



Note on European Environment Agency (EEA) and the Arctic Council (AC)

Background information on EEA

EEA is a specialised agency of the European Union (EU) set up¹ to provide the European Commission, Parliament, member states and citizens with sound and independent environmental information. The purpose of its services is to support sustainable development by bringing information needed to develop and evaluate environmental policy and to support decision making.

The EEA was created as a networking organisation, the European Information and Observation Network being established also through the EEA founding Regulation². This network covers relevant national environmental bodies assigned to work with the EEA in gathering, analysing and assessing environmental information to support policy processes. Initially in 1994, Eionet consisted of the 15 EU Member States plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Today, EEA's membership covers 32 European countries³ including all the five European members of the Arctic Council (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden).

In performing its tasks, EEA also collaborates with other EU bodies (DG ENV, DG JRC, DG Eurostat, further Commission services) as well as with international organisations and programmes, conventions' secretariats, etc.⁴. The EEA also has a history of cooperation with neighbouring countries (which includes the Russian Federation), the USA and Canada.

Why EEA wants to take account of the Arctic in its work

EEA contacts and dialogue with the Arctic Council have existed since the early days of EEA's establishment. This has been due on the one hand to the EEA membership of countries from the region (Denmark, Finland, Sweden Norway and Iceland) and on the other hand to the relevance of Arctic issues for EEA assessments and reporting activities (particularly with regard to climate change, biodiversity, chemicals, etc.).

EEA has over the years tried to bring Arctic perspectives into its reporting for several reasons:

¹ Council Regulations (EC) No 933/1999 of 29 April 1999 and No 1641/2003 of 22 July 2003 amending Regulation (EEC) No 1210/90 on the establishment of the European Environment Agency and the European environment information and observation network.

² See <http://eionet.europa.eu/>

³ EEA member countries are at present: the 27 EU Member States, Norway, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Turkey and Switzerland.

⁴ Detailed information about EEA can be found at our web site <http://www.eea.europa.eu/>

Europe is concerned about the ecological footprint of the EU outside its own territory. European emissions are partly responsible for the climate effects we find in the Arctic, while discharges of hazardous substances from Europe contribute to the pollution effects documented in certain Arctic species and areas. European-based companies are, and will probably in the future, be even more active within the Arctic within the fisheries, shipping, tourism, mining and oil and gas exploitation sectors. Europe therefore has the potential to contribute to the improvement of the environment of the Arctic. In order to do so, EEA's role is to try to document these effects and bring them into the policy development processes of the relevant European bodies.

The Arctic environment is especially vulnerable to certain human pressures. By setting environmental goals and standards that take these vulnerabilities into account, an effective protection also of the broader environment in Europe and elsewhere can be achieved. Reporting on environmental effects in the Arctic can therefore bring good arguments for strengthening European environmental policy, e.g. regarding climate change and chemical pollution.

EEA is involved in numerous networks and partnerships beyond EEA countries, and in some cases beyond Europe. Cooperation with the Balkan region is well established⁵; collaboration with Eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asian⁶ (where the Russian Federation is a key player) countries is progressing well; and cooperation with the Mediterranean region has been consolidated over the years. EEA also cooperates with relevant environmental bodies in USA and Canada. In a similar way, by attending and contributing to the work of the Arctic Council, the EEA would like to initiate a consistent cooperation with the most relevant body in this region and with its working groups.

Arctic activities and EEA collaboration with Arctic Council

Publications and products

EEA published its first report about the Arctic environment in 1997⁷. "The state of the Arctic environment" was produced in collaboration with the Norwegian Polar Institute. It gives an overview of the environmental situation in the European Arctic, the main environmental challenges and recommendations for policies and management.

⁵ Since 1996 the countries in this region are collaborating with EEA with EU support (Phare programme and CARDS)

⁶ The cooperation was strengthening within the context of the "Environment for Europe" process and was financially assisted by the EU through the TACIS programme.

