

# Cover sheet

Full name of state or organization:

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

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Observer's website, if appropriate:

www.fco.gov.uk

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Is your state or organization still interested in continuing as an Observer of the Arctic Council?

Yes  No

# Observer Report

Please describe in no more than 2 pages your state or organization's contributions to the work of the Arctic Council's Working Groups, Task Forces and/or Expert Groups since the time of your most recent report, or in the previous two years. Please highlight contributions to specific projects, such as through proposals, concept development, in-kind and financial support, and hosting of meetings. If applicable, please include mention of collaboration with Permanent Participants, such as project proposal endorsement and support.

The UK is the Arctic's closest neighbour and has an over 400 year old relationship with the region, from the voyages of men like Frobisher and Franklin to today's cutting edge scientific research. The UK's long-standing ties, continued interests and engagement with the Arctic is reflected in the fact that the UK was an accredited Observer at the first AEPS Meeting in 1991 and the UK was listed as an Observer in the initial rules of procedure of the Arctic Council. The UK has been represented, by officials from London, at every Senior Arctic Officials and Ministerial Meeting of the Council since 1996 and has always constructively engaged with the Council.

In October 2013 the UK Government published its Arctic Policy Framework: *Adapting to Change*, which for the first time sets out UK interests in and policy towards the Arctic. The policy framework set out the UK's vision for the Arctic as *"an Arctic that is safe and secure; well governed in conjunction with indigenous peoples and in line with international law; where policies are developed on the basis of sound science with full regard to the environment; and where only responsible development takes place"*.

It outlines what expertise the UK can offer to help meet some of the long term challenges facing the region and to ensure a sustainable future and therefore provides the framework for supporting the goals of the Arctic Council. This was reiterated in 2015 in the Governments Response to the House of Lords Select committee on the Arctic Report (2015).

The UK continues to be fully engaged and directly contribute to the work and the objectives of the Arctic Council's Working Groups, Task Forces and Expert Groups. For example:

- Plymouth Marine Laboratory in the UK has contributed to the Arctic Council's "Ocean Acidification Expert Group," since 2011 and continue to participate in all AMAP, Acid Ocean Acidification meetings to date, the latest held in January 2016.
- The UK is a strong supporter for action to reduce global emissions of methane and black carbon and so the UK has been actively involved during the development stage of the Black Carbon framework 2015, which was produced by the Arctic Council Taskforce on Black Carbon.

- Through the participation of the National Environmental Research Council (NERC) Arctic Office the UK contributes to the Arctic Council sponsored “Sustaining Arctic Observing Network”, which aims to provide an international setting for coordinating Arctic observational networks.
- In the context of global biodiversity, the UK is of major international importance for its populations of non-breeding water birds deriving from the Arctic. The UK’s Joint Nature Conservation Committee regularly contributes to the work of, and is the UK’s permanent representative to, the Conservation of Arctic Fauna and Flora Working Group as well as having a UK expert on the Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative Steering Group.
- The UK has attended meetings of PAME and TFAMC, and has contributed expertise on the polar code and the Polaris system, feeding into the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment session this year. We have also attended all of the meetings of the Science Cooperation Task Force and actively suggested alternative wording for text directly affecting the position of non arctic states. We have also attended the Task Force meetings of the Arctic Marine Cooperation in 2015 and 2016.

The UK strongly supports the role of Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council and welcomes their unique and essential input into Council discussions. At the Arctic Circle Assembly in 2015 the UK presented a well received and successful breakout session on Traditional Knowledge-based Innovation in the Age of Climate Change. We continue to have constructive and useful discussions with Permanent Participants on issues of mutual concern/benefit. The UK and Permanent Participants share a great concern over climate change and its effects. We are well aware of the value of local knowledge/memory in determining the level and effects of climate change on the Arctic and its communities.

If applicable, please describe in no more than 1 page your state or organization's future plans for contributing to the work of the Arctic Council's Working Groups, Task Forces and/or Expert Groups. Please highlight intentions to contribute to specific projects and to collaborate with Permanent Participants.

The UK is committed to continuing to support the work of the Working Groups and is keen to explore ways in which to better coordinate science programmes and other initiatives. Identifying common ground and improving synergies, cooperation and collaboration will then make it easier to contribute more directly and substantially to the Working Groups, (in particular, CAFF, AMAP and PAME) by ensuring for example that where appropriate the future funding of NERC science programmes takes these elements into account.

