



---

# STATEMENT BY THE NETHERLANDS ON ITS INVOLVEMENT IN THE WORK OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

The Netherlands wishes to congratulate the Arctic Council with its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and welcomes this opportunity to present its remarks at the occasion of the 12th Arctic Council Ministerial meeting.

With this statement we want to reconfirm our commitment to the Arctic Council as the main forum for dialogue and cooperation on Arctic affairs, and inform you about the Dutch involvement and contributions.

In addition we wish to thank the Icelandic Chairmanship for successfully taking the work of the Council forward during these challenging times of Covid-19. In particular we convey our compliments to the Chairmanship for their efforts to strengthen the ‘meaningful engagement’ with the observers.

## The Netherlands and the Arctic

Even though our national borders do not cross the polar circle, the Netherlands does have a strong connection to the region. These ties go back to 1594, when Willem Barentsz started an expedition in search of the Northern passage. They continue into today, if only through migratory birds crossing from the Arctic to the Dutch Wadden area and Zeeland every year. The Arctic is of unique value for humankind and for ecosystem earth. Unfortunately this area suffers to a large extent from the consequences of climate change. Global warming leads to ice loss and puts pressure on biodiversity. We see it as our joint responsibility to make sure the Arctic’s value will be maintained.

These developments have both direct and indirect consequences for the Netherlands, such as sea-level rise due to the melting polar ice caps, more extreme global weather, changes in biodiversity, new economic opportunities and changing geopolitical relations. That is an additional reason for the Netherlands to contribute to polar research and international cooperation in the region.

For some time now, Dutch polar policy has rested on three key concepts: sustainability, international cooperation and scientific research. In the new [Polar Strategy 2021-2025](#) “Prepared for Change” the Netherlands reaffirms its commitment to these corner stones of polar policy. Even at this time of rapid change, these cornerstones remain relevant, and we continue to regard them as the foundations of our polar policy. All aspects of climate change, safety and security now receive more attention than they did in the past. The Netherlands will continue working to protect the ecosystems and environment of the polar regions, strengthen international cooperation and ensure that economic activity is sustainable.



In the Arctic region, Dutch efforts focus primarily on the protection of human interests, the environment, and international security and stability. Where there is economic activity, we encourage compliance with international agreements and standards concerning sustainability. These efforts take several forms, including support for and (where necessary) reinforcement of the international legal and administrative frameworks, based on the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)*. We also help preserve political stability in the region, as an active observer at the Arctic Council and in our bilateral contacts with the Arctic states, where we emphasise the importance of cooperation and engagement on the part of all relevant actors. With developments in the region accelerating, dialogue and cooperation on the Arctic region are more important than ever.

#### The Netherlands' engagement in the Arctic Council

The Netherlands started active participation in AMAP in 1993, and has contributed actively to the work of the Arctic Council since its establishment in 1996. The Netherlands regards the Arctic Council as the primary circumpolar policy forum for sustainable Arctic development and management of the area. Experienced Dutch Arctic scientists, based in Groningen, have a long-term active involvement in three working groups (AMAP, CAFF and SDWG) and in 2019 the Netherlands also became active in PAME with a representative of [Wageningen University & Research](#). One of the pressing themes that deserves attention and action is marine litter. As a country, we agreed to make our economy fully circular by 2050. The research conducted in this group supports our efforts and vice versa. And last but not least, the Netherlands is increasingly active within the PAME working group on shipping. The Netherlands supports sustainable development of the Arctic and securing responsible shipping is highly important to protect the Arctic environment.

Government officials always attend meetings of the Council (SAO, ministerial) and Observer meetings organised by the Arctic Council. As such they promote and support Dutch scientific research in the Arctic.

Dutch polar researchers are active in a variety of fields, but have especially good reputations in glaciology, oceanography, biology, international law, human & social sciences and marine litter. The *Netherlands Polar Research Programme* enables the experts to make a substantive contribution to the work of the Arctic Council. The Netherlands stimulates participation by experts – policy makers, researchers and representatives from industry and NGO's – in seminars/workshops/expert groups, for example Arctic Frontiers and the Arctic Circle.

Dutch Arctic research is considered to be of high-quality. The [Dutch Arctic Centre](#) – based in Groningen, the 'Dutch High North' - is specialized in many of the themes central to the Arctic Council working groups. One of our areas of expertise is Arctic migratory birds. Many migratory birds that winter in the Dutch Wadden area and in the delta's in Zeeland brood in the Arctic. Furthermore, Dutch research initiatives like the upcoming [SEES expedition](#) - that will embark in August 2022 - provide researchers with relevant knowledge and data to share within the Arctic Council working groups.

Finally, we want to take this opportunity to wish you a productive Ministerial meeting. We very much look forward to continuing our fruitful cooperation with this Council – under the upcoming Russian Chairmanship - in the coming years.