



ARCTIC COUNCIL
NORWEGIAN CHAIRMANSHIP
2006-2008

Norwegian chairmanship programme



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Programme for the Norwegian chairmanship of the Arctic Council 2006-2008

The Arctic Council was established as a high-level forum for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction between Arctic states on common Arctic issues, with the participation of Arctic indigenous communities and other inhabitants of the region. Until now, the main emphasis has been on sustainable development and environmental protection, and an extensive knowledge base has been established under the auspices of the Council. However, it will not be possible to maintain settlement patterns and ensure growth and welfare without economic activity. Therefore, the Council should also initiate broad political debate on all issues of importance to the Arctic and the people living there. These include economic activity in the energy, fisheries and mining sectors and other matters of joint interest related to social and economic development.

Formerly a region marked by the Cold War and East-West tensions, the Arctic has developed into a region of cooperation, particularly within the environmental field. This is a region with immense environmental assets and some of the last expanses of pristine nature and intact ecosystems in our part of the planet. The Arctic is also rich in valuable natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable.

However, increasing utilisation of natural resources, pollution and climate change are creating challenges that must be dealt with in a way that ensures sustainable development. Environmental change in the Arctic will affect biodiversity, our societies, indigenous cultures, resource utilisation and the economy. The close links between culture and nature and the fact that many people's livelihoods are based on hunting and fishing make the population particularly vulnerable to such changes.

Protection of the environment combined with sustainable utilisation of natural resources should be the core area of cooperation under the auspices of the Arctic Council in the years ahead. Cooperation under the Arctic Council and in-

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tegration of indigenous peoples' knowledge into these efforts has yielded results far greater than could have been achieved by national efforts alone. This is particularly true in the fields of long-range pollution and climate change. The substantial efforts within these main areas of cooperation will be continued during the Norwegian chairmanship. In addition to long-range pollution and climate change, these include action to prevent pollution and reduce releases of hazardous substances, protection of the marine environment, and conservation of biological diversity. In order to ensure growth and welfare and maintain settlement patterns we should also focus our efforts on managing and using both the renewable and non-renewable natural resources of the region in a prudent manner that protects the environment and ensures high safety standards.

Economic activities in the North should be carried out with due regard for the interests of indigenous peoples. Cooperation in the Arctic has clearly strengthened cooperation not only between countries and local communities, but also between indigenous peoples.

Integrated resource management

Arctic communities and settlements are largely based on the use of natural resources. Traditionally these activities included hunting, fishing and reindeer herding. However, the importance of the non-renewable resources is growing in the Arctic. Together with the fisheries, the exploitation of minerals and fossil fuels is now the main basis for the regional economies. The growing economic activity offers significant opportunities for Arctic communities, but also involves challenges, particularly in the field of environmental protection.

The Arctic is believed to hold large undiscovered petroleum resources. While many of the other petroleum provinces of the world are characterised by conflicts and political unrest, the Arctic stands out as a stable and peaceful region. Both onshore and offshore petroleum developments are expanding to new areas of the Arctic. New economic activities may provide an important basis for welfare and economic growth. It is therefore vital that all resource uti-

lisation is planned and carried out in a sustainable manner in order to facilitate the coexistence of activities in different sectors, including fisheries, mining, maritime transport and the petroleum industry. These must be carried out in accordance with environmental and safety standards and should be to the benefit of Arctic society. Minimising negative impacts of industrial activities on the ecosystems and living resources of the Arctic is a particularly important task.

Over the years, Norway has increasingly taken a management approach that takes into account the importance of healthy and productive ecosystems as a long-term basis for economic development. Norway's integrated management plan for the Barents Sea-Lofoten area, which was launched in spring 2006, is based on the ecosystem approach. Its purpose is to ensure a balance between petroleum development, increasing maritime transport, the utilisation of living marine resources and the need for environmental protection in the Norwegian part of the Barents Sea. It will provide a framework for the sustainable use of natural resources and goods, while at the same time maintaining the structure, functioning and productivity of the ecosystems of the area. In addition it is important to consider the onshore impacts of offshore activities.

