

Speech
Arctic Council 15
May 2013
Lena Ek, Minister
for the
Environment

Speech by Lena Ek, Minister for the Environment, at the Arctic Council meeting 15th of May 2013

Dear ministers and colleagues,

The majority of the work of the Arctic Council is focusing on the environment. I am therefore very happy to be given this opportunity to present the work of the environment ministers in support of our joint work within the Arctic Council - to act "on the science that is screaming at us" to quote our colleague John Kerry .

The changes in the Arctic will fundamentally affect the lives of Arctic inhabitants and ecosystems. Projections of recent science work within the Arctic Council point to increases around and above 10 degrees warming during winter before the end of the century. The Arctic Ocean Acidification Assessment further demonstrates that carbon dioxide turns oceans more acid and the Arctic Ocean is on the frontline of this significant global change, and even if emissions are stopped today, it would take tens of thousands of years to recover.

Last year's record low sea ice extent and rapid melt of the Greenland ice sheet are reminding us that the Arctic holds tipping points that, if crossed, have substantial global effects. And we might have passed some tipping points. As Arctic nations we therefore need to work together to turn this development around in order to strengthen the possibility of a safe development for human wellbeing here and globally. This is the focus of the Arctic Resilience Report that shows that while climate change is the most prominent driver of change, many other environmental changes are taking place alongside.

Substantial cuts in greenhouse gases must be the backbone of our climate change efforts, however joint scientific efforts show that reducing short lived climate pollutants could slow Arctic warming by as much as 0,7 degrees and bring substantial health benefits. The Arctic nations can today take a good next step by agreeing to a joint task force for action to reduce emissions.

The Arctic Biodiversity Assessment concludes that biodiversity is being degraded and that only decisive actions can reverse the trend. Many migratory species in the Arctic are threatened by harvest for consumption and changes to key habitats outside the Arctic. One of many similar examples is the spoon-billed sandpiper, migrating through East Asia. It has decreased from about 6,000 breeding pairs to just a few hundred pairs.

Another important report presented to this meeting is the Arctic Ocean Review that aims to identify actions to strengthen governance for the conservation and sustainable use of the Arctic marine environment.

Environment ministers have played an essential role in creating the Arctic Council, in shaping its agenda and for executing its recommendations. The

Arctic environment ministers meeting, held earlier this year, agreed to find joint actions to reduce short lived climate pollutants, implement ecosystems based management and to implement biodiversity objectives targets. We committed ourselves to meet again in a similar format, and we all look forward to coming to Canada for a new meeting.

Thank you.

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