. The ACS director noted that the auditor's report concluded that the financial statement has been prepared in accordance with Norwegian law and asked SAOs to take note of the Annual report, approve the 2020 financial statement, and the ACS work plan and budget for 2022-2023

Delegates expressed their appreciation of the ACS, and many noted the ACS's adaptability during the pandemic and successful efforts in hosting online meetings. Many delegates also pointed to the enhanced communications work. One delegate noted the absence of Russian translation capacity in the 2022-2023 ACS budget, and encouraged States to support Russian language translation services to continue.

Conclusion

The SAOC noted with appreciation the successful operation of the ACS in 2020 despite challenging conditions presented by the pandemic and thanked the ACS director and her team for their cooperation and strong work ethic. He concluded that SAOs took note of the ACS 2020 annual report and approved the financial statement and auditor's report for 2020. The complete annual report will be uploaded to the Arctic Council Open Access Repository when finalized (OAR).

3. Youth engagement

Background and discussion

Two documents were distributed for discussion under this agenda item. The first was a draft ACS internship program [outline](#) that was prepared following last November's discussion on youth engagement at the SAO plenary meeting. The second document was a [concept note](#) prepared by the Chairmanship that proposes to start an informal youth group to enhance youth participation in the Council's work.

The director of the ACS presented the internship proposal, which proposes that one intern be hired in the fall of 2021 to work with the ACS in Tromsø. Internship requirements would include being a national from one of the Arctic States between 20 to 30 years of age and either be a student or a recent graduate. The intern would take part in different tasks the ACS is involved in, while learning more about the Arctic Council in the process.

As noted in November, there was general support for an ACS internship program. Comments on the proposal included lowering the age limit of interns, shortening the duration of individual internships and increasing the number of interns per year. Many delegates expressed the importance of exposing youth to the Council and its work, and emphasized that an internship at the ACS could be a way for youth to be more meaningfully involved.

Some delegations expressed reservations on the Chairmanship's proposal for an informal youth group. While many appreciated the Chairmanship's initiative, one delegate questioned if a new structure for youth was necessary, and held that youth engagement should remain the prerogative of individual States and PPs. The SAO for Russia reaffirmed that youth engagement will be a priority during its upcoming Chairmanship.

Many underlined the importance in giving a voice to youth and providing appropriate experience and training to better understand the Arctic Council and its work. Several delegates shared their experiences with youth engagement, including national, PP and WG-level internships, noting youth delegates' participation in the meeting. One youth delegate encouraged SAOs to consider giving Indigenous youth a separate seat at the table to ensure representation is fair and equitable to Indigenous peoples. The CAFF Chair noted the WG's new youth engagement strategy, ongoing youth internships and youth exchange program where youth have been engaged in and given advice to various CAFF activities. Observer delegates also communicated their own youth initiatives in the chat box.

Conclusion

The SAOC concluded by welcoming the ACS's efforts to move the internship proposal forward taking the suggestions into consideration and explaining that an age limit under 20 years of age could have legal implications. He welcomed the many strong ideas for youth engagement suggested by the incoming Chairmanship and noted that the idea to establish an informal youth group or similar mechanism as outlined by the Chairmanship's proposal would not move forward at this time, but remained available for future reference.

4. Observer review process and regular reporting

Background and discussion

The SAOC gave a status update on the 19 Observers in the *Fairbanks Group* under review and the regular reporting by Observers in the *Rovaniemi Group* not under review. On the basis of the Icelandic Chairmanship priority of building a stronger Arctic Council, the Chairmanship aimed to improve the substance of the Observer review process by conducting one-on-one follow-up meetings with Observers under review. The informal meetings, conducted by Selma Sif Ísfeld Óskarsdóttir of the Icelandic Chairmanship team and supported by the ACS, and interested States and PP organizations, took place in January 2020. The meetings enhanced Observer engagement by creating an informal channel of communication to share feedback on the reports, seek further clarification if needed and acknowledge Observer contributions to the work of the Arctic Council.

The SAOC shared that the Chairmanship had received positive feedback on this process both from Arctic Council delegates and from the Observers under review. He noted that SAOs are preparing a recommendation to Ministers on the outcome of the review process. The next round of Observer review for those either reviewed or admitted at the 2019 Rovaniemi Ministerial meeting (the *Rovaniemi Group*) will take place during the Russian Chairmanship. The deadline for submitting review reports is 20 June 2022. The SAO for the Russian Federation indicated that the enhanced Observer review process will continue during the Russian Chairmanship.

Observers that are not under review during a Chairmanship are required to submit a regular report outlining up-to-date activities with the Arctic Council. The SAOC confirmed reception of all 19 regular reports from the *Rovaniemi Group*. The reports were compiled for SAO information prior to this meeting and will be made available on the Council's OAR.

Conclusion

The SAOC thanked the Observers for their good work with the WGs and the Council throughout the Icelandic Chairmanship, despite challenges caused by the pandemic. He thanked all delegates that attended and participated actively in the 19 follow-up meetings in January 2020. Furthermore, the SAOC thanked the ACS for its support and for providing day-to-day communication with Observers.

