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SAO MARINE MECHANISM WEBINAR SERIES

Summary of
proceedings
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ARCTIC COUNCIL

ORGANIZATION OF THE SMM SERIES

The SAO based Marine Mechanism (SMM), originally scheduled for the Akureyri SAO Plenary in March 2020 but postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, was held in the form of a webinar series from 29 September until 29 October 2020. It started with an opening plenary session on Tuesday 29 September, followed by four thematic sessions held Thursdays from 1 until 22 October and concluded with a plenary session on 29 October. Agendas for each of the sessions can be found [here](#). The four thematic sessions were dedicated to the Arctic Marine Strategic Plan, Sustainable Arctic Shipping, Regional Coordination of Marine Issues and Global Commitments, and finally Ecosystem Based Management. Keynote speeches and expert presentations for the opening and thematic sessions were recorded and can be found [here](#).

The thematic sessions were moderated by Mary Frances Davidson, Deputy Director at UNESCO GRÓ - Fisheries Training Programme (first and third session) and by Magnús Jóhannesson, Special Advisor to the Icelandic Chairmanship (second and fourth session). At the concluding plenary session, the moderators reported from their respective thematic sessions. Their presentation material can be found [here](#).

Chapter two of this summary is based on the reporting of the moderators and reflects their general observations on the four themes. Chapter three reflects further ideas for the way forward that were mentioned during discussions in the concluding session. The summary reflects the moderators' impressions of the concluding session discussions and should not be interpreted as SMM consensus decisions, conclusions, or next steps.

1. THEMATIC SESSIONS

The following paragraphs recount the two moderators' general observations as drawn [from the four thematic discussions and summaries](#) at the SMM's final session 29 October 2020.

1.1 ARCTIC MARINE STRATEGIC PLAN (AMSP)

WGs, Arctic Indigenous peoples and local communities should collaborate on marine strategic planning work and implementation. Implementing the AMSP and tracking progress should be a high priority for relevant WGs, with support from SAOs and PPs.

1.2 SUSTAINABLE ARCTIC SHIPPING

As marine and shipping activities continue to increase in Arctic waters, the Arctic Council should continue to proactively support safe, sustainable and environmentally sound Arctic shipping. Areas that could receive even greater attention include social responsibility; social and economic aspects; actions to limit environmental impacts; relationship of shipping to other legitimate uses of the sea; national and regional infrastructure; and gaps in, and needs for, regulations.

1.3 REGIONAL COORDINATION OF MARINE ISSUES AND GLOBAL COMMITMENTS

Marine leadership in the Arctic should be approached in a holistic way, e.g., through coordination of national, regional and international instruments. Solutions to the complex issues facing the changing Arctic marine environment and enhancing its protection require creative actions, coordination and cooperation across issue-areas and WGs, enhancing Arctic States' positions in international bodies or fora, and coordinating the implementation of issues arising in international fora such as the CBD and BBNJ.

1.4 ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT

As noted at the Rovaniemi Ministerial meeting in May 2019, there is a political will by Ministers to work towards the implementation of EBM in the Arctic. EBM is a systematic and holistic management process to achieve and maintain good status of marine environment which also addresses the impacts of climate change. The time is right to take bold steps towards implementation, building on the Arctic Council's EBM work and the AMSP. It was noted that work on EBM in various international organizations could be relevant for the work of the Arctic Council.

2. DISCUSSION AND WAY FORWARD

SAOs and PPs expressed their general satisfaction with the SMM and stressed the importance of identifying concrete actions for follow up. Norway offered to write a concept paper on EBM and scientific cooperation. When considering this idea, Russia proposed to take into account the experience and cooperation under the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, which can be considered as an element of the EBM. Delegations also emphasized the need to set up a pilot project concentrating on the Central Arctic Ocean. Canada called for a mapping of how the recommendations of the TFAMC have been met to date. The Chairmanship noted that while it is clear that it is not realistic to organize an Arctic Ocean Ministers' meeting with in-person attendance during this winter, the possibility of a virtual meeting could be explored if there was a wish for that.

While there was general appreciation of the increased focus of the Arctic Council on the Arctic marine environment through the SMM, some pointed out a need for appropriate planning as this increased focus could potentially impact the Council's structure and workload. Increased focus on marine issues could also reduce attention from other important issues such as food security, human health and well-being. It was suggested that the Chairmanship should draft concrete proposals on the way forward. The Chairmanship said it was ready to do so in collaboration with the upcoming Russian Chairmanship.

In summary, the SAOC pointed out that the upcoming SAO plenary meeting would give an opportunity to further reflect on these proposals and the possible next steps as identified by the moderators of the thematic sessions.