

Common objectives and priorities for the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish chairmanships of the Arctic Council (2006-2012)

The Arctic Council (AC) is a high-level forum for cooperation, coordination and interaction between Arctic states, indigenous communities and other Arctic residents on issues such as sustainable development and environmental protection. The AC provides a valuable platform for discussions on all issues of relevance to the Arctic and the people who live there.

Delivering results on the major challenges facing the Arctic region takes more time than a two-year chairmanship allows. The purpose of this paper is to promote continuity in the work of the AC by identifying common objectives and priorities for the next three chairmanships.

Climate change

The next three chairmanships will continue to follow up on the findings of the ACIA report and pursue implementation of the recommendations set out in the ACIA Policy Document adopted at the 2004 Ministerial Meeting.

The AC should continue its efforts to provide high quality information on climate change that includes input from all Arctic states and peoples. Updated information on the consequences of and challenges posed by climate change in the Arctic should be gathered and presented to AC Member States at regular intervals. The AC should maintain its special focus on the effects of climate change on Arctic residents and the traditional ways of life of indigenous peoples.

AC Member States will be encouraged to share and discuss their experiences. Topics for discussion could include Member States' experience of taking action to develop and implement local adaptation strategies for Arctic areas, of introducing local measures to reduce climate gases, of reviewing best practices, and of developing and using renewable energy resources in the Arctic.

Integrated management of resources

Sustainable use of resources and protection of the environment will be important issues for the AC in coming years. Due regard should be paid to the needs of Arctic communities and indigenous peoples. It is of vital importance that high environmental standards are applied to all activities, and that all use of natural resources is sustainable and ecosystem-based. The environment faces pressure from multiple uses, and a holistic perspective on the management of activities and the environment is therefore required.

As many Arctic ecosystems cross national boundaries, international cooperation is a prerequisite for sustainable development. A key objective for the next three chairmanships will be to enhance discussion on and promote the integrated management of natural resource use in accordance with high environmental standards.

More work is also needed on the management of chemicals, to eliminate such threats to people and the environment as chemical waste and diffuse contamination. The chairmanships

will continue to develop cooperation initiatives, and will promote the exchange of experience and lessons learned in relation to prevention, preparedness and response in the Arctic, to ensure that effective measures can be implemented where accidents involving oil or other hazardous materials occur.

The International Polar Year 2007-2008 (IPY)

The IPY will boost scientific research in the Arctic and highlight the importance of the polar regions through several major events. The next three chairmanships will work closely with the IPY Joint Committee to provide political support for the IPY effort and to ensure that IPY results are taken into account in policy-making.

An important task for the AC will be to help to ensure that the IPY leaves a legacy in the form of permanent, long-term, integrated circumpolar observation and monitoring of change in the Arctic that are closely linked to relevant institutions in AC Member States. Indigenous knowledge and community-based monitoring should be an integral component of these measures. The quantity and quality of the data gathered should be improved through better coordination and improved data management.

Economic and social statistics on changes in the Arctic are not readily available. The AC should consider establishing a permanent forum for coordinating observations and monitoring environmental data and relevant economic and social statistics.

Sustainable development and integrated management call for a multi-disciplinary approach and multi-disciplinary expertise. The next three chairmanships will work to enhance relations between the AC and the international Arctic science community. OK

Indigenous peoples and local living conditions

For many indigenous peoples, a combination of subsistence living and paid work provides the economic basis for a way of life that bridges traditional and modern modes of production. Reindeer husbandry and hunting for Arctic mammals are activities unique to the Arctic. A cluster to bring together the various AC activities in this field should be considered.

Documentation and research on indigenous issues such as indigenous languages should be promoted in the interests of preserving culture and identity.

The work that the AC has done on health issues thus far has been useful. The newly created health cluster needs to be further strengthened to increase knowledge about the connections between specific diseases and social, cultural and environmental parameters, and about the relationships between conditions during childhood and health patterns and wellbeing, with a view to developing methods of intervention. The use of distance-spanning technologies and renewable energy sources in the Arctic to counteract the difficulties caused by sparse populations should be further explored.

Management issues

The AC can look back on 10 years of successful cooperation, and 15 years of working to implement the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy. Valuable experience has been gained.

It is very important that the AC continues ongoing evaluations of how it works, to ensure that its limited resources are used as efficiently as possible.

A joint secretariat, led by the Chair of Senior Arctic Officials (SAO), will be established in Tromsø for the period 2006-2012.

The sharing of information between participants and with other countries, organisations and the general public is an important instrument in the Arctic cooperation. The AC website will be regularly updated, to ensure that it is a practical and useful tool for all interested parties.

Efforts will be made to continuously highlight Arctic perspectives and Arctic concerns in relevant major international processes.

Ministerial Meetings could be moved to the spring to take advantage of the more favourable weather conditions in the Arctic during that season.