He took note of the incoming Chairmanship's plans for enhanced meaningful engagement with Observers during its term, not least by including the follow-up interviews in the review process of the *Rovaniemi Group*, before he reminded the meeting that the second review process of the *Fairbanks Group* will conclude at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting.

5. SMM update and continuation through the Russian Chairmanship

Background and discussion

Two documents were discussed under this agenda item. The first was submitted by the Chairmanship outlining [proposed arrangements for the continuation of](#) the SAO Marine Mechanism (SMM) for future Chairmanships. The second was a [concept paper](#) developed by Norway on different options for furthering cooperation under the Arctic Council on EBM of Arctic marine ecosystems.

The SAOC invited the Chairmanship's Special Coordinator on plastics pollution and marine litter, Magnús Jóhannesson, to summarize the draft concept paper on the continuation of the SMM. He recalled that the SMM was developed following a recommendation made by the Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation II (TFAMC II) adopted at the Rovaniemi Ministerial meeting in 2019, with the objective of ensuring involvement of senior marine managers in the dialogue on Arctic marine stewardship. The first edition of the SMM was held in September and October 2020, and was further discussed at the November 2020 SAO plenary meeting. Based on the 2020 SMM edition, the Chairmanship recommended that the mechanism be continued as a recurrent forum organized through annual meetings during a two-year Chairmanship cycle and form a two-tier sequential process. A first meeting of experts could be held in the fall of the first year of a Chairmanship and be overseen by two Co-chairs acting on behalf of the SAOC. A second meeting would follow the next year in connection with the second SAO plenary meeting. It could be chaired by the SAOC who would set the agenda in consultation with the Co-chairs of the first meeting. It was also recommended that the ACS would coordinate the SMM process and develop a communications plan for it.

Delegates re-affirmed their interest in continuing the SMM and underlined the importance that the Arctic Council prioritize marine issues. Many welcomed the proposal and its two-tiered approach. Regarding content, one delegate observed that policy recommendations on marine matters should come from WG reports that are based on extensive reviews and scientific assessments rather than stem from the SMM dialogue. While many pointed to the need to address emerging issues, some also suggested that it would be important to have long-standing topics on the agenda that add continuity to the SMM through the Chairmanship cycles. It was also suggested that the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment WG (PAME) should be the primary body responsible for carrying out SMM activities. The SAOC cautioned against placing all responsibility on PAME, as nearly all WGs are engaged in projects related to the Arctic marine environment. He also specified that the 2020 SMM had been developed in concert with all WGs.

Magnús Jóhannesson thanked the delegates for their feedback. He noted that the SMM was still a body in development and that it was up to the SAOs to develop the forum as best suited to an open dialogue between SAOs and marine experts. The SAOC noted that the final decision on the way forward with the SMM rested in the hands of incoming Chairmanships.

The SAOC invited Fredrik Juul Theisen to introduce Norway's [concept paper](#) on enhancing coordination and cooperation on EBM of Arctic marine ecosystems, a matter that was discussed at one of the thematic sessions of the SMM. The delegate from Norway first noted that PAME was

already conducting useful work on this topic, which provides a basis for further developing cooperation. The concept paper suggests options such as a circumpolar action plan or cooperative mechanism related to EBM and area-based management, voluntary guidelines, frameworks and management tools developed under the Arctic Council.

Many delegates expressed appreciation for Norway's initiative and concurred that the Arctic Council can play a role in EBM. Several delegates requested that PAME review the concept paper and provide further guidance, as the WG has the appropriate technical expertise to provide input on EBM. Delegates expressed interest in receiving feedback in due time.

Conclusion

The SAOC noted the strong support for the continuation of the SMM and thanked the incoming Russian Chairmanship for its intention to incorporate it into its Chairmanship program. He acknowledged the constructive suggestions on the SMM's further refinement and suggested that the incoming Russian Chairmanship take this into consideration when deciding on modalities of the next SMM.

Regarding Norway's EBM concept paper, the SAOC noted the appreciation it had received and concluded by asking PAME to take it under consideration in consultation with other relevant WGs and provide SAOs with their advice and recommendations at a future meeting.

6. Project Support Instrument update

Background and discussion ([link to pre-recorded presentation](#))

In his [progress report](#), the facility manager of the Project Support Instrument (PSI), Ulf Bojö, highlighted that 12 projects in total have been completed with the mechanism's support. He acknowledged that implementation is not yet at the desired pace and that challenges still persist, but that project approval efficiency has improved over the past two years. With the pilot phase of PSI expiring at the end of 2021, he noted that PSI is interested in continuing work and provided suggestions for streamlining the project decision-making process and implementation phase should the PSI continue.

The SAOC noted that the question of the continuation and future of the PSI after the pilot phase concludes is still under consideration. He suggested that delegates review PSI's [evaluation report from 2018](#) for a deeper understanding of the challenges PSI faces, noting the progress it has made since 2018. He also addressed questions about the possibility for Observers to contribute to the PSI. He pointed to the 2004 mandate in the Reykjavik Declaration, that initiated the PSI process and welcomes Observer participation in PSI and that one of the Arctic Council Observers, NEFCO, is not only the host of the PSI, but also one of its main funders. The PSI facility manager noted that the exact modalities and procedures for Observer contributions are still being reviewed and further dialogue with Observers and SAOs and PPs is needed before a conclusion is made.

