

Cover sheet

Full name of state or organization: The West Nordic Council

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Observer's website, if appropriate: www.vestnordisk.is

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

X Yes No

Observer Review Report

Please describe in no more than two pages your state's 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. Please detail any collaboration with Permanent Participants, such as project proposal endorsement and support.

The West Nordic Council was admitted as an observer to the Arctic Council in 2017. The West Nordic Council has since 2018 attended all SAO meetings and the Ministerial Meeting in Rovaniemi in 2019. The West Nordic Council has prioritized its engagement in the Arctic Council Working Group; the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG). Staff from The West Nordic Council has attended SDWG-meetings for the past two years. The results from the meetings have been of great value to politicians in the West Nordic Council in their general parliamentary work within the Arctic field. It has, for example, been a significant factor in the choice of the upcoming West Nordic Council theme for 2020-2021, namely young people in the Arctic and their living conditions, especially in outer coastal and rural districts.

Involvement of teenagers and adolescents in the works of the Arctic Council has been high on the agenda in the SDWG Working Group, and Arctic Council on a broader scale, during 2019/2020. The West Nordic Council has addressed this issue in several contexts and has, for example, worked with abuse of drugs and alcohol as a subject.

On the Monday leading up to the SDWG meeting in Isafjörður in September 2019 The West Nordic Council co-arranged a conference under the title: "Strengths, Well-being and Engagement of Youth". The West Nordic Council moderated the conference that had a widespread participation of experts, politicians, and participants from the SDWG working group, highlighting the important subject of the conditions of youth in the Arctic.

If applicable, please describe in no more than one page your state's 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 West Nordic Council has intentions about taking advantage of the Icelandic Chairmanship in 2019-21. The Secretariat of the Council is located in Reykjavik, offering better opportunities for activities on a broader scale than otherwise. Our plans have, however, been somewhat hampered by the Corona pandemic of 2020.

The West Nordic Council has in April 2020 proposed to the Icelandic Chairmanship and the SDWG Secretariat that The West Nordic Council should facilitate a presentation about Youth and Adolescents in the Arctic during the SDWG meeting in October in Egilsstadir. The presentation was mainly supposed to give expert views on how to secure equal access to education in both rural and urban areas of the Arctic. The chairmanship has because of the Corona crisis for the time being declined such a presentation in direct connection to the SDWG meeting since a lot of the general planning of the chair has been derailed. The West Nordic Council has, of course, the highest understanding of this situation. As an alternative to directly participating on the SDWG meeting, the West Nordic Council intends to arrange a conference, probably in Reykjavik in the days leading up to the SDWG meeting in October in Egilsstadir. On this conference, preferably co-arranged with university experts and a permanent participant, The West Nordic Council will put young people in the Arctic on the Agenda.

In June 2021, The West Nordic Council will arrange an open theme conference spanning a whole day where we will put Young People in the West Nordic part of the Arctic on the Agenda. The theme conference will be held in Qaqortoq, Southern Greenland. During the conference university experts, politicians, locals and teachers will present their views on the status of young people in the coastal and rural regions and the Arctic, where health, education, innovation, startup business, abuse of drugs and alcohol will be among the subjects. It is our hope that we will be able to have participation from the ICC (Inuit Circumpolar Council) at the conference.

The West Nordic Council continuously monitors the projects in the SDWG with a view to assessing whether there are any projects that appear relevant for the participation of a small council with a limited budget and staff.

If applicable, please describe in no more than one page your state's 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.

During 2019/20 the West Nordic Council has been working ambitiously with the position of the three West Nordic languages, Greenlandic, Icelandic and Faroese. The languages share some important elements, being small Arctic languages spoken by relatively few people and challenged by other languages, English in particular. The languages have, however, also dissimilarities, among these are that Greenlandic is an indigenous language challenged by Danish in many societal and administrative aspects, while Icelandic is a significantly larger language with stronger financial and linguistic technological strength. The Faroese language is on many aspects placed in the middle. The West Nordic Council arranged a large open conference on the subject in Tórshavn in January 2020 and has also raised awareness on the subject in other circumstances. We have, however, not identified the challenges of the Arctic languages directly on the Arctic Council's present agenda. If this happens in the future, the West Nordic Council would very much like to contribute with the knowledge that we possess on these important matters.

At the Arctic Circle Assembly 2019 in Reykjavik The West Nordic Council arranged two breakout sessions with a clear Arctic focus. One centered on how small Arctic nations can thrive in the new geopolitical reality of the Arctic, while the other presented positive ways of overcoming the challenges that the small Arctic languages, Greenlandic, Icelandic and Faroese face. Both breakout sessions had ministers and other prominent speakers from Arctic governments, parliaments and the academia.

The West Nordic Council has for many years been a committed partner in The Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, SCPAR, the most important parliamentary cooperation of the Arctic.

The West Nordic Council regularly organizes events, conferences, and participate in the general debate on Arctic matters with a prevalent focus on culture, economy, geopolitics, and international cooperation in the region. It is our strong belief that all our initiatives are in line with the values and goals of the Arctic Council.