



PRESS RELEASE

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Arctic Council on Right Track – But Slow Track

The Arctic Council Ministers took many of the right steps today in laying out the council's work for the next two years, but some were baby steps.

“We are disappointed that the Council is not moving faster to address such urgent issues as preventing oil spills, and reducing the impacts of regional and global climate change.” says Alexander Shestakov of WWF. “They have not completely ignored these issues, but have put them on the back burner for two years. The pace of change in the Arctic does not allow for a two year time-out.”

Because the Council operates on a consensus basis, any one state can block a proposal. For instance, Russia was singled out by the Arctic Athabaskan Council, one of the Indigenous peoples' organizations at the Arctic Council, for blocking negotiations a on black carbon agreement. Black carbon, commonly called soot, is produced by burning diesel and other fuels and is blamed for increasing Arctic melting.

The council is taking positive and decisive steps in other areas of its work. Ministers approved recommendations aimed at dealing with climate-driven threats to Arctic biodiversity, and gave instructions for those recommendations to be followed up. They also decided to boost cooperation on a UN agreement to strengthen shipping rules in the Arctic. An agreement on responding to oil spills was also officially signed. As an official observer WWF worked with council members on the agreement, and will be watching to ensure that the agreement is effectively implemented. WWF welcomes the increased focus on business interests in the Arctic, on the assumption that this will not interfere with the traditional focus on environmental protection and sustainability, or undermine the interests of the Arctic's Indigenous peoples.

“We will continue to work with the Council on its conservation and sustainability initiatives, and will watch to ensure that it follows up on commitments” says Shestakov. “They don't always go as far as we'd like, or as fast as we think is necessary, but we believe that concerted action by the Arctic states, Indigenous peoples, and observers is the only way to address the challenges facing Arctic wildlife and peoples, and the Council provides a framework for that.”

WWF welcomes the new observers, and looks forward to their positive contribution to the work of the Council, and to helping advance Arctic issues in other international fora.

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About WWF

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with almost five million supporters and a global network active in more than 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.