Several delegates spoke to the importance of the PSI instrument. Some delegates pointed out that project decision-making delays are an ongoing problem that needs to be resolved. One delegate noted that all WGs should be able to put forward projects for funding in order for PSI to be an effective circumpolar instrument.

Conclusion

The SAOC thanked the PSI facility manager for his update on PSI's operation. He noted that the decision on the future of PSI is an ongoing process at the SAOX-level. He concluded that after further consultations, the Chairmanship will develop a proposal on a course of action for SAOs to consider intersessionally or at the upcoming spring SAOX meeting.

7. Working Groups: approval of deliverables for the 2021 Ministerial

Background and discussion

The SAOC invited WG Chairs to provide an overview of their deliverables to be approved by SAOs before submitting them to the Reykjavik Ministerial for final approval. Each WG produced individual [summary reports](#). The SAOC noted that almost all the deliverables still require final layout and design work ahead of the Ministerial in May.

7.1 ACAP

Background and discussion

The ACAP Chair, Inger Johanne Wiese, presented the WG's four deliverables for approval. She highlighted the WG's achievements over the last two years, which include efforts related to toxic and hazardous substances, improvement of waste management in remote Arctic communities and reduction of black carbon and methane from flaring at remote Arctic petroleum fields, as well as accompanying workshops and webinars. One deliverable, "Report: the establishment of the Circumpolar LEO Network," still needed internal ACAP approval and would be submitted to SAOs for intersessional approval before the Ministerial. The ACAP Chair asked SAOs to take note of the deliverables and approve the four available ACAP reports.

Meeting delegates shared their appreciation and support of ACAP's work and deliverables. Several pointed out the importance of tangible and community-based projects that contribute to cleaner communities, emissions reduction and meeting objectives in the Paris Agreement.

Conclusion

The SAOC noted the strong appreciation for ACAP's work and the dedication of its Chair and welcomed the incoming Chair, Patrick Huber of the United States. He concluded that four ACAP deliverables will be submitted for final approval at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting:

- "ACAP Webinar on Reduction of Black Carbon and Methane. Emissions from the Oil and Gas Sector in the Arctic";
- "Kola Waste Project: Cleaning of the Sami Territory in the Murmansk Region (2018-2020)";
- "Final Report: Rapid Environmental Assessment Demonstration Project in Russia"; and,
- "Mitigation of Short-Lived Climate Pollutants from APG – Flaring", Phase 2 "The Use of New Methodology to Reduce APG Flaring at Remote Fields," Final Report.

The "Report: the establishment of the Circumpolar LEO Network" will be submitted to SAOs either intersessionally or to the spring SAOX meeting.

7.2 AMAP

Background and discussion ([link to pre-recorded presentation](#))

The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) Chair, Anders Turesson, presented seven AMAP deliverables for approval. He highlighted that the deliverables represent a huge scientific effort, and together, provide a comprehensive picture of the current trends and patterns in the Arctic. He emphasized that changes of the Arctic climate and most of the hazardous substances that occur in the region do not originate there, and that these problems must be addressed further South with the Arctic States playing a key role, both because they are responsible for the Arctic and because they account for a significant part of the pollution emissions.

Delegates commended AMAP for its important work, particularly in relation to climate change, and supported all submitted deliverables. Several delegates stressed the value of many of the findings in making informed decisions nationally and internationally. AMAP's increasing cross-cutting activity with other WGs was highly appreciated, as well as the innovative ways of using new tools to disseminate their work. AMAP's increased effort to include Indigenous peoples in its work was welcomed.

Conclusion

The SAOC noted the appreciation for AMAP's work and strong leadership under its current Chair and welcomed the incoming Chair, Benjamin DeAngelo of the United States. He concluded that seven deliverables will be submitted for final approval at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting:

- “Arctic Climate Change Update 2021: Key Trends and Impacts” Summary for Policy-Makers;
- “AMAP Assessment 2020: POPs and Chemicals of Emerging Arctic Concern: Influence of Climate Change” Summary for Policy-Makers;
- “2021 AMAP Mercury Assessment” Summary for Policy-Makers;
- “Short-lived Climate Forcers (SLCFs) 2021”;
- “Human Health in the Arctic 2021” Summary for Policy-Makers;
- “AMAP Litter and Microplastics Monitoring Plan”; and,
- “Overview of AMAP Initiatives for Monitoring and Assessment of Plastics Pollution in the Arctic.”

7.3 CAFF

Background and discussion

The CAFF Chair, Mark Marissink, presented eight CAFF deliverables for approval, and five documents for information. One deliverable, the “2021 SAMBR Update: Marine Mammals”, had been withdrawn from the agenda to be discussed further intersessionally. The CAFF Chair highlighted several deliverables, including the work on monitoring terrestrial animals, resilience and management of wetlands in the Arctic and on the Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative (AMBI) – which includes close collaboration with Observer States. He noted CAFF's youth strategy, which was developed in collaboration with a Youth Advisory Committee.

