



The Kiruna Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council – WWF input

May 15, 2013

WWF has played a constructive role as Observer at the Arctic Council since it was formed in 1996. In the past two years of the Swedish chairmanship, we have added capacity, advice and input to a variety of Arctic Council initiatives, including the Arctic resilience report, the report on life linked to ice, the expert group on ecosystem based management, and the agreement on oil spill preparedness and response. We commend the Council and the Swedish Chair on their achievements in the past two years, but note much practical action remains on the agenda for the Council to meet its twin goals of sustainable development and environmental protection, as outlined in its founding document, the Ottawa declaration.

Acting on Climate Change

Climate change remains the prime driving force in both the development and degradation of the Arctic. Climate change in the Arctic also drives global impacts, such as water level rise, affecting hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Arctic states are not the only ones responsible for the extent of Arctic climate change, but they are well-positioned to lead a response. Firstly, they can take action on “black carbon”. This is mostly soot emitted by industrial sources, and by agricultural burning. Evidence gathered so far by the Council and other sources suggests the black carbon emitted the furthest north has the greatest effect on warming and melting in the Arctic. *WWF recommends the Arctic Council extend the mandate of the Task Force on Short Lived Climate Forcers, to develop an international instrument to reduce emissions of short lived climate forcers, especially black carbon emitted at high latitudes.*

The Arctic states should also coordinate a common approach to the United Nations climate negotiations with the goal of a climate agreement by 2015 that will keep the global average temperature from rising by more than two degrees. As some of the world’s biggest producers of greenhouse gas pollution, the Arctic states have an obligation to lead in these negotiations.

At the same time as reducing climate change, Arctic states can act to reduce climate stress on the region. A development agenda must be balanced with the need to protect areas that will most help to make the Arctic resilient to coming climate-driven changes. *We recommend that Arctic states continue to work toward operationalizing the principles of ecosystem based management, rather than just managing single activities, or places. WWF urges the Arctic Council to lead the coordination of a common approach to ecosystem based management.* This form of management is necessary for ecosystems to continue to provide valuable services to local communities, the Arctic region, and to global systems. Finally, *we also propose that Arctic states develop recommendations for the next (2015) Ministerial meeting to advance the creation of a pan-Arctic network of specially managed areas underpinning biodiversity conservation and ecosystem resilience.*

Oil and Gas

The risks and potential impacts associated with Arctic offshore oil and gas development are currently largely unknown and what is known shows risks are unacceptably high and unmanageable. *WWF believes that without proper regulation of operations, available proven techniques for prevention and response to oil spills and adequate knowledge about Arctic systems there should be no new development of hydrocarbons in the Arctic offshore.* This unreadiness to drill was graphically illustrated by Shell's series of mishaps as it attempted to drill off Alaska last year.

The Arctic Council Member Governments have gone some way toward safer development by their agreement on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response for Arctic Waters. WWF is also participating in the efforts being made by the Council to address the prevention of oil spills through the report "*Recommended Practices for Arctic Oil Spill Prevention*" and its recommendations. *We recommend that the Arctic Council now needs to further advance its work on oil spill prevention by negotiating an international instrument on marine oil spill prevention.*

Environmentally Sound Arctic Shipping Operations

As climate change eats away at Arctic sea ice, increasing numbers of ships use the Arctic Ocean to transport goods and to bring newly accessible Arctic resources to southern markets. More boats travelling Arctic waters pressure the biodiversity and ecosystems of the region, and raise prospects of catastrophic impacts from spills.

There are international agreements, both existing and in negotiation that can help deal with these pressures. But at present, the Arctic states are not acting in a concerted and coordinated fashion to ensure these agreements provide the protection needed, such as a ban on polluting heavy fuel oil in Arctic waters. *We recommend the Arctic Council create a coordinated voice by Arctic states in international agreements to update Arctic-specific shipping measures relevant to safety and environmental protection.*