Our continuing and future contributions to specific projects are highlighted below:

- The UK continues to work with the Council's Science Cooperation Task Force, engaging on the draft of the Science and Cooperation Agreement. The UK strongly supports the principle of increased scientific cooperation on Arctic matters, particularly as many of the scientific challenges are so great that solving them requires a fully international effort. The UK will therefore continue to work closely with this Task Force, ensuring representation at all meetings until the agreement is finalised.
- The UK has nominated an expert to Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative Steering Group (CAFF) from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and we intend to stay fully engaged with this steering group.
- Reducing global emissions is of critical importance to the UK and therefore the UK intends to be fully engaged in this area. We have a UK expert appointed to the AMAP Expert Group on Ozone and Black carbon and are currently contributing to the Expert Group on Black Carbon and Methane (EGBCM).
- The UK intends to continue to work with the Protection of Arctic Marine Environment Working Group as it discusses the Pan-Arctic Network of Marine Protected Areas, Arctic Shipping and Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines. With the Polar Code coming into force in 2017, the UK is keen to stay engaged with the work to analyse the relative effect of the Code on Arctic Shipping. We have a UK representative on the Shipping Expert Group who will work on a paper to PAME II 2016 that elaborates on proposals for an "Arctic Shipping Best Practice Forum".

Following the success of its previous four year Arctic Research Programme, NERC announced in 2015 the investment of a further £16m in a new five year research programme (covering the period 2017-2022). The overarching goal of which is to explore the effect of changes to ice cover on the marine ecosystem and the associated biochemistry of the Arctic Ocean. The aims are to understand the potential major impacts of environmental change in the Arctic and provide projections for future ecosystems services. This knowledge will help to develop mitigation and adaptation strategies to manage these effects. A key principle in determining what to invest these funds will be the strength and depth of international cooperation including links with priorities of the Arctic Council Working Groups.

If applicable, please describe in no more than 1 page your state or organization's contributions to other aspects of the Arctic Council and its goals not covered by the previous sections since the time of your most recent report, or in the previous two years.

The UK plays an active role in many relevant international bodies and agreements including the IMO, UN (especially in respect of UNCLOS), CBD and OSPAR, all of which contribute to the orderly management and governance of the wider Arctic region. The UK has made significant contribution to the development of the IMO's Polar Code under the SOLAS and MARPOL Conventions, including acting as the Chairman of the groups that developed the environmental aspects.

The UK maintains good bilateral and multilateral relations with all the Arctic States both generally and in relation to polar matters and is keen to maintain this position. The UK's Memorandum of Understanding with Canada is an excellent example of bilateral cooperation. The primary aim is to facilitate exchange of scientific knowledge, expertise and facilities. We are beginning discussions with Canadian authorities on reviewing the agreement, to fully reflect current priorities. The UK also has a polar Memorandum of Understanding with Norway, which includes Arctic research and which is currently also being renewed.

The UK promotes the Arctic Council wherever appropriate and possible to do so and considers that education and outreach are important in order to promote the Arctic and the work of the Arctic Council. The FCO developed website "Discovering the Arctic" is aimed at school children and provides a guide to the Arctic, its people and institutions. UK Government Ministers have also highlighted the importance of the Arctic Council and the UK's position as an Observer in several debates in the Houses of Parliament, most recently in 2015.

The UK is a committed member of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) and has a large body of Arctic scientists at a range of institutions across the UK. A number of universities and national institutions have large Arctic research programmes, such as those at Swansea, Leeds and Stirling Universities. The Scott Polar Research Institute and Scottish Association for Marine Science are both deeply involved in the Arctic, as are the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), who increasingly deploy their internationally renowned polar scientists and resources in the region and continues to host the UK Arctic Office, at their headquarters in Cambridge.

The UK continues to view the Arctic Council as the primary regional body; it represents a unique forum to help ensure sustainable management of the region. The UK recognises that a peaceful, stable and well-governed Arctic is the bedrock on which all of the Government's policies towards the Arctic are based. As an Observer, the UK has contributed scientific and policy expertise to various expert, working groups and major reports produced by the Arctic Council. The UK intends to continue this high level of engagement and considers that the Arctic Council could benefit from greater UK and other State Observer participation in order to achieve common goals, and we recognise that steps have been made toward this by the US Chairmanship. The UK has been actively engaged in the Council for the last 20 years and we remain committed to doing so.