Many delegates acknowledged CAFF's work and deliverables. In response to a question on how Indigenous youth were being considered in CAFF's youth engagement strategy, the CAFF Chair shared that three of the four members of the Youth Advisory Committee are Indigenous, and the WG

encourages Indigenous participation in its youth work. Several PP delegates expressed the hope to see more meaningful engagement with Traditional Knowledge and Local Knowledge (TKLK) in CAFF's projects, and noted the importance of considering Indigenous seasonal harvesting of birds, in projects such as AMBI. The CAFF Chair took note of the suggestion to conduct more research on harvesting processes on Indigenous lands. The SAO for the Russian Federation acknowledged that the incoming Chairmanship would place biodiversity high on its agenda.

Conclusion

The SAOC noted the appreciation for CAFF's work and strong leadership under its current Chair and welcomed the incoming Chair, Mia Rönkä of Finland. He concluded that eight deliverables will be submitted for final approval at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting:

- Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Programme (CBMP);
 - “State of the Arctic Terrestrial Biodiversity Report”;
 - “Strategic Plan for the Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program (2021-2025)”;
 - “2021 SAMBR Update: Seabirds”;
- “Resilience and Management of Arctic Wetlands: Key Findings and Recommendations”;
- “Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative (AMBI)”;
 - “Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative (AMBI) Revised Workplan 2019-2023”;
 - “AMBI Mid-term Evaluation 2021: Summary of 2019-2020 activities and advice for implementation”;
 - “Case studies: Working with Indigenous Communities on Migratory Birds – case studies of relevance to the Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative (AMBI)”;
- “CAFF Arctic Youth Engagement Strategy: 2021-2026.”

The “2021 SAMBR Update: Marine Mammals” report will be subject to further consultations and decided upon intersessionally.

7.4 EPPR

Background and discussion

The EPPR Chair, Jens Peter Holst-Andersen, presented eight EPPR deliverables for approval. He specified that some of them were part of EPPR's approach to risk assessment. These new tools offer additional resources for the Arctic Council to use as appropriate. Other deliverables cover oil spill prevention and response in small Arctic coastal communities, the growing concern of potential radiological risks in the Arctic and enhanced cooperation with coast guard representatives from Arctic States.

Delegates thanked the EPPR Chair for his many years of service in the Arctic Council and most recently as EPPR Chair. Several underlined the importance of the Radiation Expert Group and its radiation risks consensus report. EPPR's work on the community-level was also well-appreciated.

Conclusion

The SAOC noted the appreciation for EPPR's work and strong leadership under its current Chair and welcomed the incoming Chair, Kathy Nghiem of Canada. He concluded that all eight deliverables will be submitted for final approval at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting:

- “Arctic Marine Risk Assessment Guideline Web-based Tool”;
- “Circumpolar Oil Spill Response Viability Analysis (COSRVA) Phase II Web-based Tool”;
- “Prevention, Preparedness and Response in Small Communities Phase II” (movie);

- “RADSAR Report. Sharing of Competence Within Search and Rescue in a Maritime Radiological/Nuclear Scenario”;
- “RADEX 2019 Table-Top Exercise Final Report”;
- “Report: Arctic Oil Pollution Research and Development Workshop”;
- “EPPR Consensus Report: Radiological/Nuclear Risk Assessment in the Arctic”; and,
- “Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF) and Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) Arctic Guardian 2020 Table-Top Exercise After-Action Report (AAR).”

7.5 PAME

Background and discussion

The PAME Chair, Paula Kankaanpää, presented five deliverables for approval, and noted 13 documents for information. She highlighted that the Arctic Marine Strategic Plan Implementation Report was developed in collaboration with all WGs and includes 72 activities. She noted that the work contributes to horizontal and systematic cooperation on marine-related issues of the Arctic Council. PAME’s Vice-Chair, Elizabeth McLanahan, introduced the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter in the Arctic (ML-RAP), which had received strong interest from States, PPs, Observers and other WGs. The ML-RAP includes 59 strategic actions categorized into eight thematic areas, which will be revised every four years based on new information and research.

Meeting delegates thanked the PAME Chair for the WG’s important work, and many acknowledged the effort and ambition that went into developing the ML-RAP in particular. Many underlined the important role PAME plays, especially as the Council increases its engagement in marine issues.

Conclusion

The SAOC noted the appreciation for PAME’s work and strong leadership under its current Chair and welcomed the incoming Chair, Jessica Nilsson of Sweden. He concluded that all five of PAME’s deliverables will be submitted for final approval at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting:

- “Proposed Joint Policy Statement with the Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission (ARHC) on Hydrography in the Arctic Region”;
- “Information Briefs on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Food Security in Changing Arctic Conditions. Marine Protected Areas in a Changing Arctic”;
- “Information Briefs on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Changing Arctic Conditions. Indigenous Food Security in the Arctic”;
- “Meaningful Engagement of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Marine Activities (MEMA) Reference Guide”; and,
- “Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter in the Arctic.”