⁷ The report can be found at: <http://reports.eea.europa.eu/MON3/en>

The second Arctic report from 2004 was called “Arctic environment: European perspectives. Why should Europe care?”⁸. It was prepared in collaboration with UNEP GRID-Arendal and AMAP. The intention was to raise awareness in Europe about the Arctic environment.

The Arctic environment has also been included in several general EEA publications over the years. The recently published “Europe’s environment-The Fourth assessment”⁹ addresses the Arctic region and related key challenges in the chapters on climate change, chemicals, environment and health and the quality of life.

EEA can also support the reports of other organisations that highlight the Arctic. For example, when UNEP launched its “Global outlook on snow and ice” on World Environment Day 2007, EEA facilitated the participation of two of the lead authors at meetings in Brussels in the European Commission and the Environment Committee of the Parliament.

Most recently, EEA has made a film about climate change in the Arctic and adaptation to a warmer climate in Greenland. The film, which was premiered on Monday 26 November 2007, follows an EEA team participating in a multi-sport competition in Tasiilaq. It is an attempt to communicate climate issues to a broader audience than is possible with the standard reports and it will hopefully get the same broad distribution on TV channels as the previous films from this race.

Cooperation with the Arctic Council

EEA has cooperated with AMAP in the preparation of its second report on Arctic environment issues published in 2004 (mentioned above).

AMAP has recently been invited to EEA workshops on the development of indicators for reporting on the state of the European marine environment (EMMA). AMAP is also in the reference group for our coming reports about climate change in Europe, where indicators are being included on the Greenland ice sheet and polar sea ice in addition to other cryosphere indicators.

The EEA’s executive director, Professor Jacqueline McGlade, chairs the UN expert group dealing with the evaluation of existing marine assessments globally¹⁰. This group will propose a way that UN can report on the state of the

⁸ See http://reports.eea.europa.eu/environmental_issue_report_2004_38/en

⁹ See http://reports.eea.europa.eu/state_of_environment_report_2007_1/en

¹⁰ “Assessment of assessments”, see <http://www.unep.org/dewa/assessments/EcoSystems/water/MarineAssessment/index.asp>

world's oceans Within the expert group EEA is responsible for the Arctic and has established contacts with PAME.

Possible contributions to the work of the Arctic Council

Although EEA has had a long interest and engagement in the Arctic, the activities have not been systematic and continuous. The EEA Management Board with representation from all member countries has encouraged the Agency to focus more on the region. In-house capacities have therefore been strengthened with the addition of an Arctic advisor. A more continuous and permanent relationship to the Arctic Council is to be strived for.

Apart from participating in the SAO meetings in order to obtain and keep up to date an overview of activities and initiatives in the area, the EEA is interested in participating in relevant activities of the Arctic Council working groups. Central areas for the Agency to explore are climate change and adaptation, pollutants, biodiversity and marine management. In all these areas, the Agency has activities and expertise which could provide a valuable contribution to the working groups (e.g. from the upcoming network on climate adaptation and our planned biodiversity 2010 report) and/or the Arctic council members can provide information that can be used in the Agency's work to highlight the situation in the Arctic.

It would be very useful to discuss how Arctic issues can be incorporated into Eionet activities, e.g. through regular reporting on selected indicators from the Arctic. This is probably the best way to ensure that Arctic perspectives are brought into EEA's routine reporting activities. The five European Arctic countries which are members of both the EEA and the Arctic Council are interested in developing a coordinated approach for the sharing of information with the EEA and the Arctic Council and in their participation in relevant assessments. A coordinated approach could provide a more consolidated European perspective and input to the deliberations of the Arctic Council to the benefit of the EU and its neighbours.

Finally, the EEA is interested in developing a regional web site about the Arctic environment on the EEA web site with links to assessments, reports, monitoring results, projects, etc from the Arctic Council in order to promote this work, raise awareness and give easy access to Community bodies and other partners across Europe working in this field.

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