

State Observers Statement

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen

The State Observers would like to renew and reiterate their support for the work of the Arctic Council and their desire to continue to look for opportunities to work in partnership on common goals and interests.

We note there have been several international meetings recently which discussed a range of issues of relevance to the Arctic Council. For example, the “Arctic under a Changing Climate” meeting in Tromsø, organised by Norway, which a number of State Observers attended, had a number of very positive outcomes.

In particular, we were very pleased that Arctic Council Member States said they were willing to look at ways of enhancing the participation of Observer States and acknowledged that Observer States should be considered an asset to the Arctic Council.

The title of the recent conference organised in Ilulissat by the Nordic Council of Ministers “Common Concern for the Arctic” is significant. This meeting had a specific purpose to inform non-Arctic stakeholders about a variety of current Arctic issues. This Conference was in itself a recognition that there are stakeholders who are not from the Arctic region.

Understandably the main focus of both the Tromsø meeting and the one held in Ilulissat was to consider the main challenges facing the Arctic Region, most notably climate change. The European Commission and many non-Arctic States were present and many participants expressed the need for cooperation and joint working especially in terms of science, but also in wider activities and decision making where appropriate.

Mr Chairman, the transformation of the Arctic is and will be an event of global significance. It can be argued that the whole world is a stakeholder in our Polar regions. Therefore we too believe that it is important to take a holistic view of the Arctic Region.

The participation of non-Arctic states in Arctic science is not the only aspect through which they qualify as responsible stakeholders. There are many examples that demonstrate that specific and unusual ‘polar capabilities’ can be found in non-polar nations. State Observers to the Arctic Council **do** provide added value.

The IPY is a very good example of the contribution and commitment of non-Arctic States. Many nations, far removed from the white ends of the globe, invest heavily in IPY research and act as lead nations in many IPY-projects. It is important to build on this once in a fifty year opportunity. For this reason State Observers fully support the recent Norwegian ‘Maximising the legacy of the IPY in the Arctic’ initiative.

In our view, the continued participation and scientific input from State Observers in AC Working Groups can increase the weight of AC reports and recommendations.

More specifically: such involvement by non-Arctic States increases the policy relevance of Arctic Council recommendations in their own countries' Governments, the general public, businesses and other interest groups.

The recently published AMAP "Arctic Report Cards 2008" highlight the importance of Arctic science and focused programmes linked firmly to policy. The possibility of co-funding of AC projects by State Observers may become increasingly likely if State Observers were involved in the drafting of project proposals for which funding is sought. Involvement at an early stage would also avoid the risk of duplication or overlap with other science projects and help to maximise cooperation wherever possible.

Several Permanent Participants have explicitly called for greater involvement of the EU and non-Arctic nations in the work of the AC. Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity to welcome the recent EU Commission Communication on the Arctic, as an example of renewed EU interest in Arctic issues.

We can assure this meeting that State Observers will continue to contribute in a measured and constructive manner, adding value to the debate. Indeed we try to coordinate our input into the discussions of the Council as much as possible. For example, earlier this year the State Observers held another informal meeting in London. We discussed a number of issues and agreed that it was important to engage with the Arctic Council and to look for further ways of doing this.

State Observers are also pleased to see that the Arctic Council is actively discussing the role and level of engagement of Observers. We are looking forward to the results of these discussions as well as the upcoming "Arctic Council Efficiency" paper - and having an opportunity to engage constructively in developing suitable proposals and responsibilities.

Thank you