7.6 SDWG

Background and discussion

The Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) Chair, Stefán Skjaldarson, presented six deliverables for approval. He highlighted that much of SDWG’s work during the last year, in addition to its projects and deliverables, was related to Covid-19 and its impacts in the Arctic. He asked SAOs to take note for the record of the [“Covid-19 in the Arctic: Briefing Document for Senior Arctic Officials”](#). Although not part of the WG’s 2019-2021 work plan, he stressed that it constituted a significant part of the SDWG’s work in 2020, and an important deliverable that showcases the

Council's ability to respond to issues of importance in a timely manner. He noted that SDWG is expediting internal review of one report, "Economy of the North (ECONOR) IV," and the deliverable will be shared with SAOs for intersessional approval ahead of the Ministerial.

Meeting delegates congratulated SDWG for its strong work and dedication to also undertake additional work related to Covid-19 in the Arctic since the breakout of the pandemic last year. Several delegates questioned whether the process of endorsing final reports had been followed in the case of the "Arctic Resilience Forum 2020 Report," stressing that an endorsement of this report did not automatically constitute a mandate for continuation. The SDWG Chair clarified that the report is listed in the SAO Report to Ministers under "Activities Tasked by SAOs", not as an SDWG project. He noted that this was a one-time issue and stated that possible new projects on resilience would follow the normal procedures for endorsing new projects. The SAO for the Russian Federation reiterated the importance SDWG will have during the incoming Chairmanship.

Conclusion

The SAOC noted the appreciation for SDWG's work and strong leadership under its current Chair and welcomed the new incoming Chair, Oleg Solyakov of the Russian Federation. He concluded that five of SDWG's deliverables are approved and will be submitted for final approval at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting:

- "Blue Bio-Economy in the Arctic Region. Project Report 2021";
- "Arctic Renewable Energy Atlas (AREA)";
- "ZERO ARCTIC. Concepts for carbon-neutral Arctic construction based on tradition";
- "Gender Equality in the Arctic Report"; and,
- "Arctic Resilience Forum 2020 Report".

"The "Economy of the North (ECONOR) IV" report will be submitted to SAOs for intersessional approval. The "Online Community Solid Waste Management Assessment Tool" will not be submitted as a 2021 Ministerial deliverable.

General Conclusion on 2021 Working Group Deliverables

The SAOC thanked and congratulated the WGs for carrying out their work and completing their deliverables in time for the Ministerial in May 2021. He noted the WGs demonstrated strong resilience throughout the past year and the impressive list of WG and EG deliverables once again shows how the Arctic Council has succeeded in maintaining its working activities despite the challenges brought by the pandemic.

8. EGBCM deliverables for the 2021 Reykjavik

Ministerial

Background and discussion

The EGBCM Chair, Kristín Linda Árnadóttir, provided an update on the EG's third [Summary of Progress and Recommendations](#), which is being finalized for delivery at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting. She highlighted that all eight Arctic States have (re)confirmed their support of the collective goal to reduce black carbon emissions by 25 to 33 percent by 2025. Seven Arctic States and nine Observer States and the EU have submitted their national reports. The Chair noted that although the Russian Federation has not submitted its national report, it has provided information included in the report itself. She shared that based on the data available at the time of writing the report, the EG has

assessed that black carbon emissions have been reduced in relation to 2013 and are on track to meet the collective goal. However, emissions of methane from Arctic States have unfortunately increased by 2 percent from 2013 to 2018 and are projected to increase by 8 percent by 2025. This indicates that the Arctic States are not on track to achieve the Common Vision for Enhanced Action to reduce methane emissions.

The EGBCM Chair thanked all Arctic States and Observers for their work on the report, with a special thanks to Finland for leading the technical team and managing emissions data. She acknowledged cooperation with WGs, particularly with AMAP, and noted that for the first time, the Summary Report will also include a chapter on policies and governance structures to address emissions of black carbon and methane, including a short section on cross-cutting Arctic Council work. She also noted that PPs were consulted in the report development process and provided valuable input. She welcomed the incoming Russian Chairmanship's ambitious plans for the next two years, where it will also Chair the EGBCM.

Meeting delegates underlined the importance of EGBCM's work and noted their positive anticipation of seeing the report once completed. Several delegates noted their disappointment that Arctic States are not on track to meet methane emissions goals and urged others to do more to reduce emissions in the future. One PP emphasized that actions to reduce greenhouse gasses should not be at the expense of Indigenous peoples' livelihoods and cultures

Conclusion

The SAOC noted appreciation for the work of the Chair and the EG. The SAOC thanked the EGBCM Chair for her update and welcomed Veronika Ginzburg of the Russian Federation as the incoming EGBCM Chair. He encouraged the EG to arrive at an arrangement and finalize the report for intersessional approval and delivery at the Reykjavik Ministerial.

9. Arctic Council work related to COVID-19 in the Arctic

Background and discussion

At the SAO plenary meeting in November 2020, there was strong support for the SDWG to continue its work and leadership on the impacts of Covid-19 in the Arctic and, as possible, coordinate the Arctic Council's work on the pandemic with other WGs. As a follow-up, the SDWG submitted a [briefing note](#) to give an overview of the work it has been conducting on this topic and to confirm the level and type of support that SAOs will expect from SDWG.