All the Arctic countries have long experience in managing resources in the Arctic, for example in connection with forestry, fisheries, reindeer herding, mining and petroleum activities. Many Arctic ecosystems and environmental impacts of human activity extend across national borders. The exchange of experience and knowledge, including traditional knowledge, with the aim of developing a common approach to ecosystem-based management of the natural resources of the Arctic is therefore a natural priority for the Arctic Council.

Norway will arrange a conference to further explore integrated resource management and its relevance for the Arctic. One of the main aims of the conference should be to develop a common approach to ecosystem-based management.

1. Ecosystem-based management

Ecosystem-based management should ensure the sustainable use of natural resources and goods in the Arctic, while maintaining the structure, functioning and productivity of ecosystems.

Norway will invite closer cooperation on developing the following methods and tools that will ensure a sound scientific basis for and a common approach to ecosystem-based management.

- Development of guidelines for ecosystem-based management of the marine environment in the Arctic.
- Development of environmental quality objectives and environmental standards.
- Development of common criteria for identifying ecologically valuable and vulnerable areas, and areas where there is a high potential for conflict between commercial (petroleum, fisheries, mining), societal and environmental interests.
- Strategies for minimising loss of biodiversity and habitat loss and fragmentation.

The establishment of guidelines for responsible development of petroleum and mineral resources in the Arctic should be given priority. The need for guidelines for other activities such as tourism, shipping, the establishment of infrastructure and waste management should also be considered.

It is vital for national experts from the Arctic countries to share their knowledge and experience in these fields, for example through discussions about impact assessments, risk management, identification of vulnerable areas, use of the best available technology/best environmental practices, licensing conditions, control of chemicals and radioactive substances, minimising habitat loss, protection of vulnerable and valuable areas, monitoring and contingency planning.

It would be useful to establish a set of operational guidelines for assessing the impact of projects, plans and programmes in the Arctic. If this is done, they should be based on experience and evaluation of national and international guidelines for impact assessments.

2. Enhanced knowledge base

The Oil and Gas Assessment will be followed up under the Norwegian chairmanship and the Shipping Assessment will be completed. As a continuation of these assessments, Arctic Council guidelines for data collection in general should be established in order to ensure a unified baseline for future assessments. The purpose will be to establish the knowledge base needed to implement an integrated, ecosystem-based approach to management in the Arctic, including integration of traditional knowledge. We must ensure that we have sufficient knowledge on potential negative impacts of pollution and human activity, such as climate change and loss of biodiversity. It is important to strengthen the international monitoring networks and improve the accessibility of data on environment and health.

The status of cultural monuments, sites and environments in the Arctic should be assessed, and information collated on management strategies in the Arctic countries. The World Heritage Convention has been ratified by all eight Arctic states. During its chairmanship, Norway will initiate a dialogue with the World Heritage Convention and explore promising opportunities for cooperation. Such areas could include improved management of existing sites and the identification and nomination of new world heritage sites in the Arctic.

3. Mechanisms for cooperation and implementation

Any standards and guidelines adopted by the Arctic Council would be implemented by national authorities in the member states. Competence building and education are important instruments for facilitating implementation.

Relevant measures include:

- Increasing teaching on sustainable management through the University of the Arctic.
- Use of the work and publications of Arctic Council working groups for educational purposes.
- Exchange of experience between management institutions, including efforts to harmonise legislation.
- Support for institutional developments in the north. Integration of traditional knowledge.

4. Regional economic development - implications for settlement patterns

The rich natural resources on land and at sea must be developed and utilised sustainably and so that positive long-term effects are achieved on land. Activities must be well planned, and potential consequences have to be assessed. It is also important to maintain a stable level of activity over time. In order to facilitate future economic development, it is important to build up the competence of the population. Projects that stimulate innovation under Arctic conditions will be encouraged.

