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Arctic Council Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation (TFAMC) 1st meeting September 21-22, 2015, in Oslo, Co-chairs summary report

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TFAMC Co-Chairs

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Co-Chairs Meeting Summary

Arctic Council Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation

1st meeting September 21-22, 2015, in Oslo

Co-chairs summary report

Introduction

The Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation (TFAMC) held its first meeting in Oslo, Norway on September 21-22, 2015. The meeting was chaired by Kjell Kristian Egge (Norway) together with Brian Israel (US) and Jóhann Sigurjónsson (Iceland). All Arctic States and three Permanent Participant organizations (the Saami Council, the Inuit Circumpolar Council and the Aleut International Association) attended the meeting. Nine observers were present (France, Germany, the Republic of Korea, United Kingdom, the European Union, CCU, SCPAR, UNEP and WWF).

The point of departure for the discussions was the mandate set forth in the April 2015 Iqaluit Declaration and SAO Report to Ministers. The co-chairs recalled that the mandate is to assess future needs for a regional seas program or other mechanism, as appropriate, for increased cooperation in Arctic marine areas, and to make recommendations on the nature and scope of any such mechanisms. Ministers' decision to form the Task Force did not constitute a decision to establish a cooperation mechanism; The Task Force's deliverable is a report to Ministers in 2017. It was emphasized that while the mandate is quite broad, the SAO Report provides substantial direction as to the questions the Task Force should answer in its report, and the order in which it should take up these questions.

The co-chairs suggested that addressing the needs assessment component of the mandate is the logical starting point for the work of the TFAMC. Delegations concurred.

Information gathering

The agenda was structured to facilitate information gathering and relatively informal discussions at this early stage. To facilitate the Task Force's needs assessment, the chairs of three Arctic Council Working Groups (PAME, CAFF and AMAP) were invited to present an overview of their past and present work identifying needs and objectives for international cooperation in relation to Arctic marine areas. To contribute to delegates' understanding of existing cooperative mechanisms relevant to the Arctic, as well as mechanisms for marine cooperation in other parts of the world, brief presentations were given by the following organizations: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES); North Pacific Marine Sciences Organization (PICES); International Arctic Science Committee (IASC); OSPAR; HELCOM; and the Sargasso Sea Commission.

A presentation offering broader context for the Task Force's work was also provided by Alf Håkon Hoel, former Research Director at the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research.

All presentations will be made available on the Arctic Council website.

Discussions

In general, delegations expressed that they approached the work of the TFAMC with an open mind and looked forward to identifying potential opportunities for future Arctic marine cooperation. Some

delegations cautioned that in this time of strained budgets and competing priorities, proposals for new cooperative ventures will be closely scrutinized in terms of need.

A number of delegations expressed the view that an assessment of *future needs* for cooperation should encompass not only *gaps* (i.e., what is not happening), but also opportunities (i.e., optimizing existing cooperation, making it more cost effective, etc.).

A number of desirable values for Arctic marine cooperation were mentioned by several delegations, including:

- The importance of involving the people living in the Arctic at all stages, and utilizing the knowledge possessed by local communities;
- The value of cooperation and coordination on an Arctic regional basis;
- Flexibility and adaptability to change. This was emphasized as an especially important attribute of cooperative mechanisms in view of the uncertainties in the future of the Arctic Ocean.

The 2015-2025 Arctic Marine Strategic Plan was generally recognized as an important point of departure for the Task Force' needs assessment. In particular, several delegations identified progress towards an ecosystem approach as a need for further international cooperation. Other needs identified, by several delegations, on a preliminary basis, included:

- Coordination across Arctic Council subsidiary bodies, and between the Arctic Council and other fora, on cross-cutting issues relating to the Arctic marine environment;
- Following up recommendations adopted by the Council;
- Ensuring stable funding for essential monitoring of the Arctic marine environment.
- In addition, several delegations identified community-based monitoring as an important opportunity for future marine cooperation.

Co-chairs' proposal for intersessional work between first and second meeting

The co-chairs stressed that significant intersessional work was needed between Task Force meetings, and circulated a proposal for conducting such work between the first and second meetings. By the end of October, the co-chairs will prepare and circulate their first draft proposal for elements that could go into a needs assessment chapter of the TFAMC report. Arctic States and Permanent Participants Heads of Delegation will be requested to provide comments on the draft to the ACS within 30 days. After integrating delegations' feedback, the co-chairs will circulate a revised co-chairs' draft for consideration by delegates before the second meeting.

The co-chairs emphasized that fulfilling the mandate will require substantial intersessional discussions among delegations and with interested stakeholders. The co-chairs' intersessional proposals will be intended to facilitate these discussions.

Next meeting

The next meeting of TFAMC is scheduled for 4-5 February, 2016 back to back with the PAME working group meeting, in Stockholm, Sweden.