The SDWG Chair, Stefán Skjaldarson, provided remarks on the WG's activities on Covid-19 in the Arctic and options for ways forward. He emphasized that Covid-19 has and will continue to have major and unique impacts in the Arctic for years to come and highlighted that the WG has invested significant time and resources into work related to Covid-19 in the Arctic over the last year. Going forward, it was noted that the WG cannot continue devoting increased attention to Covid-19 unless added capacity and resources are made available. As SAOs have made it clear that Covid-19 and health are priorities, the SDWG presented three alternative paths forward in its briefing note for the continuation of its pandemic work during the Russian Chairmanship.

Meeting delegates thanked and noted their appreciation for SDWG and its significant undertaking of Covid-19-related work in the Arctic. Several acknowledged that pandemic-related work has stretched

SDWG's capacity and resources. There was overall strong support for SDWG and the other WGs to incorporate Covid-19 into existing work as described under option one in the note, though some delegates noted that they would have liked to see the Arctic Council be more ambitious in its efforts to address this issue. Some delegates encouraged all WGs to consider including Covid-19 impacts in their existing projects and future work where it is the most appropriate. The Chair of EPPR noted that the WG has already been in close contact with SDWG and is considering a review of its strategic plan and mandate to incorporate pandemic-related work.

Several PP delegations highlighted challenges the pandemic has created for them, including housing and infrastructure deficits, cultural and livelihood disruption due to closed borders and more. Some noted they would like to see the Council explore more ambitious options and consider allocating new resources for future work on Covid-19 and pandemics in the Arctic. The SAOC observed that if further ambitious initiatives later gain support, more courses of action could be considered in the future.

Conclusion

The SAOC noted the strong words of appreciation towards SDWG for its important work on Covid-19. He concluded that SAOs support the first option outlined in the SDWG briefing note, and that SDWG and other WGs will incorporate Covid-19 topics in its existing work and develop new pandemic-related projects as appropriate and resources allow.

10. Arctic Council – Arctic Coast Guard Forum Statement of Cooperation

Background and discussion

During the Finnish Chairmanship, the SAOs decided to explore different cooperative mechanisms aimed at recognizing the important collaboration between the Arctic Council and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF), which takes place primarily through EPPR. During the November 2020 SAOX meeting, it was decided that a public statement of cooperation would be the best way forward to acknowledge the collaboration. A draft statement of cooperation was distributed to delegates in January for their consideration. After an intersessional round of comments and provisional approval, both by SAOs and the ACGF principals, an [updated draft](#) was submitted to the SAO meeting and will be submitted to the ACGF Principal and Expert meeting on 12-15 April 2021 for their formal approval.

Conclusion

The statement (see Annex I) was approved by the meeting.

11. International Symposium on plastics in the Arctic and the sub-Arctic region

Background and discussion

The SAOC invited the Chairmanship's Special Coordinator on Plastics Pollution and Marine Litter, Magnús Jóhannesson, to provide a summary of the International Symposium on Plastics in the Arctic

and Sub-Arctic Region, which was held online in March 2021 and co-hosted by the Government of Iceland and the Nordic Council of Ministers in collaboration with 11 partners. Originally scheduled to take place in-person in Reykjavik in April 2020, the event was delayed and moved online due to the pandemic.

The Special Coordinator shared that the aim of the event was to gather the best available scientific knowledge on plastic pollution in the Arctic marine environment. Close to 100 scientific studies were presented along with numerous panel discussions with scientists and marine experts. The event shed light on important sources of plastic pollution, certain impacts the pollution has in the Arctic, and the importance of regular, harmonized monitoring and international collaboration to increase overall knowledge on the issue in the Arctic. One of the main messages from the Symposium was the urgency for Arctic States and others to take action to reduce plastic pollution. To that end, the Special Coordinator stressed that the ML-RAP, AMAP's plastics monitoring plan and CAFF's work on seabirds and plastics are key Arctic Council initiatives that address many of the issues brought up at the Symposium. He underlined that continued support from Arctic States and Observers is needed to implement effective plans and projects to address this issue. Additionally, a [video](#) was shown during the event, as well as in one of the breaks of the SAO meeting, that explains the issue and the impacts marine litter has on Arctic communities.

Meeting delegates thanked Magnús Jóhannesson for his work and the Chairmanship for hosting the Symposium. Many highlighted the importance of harmonizing plastics monitoring and strengthening international cooperation on this issue. One delegate suggested that future events on this topic could also be aimed at a broader audience, focusing on addressing consumption patterns and combatting the issue at the source. Another delegate suggested that a global agreement to combat marine litter would be effective in addressing the issue and called upon Arctic States to support such an agreement in the future. The Special Coordinator emphasized that an international agreement would take significant time to come to action, but that Arctic States can lead by example by starting to take action on addressing plastic pollution and marine litter now.

Conclusion

The SAOC took note of the appreciation for the work of the Special Coordinator on Plastics Pollution and Marine Litter and thanked him for his all his efforts throughout the Icelandic Chairmanship. He offered special thanks for the Coordinator's tremendous work in organizing the Symposium, which he coordinated in part with PAME, AMAP and other WGs. He congratulated and thanked the organizers of the Symposium for a successful event. The SAOC noted that future Chairmanships could consider designating, as needed, special coordinators dedicated to specific Arctic Council priorities.