It is very important to facilitate closer international cooperation at different levels, centrally as well as regionally, on industrial development, access to resources and the development of new technologies.

Climate change

The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) of the Arctic Council gave us an overview of the available knowledge on climate change in the Arctic and its impact on the region and the world as a whole. The principal conclusion by almost 300 researchers from all Arctic countries is that the Arctic is experiencing much more rapid climate change than the rest of the world. The average temperature in the Arctic has risen almost twice as fast as in the rest of the world during the past 50 years. The project also evaluated how the situation may change in the next 100 years, and has concluded that the global warming will continue, contributing to major physical, ecological, social and economic changes.

The changes in the Arctic climate underline the urgent need to reduce global emissions of greenhouse gases. The global framework for dealing with this issue is provided by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Within the Arctic Council, Norway will give priority to the implementation of the recommendations in the ACIA report, the Reykjavik Ministerial Declaration and the ACIA Policy Document from Reykjavik.

During the Norwegian chairmanship, priority will be given to initiating new studies and assessments to fill knowledge gaps in the following priority areas.

1. Strengthening climate change research and monitoring

There is a need to develop regional climate models and scenarios in order to identify the possible impacts on ecosystems and species distribution, and to enhance knowledge of climate change in the Arctic region and its impacts on the global climate system (feedback mechanisms). It is also important to increase our understanding of the links between climate change and pollution problems and of bi-chemical processes in the Arctic region. Climate change and chemical pollutants may result in multiple, interacting impacts.

More extensive long-term monitoring of ecosystem processes, snow and ice cover, concentrations of greenhouse gases and other relevant gases and UV radiation in the region is necessary to fill gaps in our knowledge and provide a knowledge base for future studies.

2. Strengthening the adaptive capacities of Arctic residents, including indigenous peoples and local communities, and identifying the most vulnerable sectors of society

According to the ACIA report, the consequences of climate change in the Arctic will be dramatic for human life, ecosystems and many sectors of society. Further studies of impacts and means of adaptation are needed in order to address these issues. Work on adaptation strategies and action, such as institutional arrangements, should be initiated. This will contribute to local, innovative Arctic adaptation strategies.

3. Considering initiatives and measures to reduce emissions and enhance removals of greenhouse gases in the region

Even though emissions of greenhouse gases from activities in the Arctic are relatively limited in global terms, there are important mitigation opportunities in the region. It would be useful to explore mitigation possibilities across sectors in areas such as:

- energy efficiency and renewable energy
- cleaner production of fossil fuels, including CO₂ capture and storage
- use of new carbon-free and low-carbon technologies

- emissions from transport, including shipping conservation of reservoirs and enhancement of removals of carbon in soil and by forests and other vegetation.

The structure of the Arctic Council

It is now ten years since the Arctic Council was established in Ottawa as a high-level forum for circumpolar cooperation. From the very beginning the focus has been on sustainable development and protection of the environment. The Arctic Council replaced the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) that was established in Rovaniemi in 1991.

A range of concrete results have been achieved since the beginning of the Arctic cooperation. Perhaps the greatest progress has been made in the fields of pollution and climate change, but advances have also been made in the work on biological diversity, the marine environment and economic and social development.

It is important to make regular evaluations of the work of the Arctic Council in order to ensure the most efficient use of limited resources. Norway will initiate a process to examine the Council's organisation with a view to improving its effectiveness and efficiency, building on the experience gained during 15 years of Arctic cooperation.

A secretariat will be established in Tromsø for the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish chairmanships from 2006 to 2012.

Information-sharing is an important element of Arctic cooperation, whether it takes place internally between participants, with other countries and organisations, or with the general public. The Arctic Council website will be regularly updated to ensure that it is a practical and useful tool for all interested parties.