12. Update on preparations for the 12th Arctic Council Ministerial meeting

Background and discussion

The Director General for the Directorate for Bilateral and Regional Affairs at the Iceland Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Jón Erlingur Jónasson, gave an update on preparations for the upcoming Ministerial meeting on 20 May and a series of planned activities on the margins of the meeting.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministerial meeting will take place both in person in Reykjavik and online. All Foreign Ministers of the Arctic States and PP HoDs are invited to attend the

Ministerial in person in Reykjavik with smaller delegation sizes. Other regular participants, including WGs, subsidiary bodies and Observers, are invited to take part in the Ministerial via an online platform. The Director General shared that while a livestream of the Ministerial meeting will be the focal point, one aim of the online platform is to host “associated programs” as a format for WGs, PPs, Observers and potentially others to have a virtual booth to showcase their work. Other potential associated programs may include events planned back-to-back with the Ministerial such as the UArctic Congress. He also noted that while the Ministerial meeting will be livestreamed and open to the public, the online platform and associated programs will likely only be available for registered participants.

Conclusion

The SAOC thanked the Director General for his presentation and noted that delegates will receive further written information on the Ministerial in due course.

13. Update on the incoming Russian Arctic Council Chairmanship 2021-2023

Background and discussion

The SAO for the Russian Federation, Nikolay Korchunov, briefed delegates on the upcoming Russian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, 2021-2023. He noted the program for the Russian Chairmanship remained the same as presented at the November 2020 SAO plenary meeting, with sustainable development as an overarching focus and four program areas: Arctic inhabitants and Indigenous peoples, the environment, social economic growth and strengthening the Arctic Council. He shared that over 70 events are being planned throughout the Russian Chairmanship. He also noted that Russia is preparing to chair SDWG, EGBCM, Arctic SDI and PAME’s Arctic Shipping Best Practice Information Forum. The SAO expressed support for continued work on the SMM, Covid-19, youth engagement and engagement with Observers.

Conclusion

The SAOC thanked the SAO for the Russian Federation for his update and impressive program presented for the incoming Chairmanship.

14. Any other business

14.1 MOSAiC Expedition Briefing for the Arctic Council

Background and discussion

The Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the Study of the Arctic Climate (MOSAiC) completed its work in 2020 on the German research vessel Polarstern. Given the significance of this historic scientific expedition in the Arctic, and as Germany is one of the Council’s Observers, the SAOC invited the Head of MOSAiC, Professor Markus Rex, to provide delegates with a briefing on the highlights of the expedition.

Professor Rex highlighted that hundreds of researchers from over 20 countries were involved in the expedition in which the Polarstern spent a year drifting through the Arctic Ocean while trapped in ice. The goal of the MOSAiC expedition was to investigate the Arctic as the center of climate change and gain fundamental insights to better understand changes underway. He noted that several Arctic States and Arctic Council Observers were involved in the expedition. He shared some key findings, including that scientists measured temperatures 10 degrees (Celsius) higher than those encountered on an expedition 30 years prior. He emphasized that despite challenges, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the expedition was a successful example of what can be achieved in Arctic research by cooperating across borders.

Conclusion

The SAOC thanked the Head of the MOSAiC expedition for his presentation and congratulated Germany and its partners and scientists involved in the historic expedition.

14.2 Arctic Council connectivity coordination

Background and discussion

The Arctic Council's Connectivity Coordinator provided an update on his activities since last November, including his role in developing a new report with the AEC Connectivity Working Group. The WG identified a need for a useful tool to help stakeholders understand the various investment and planning decisions that can impact the long-term technical and economic success of projects in the Arctic. The tool will be presented as the Arctic Connectivity Sustainability Matrix, and will assist policymakers, local leaders and other decision makers in understanding the benefits and considerations of the various types of connectivity investments. The Arctic Council's connectivity points of contact have been invited by the AEC to provide input to the WG's report. He noted, however, that Arctic Council endorsement of the Matrix report is unlikely due to the time constraints of the review and approval process. He remains hopeful that more time will be allocated for feedback allowing the collaboration with the Arctic Council to be formalized in the report. With his mandate coming to an end in May, the Coordinator hopes the dialogue taking place between the Arctic Council and the AEC on connectivity issues and other areas continues.

The SAO for the Russian Federation thanked the Coordinator for his work and achievements. He noted that the Russian Chairmanship plans to continue to support and enhance connectivity in the Arctic.

Conclusion

The SAOC thanked the Coordinator for his excellent work and welcomed the incoming Chairmanship's engagement to maintain the Arctic Council's focus on connectivity issues in cooperation with the AEC.

14.3 Observer event

Background and discussion

The SAOC informed delegates that an online Observer event is being planned in April 2021. The event will have a moderated panel discussion on the topic of Arctic governance with three representatives from each sub-group of Observers, one SAO and one PP. The event goal is to

strengthen meaningful engagement with Observers, and will be open for Arctic Council delegates to attend.

15. Closing of the SAO meeting

Several delegates took the floor to thank the SAOC and the Chairmanship team for their leadership over the last two years, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The SAOC thanked all delegates for their flexibility and willingness to adapt to the new reality brought on by the pandemic. He also thanked his Chairmanship team and the Icelandic delegation for their dedicated work.

Annex 1

Arctic Council – Arctic Coast Guard Forum Statement of Cooperation

The Arctic Council (the Council) serves as the leading intergovernmental forum for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction on common issues among the Arctic States, Arctic Indigenous communities, and other Arctic inhabitants. The Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF) is an independent, informal, operationally-driven organization unifying coast guards or organizations that perform coast guard functions, not bound by treaty, to foster safe, secure, and environmentally responsible maritime activity in the Arctic.

The members of the Council and the ACGF have reached the following understanding to further our common goal of enhancing and promoting safe, sustainable, and responsible maritime activity in the Arctic:

- that strengthened cooperation between the Council and the ACGF is mutually beneficial.
- to exchange information of current concern on initiatives and operational experience related to the Council's and ACGF's respective mandates – with a view to avoid duplication and optimizing resources.
- to enhance information sharing and coordinate mutually beneficial activities through the Council and ACGF Secretariats.
- that in respect of the differences in the structure, membership, and mandates of the Council and ACGF, all possible activities are expected to be realized when feasible and appropriate, including to extend invitations to their respective meetings as serves their purposes.
- that both the Council and ACGF representatives can be invited to observe (participate in) each other's meetings/exercises. The extent of participation in meetings and exercises will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and approved in accordance with each organization's internal procedures.
- that the Council and ACGF members will each bear their own costs and expenses to finance activities undertaken under this cooperation in accordance with their own organizational documents.
- that in order to facilitate the joint collaboration between the Council and the ACGF, relevant planning documents may be developed that coincide with other planning factors. Before implementing any specific activities of mutual interest, the Council and the ACGF intend to discuss the opportunities and challenges presented.
- that all activities and exchange of information under this Statement of Cooperation are subject to the domestic law of Participants of both the Council and the ACGF.

In light of the operational focus of the areas of collaboration noted above, the Council's Working Group on Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response is the designated primary liaison between the Council and the ACGF Secretariat for implementing this strengthened cooperation on the two existing agreements negotiated under the auspices of the Council: the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic (2011) and the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (2013). This does not preclude the Council and ACGF cooperation through other Council bodies where and when appropriate.

Acronyms and abbreviations commonly found in Arctic Council reports

AAC	Arctic Athabaskan Council
ABC	Arctic Biodiversity Congress
ACAP	Arctic Contaminants Action Program (1 of 6 Working Groups)
ACGF	Arctic Coast Guard Forum
ACS	Arctic Council Secretariat
AEC	Arctic Economic Council
AIA	Aleut International Association
AIM	Arctic Investment Matrix
AMAP	Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (1 of 6 Working Groups)
AMBI	Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative (CAFF)
AMSA	Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (PAME, 2009)
AIP	Arctic Investment Protocol
ARENA	Arctic Remote Energy Networks Academy (SDWG project)
ARR / ARA	Arctic Resilience Report / Arctic Resilience Assessment
ARAF	Arctic Resilience Action Framework
ARHC	Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission
ASDS	Arctic Shipping Data Service (PAME)
BCM	Black Carbon and Methane
CAFF	Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (1 of 6 Working Groups)
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBM	Community-Based Monitoring (CAFF)
CBPM	Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program (CAFF)
CLEO	Circumpolar Local Environmental Observer Network (ACAP)
CLiC	Climate and Cryosphere
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EA	Ecosystem Approach
EAAFP	East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership
EALLU	Arctic Indigenous Youth, Climate Change and Food Culture (SDWG)
EBM	Ecosystem-Based Management
EG	Expert Group



EGBCM	Expert Group on Black Carbon and Methane
EPPR	Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (1 of 6 Working Groups)
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (UN)
FP-OPP	Framework Plan for Cooperation on Prevention of Oil Pollution from Petroleum and Maritime Activities in the Marine Areas of the Arctic (2015)
GCI	Gwich'in Council International
HoD	Head of Delegation
ICC	Inuit Circumpolar Council
ICES	International Council of the Exploration of the Seas
IMO	International Maritime Organization (UN)
INAO	Icelandic National Audit Office
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPS	Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat
JMS	Joint Ministerial Statement
MARPOL	International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships
MEMA	Meaningful Engagement of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Marine Activities (PAME, SDWG)
MFA	Ministry of/for Foreign Affairs
MOSPA	Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (2013)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NCM	Nordic Council of Ministers
OSPAR	The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
PAME	Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (1 of 6 Working Groups)
PBA	Polar Bear Agreement
PBRs	Polar Bear Range States
POP	Persistent Organic Pollutant
PP	Permanent Participant
PSI	Project Support Instrument
RADEG	Radiation Expert Group (EPPR, 2019)
RAIPON	Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North
ROC	Record of Observer Contributions



SAO	Senior Arctic Official
SAOC	SAO Chair (Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials)
SAOX	SAO executive meeting
SAR	Search and rescue
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals (UN)
SDI	Spatial Data Infrastructure
SDWG	Sustainable Development Working Group (1 of 6 Working Groups)
SLCP/F	Short-Lived Climate Pollutants/Forcers
TF	Task Force
TFAMC II	Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation II
TFICA	Task Force on Improved Connectivity in the Arctic
TK	Traditional knowledge
TKLK	Traditional knowledge and local knowledge
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme (Observer)
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme (Observer)
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
WG	Working Group
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WP	work plan