



## TASK FORCE ON ENHANCING SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION IN THE ARCTIC

### Benefits to people living in the Arctic

- Increased international scientific cooperation is needed to improve our knowledge of the changing Arctic, and resilience of Arctic ecosystems, environment and societies.

### MANDATE

From the Kiruna Declaration:

*Agree that cooperation in scientific research across the circumpolar Arctic is of great importance to the work of the Arctic Council, and establish a Task Force to work towards an arrangement on improved scientific research cooperation among the eight Arctic States,*

### SUMMARY

Under the co-chairmanship of representatives from Sweden, the Russian Federation and the United States, the Scientific Cooperation Task Force met five times, with participation from all Arctic States, Permanent Participants, and some observers. Delegations confirmed the importance of scientific research in the Arctic, the role of traditional knowledge and, given the elevated cost of performing research in the Arctic, the importance of efficiency and collaboration to further research in areas of common interest. Delegations then focused on the need to remove obstacles to collaboration and to support efficiency in collaborative Arctic research. The Task Force identified several key areas where shared efforts could improve scientific cooperation including sharing of data and metadata, facilitating the movement of people, samples and equipment across borders for the purposes of conducting research, facilitating logistics and access to research areas, and facilitating access to research facilities. The Task Force concluded that a high-level agreement was the best mechanism to advance the objectives set by the Ministers in Kiruna, and the text of a draft Memorandum of Understanding was initially discussed. In the course of these discussions, it became clear that addressing issues such as the movement of people and equipment across borders and access to research areas may require significant involvement from a wide range of government agencies and stakeholders that do not have a science mandate. It was agreed that resolution on these issues may benefit from the force of a legally binding agreement.

The Task Force recommends to SAOs, for inclusion in the Iqaluit Declaration, that the Task Force work towards a legally binding Agreement on scientific cooperation with a view to completing its work during the US Chairmanship.



## DELIVERABLES/ACHIEVEMENTS

Through a series of meetings held in Stockholm, Helsinki, Reykjavik, Tromsø and Oslo, the Task Force identified the importance of improving data sharing and simplifying the logistics and regulations involved with research clearances and cross-border movements of researchers and their equipment. Arctic States presented their lists of national research priorities, which were then compiled into a list of many shared priorities. These priorities are also shared by international science planning bodies.

The International Arctic Science Committee made a presentation emphasizing how cross-border logistics has been made easier during the International Polar Year of 2007/2008, as a possible model for more permanent improvements. The text of a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding was developed as a basis for further discussions. Because several delegations felt that it would be preferable to present a legally binding agreement to Ministers, all delegations agreed to identify domestic jurisdictional implications.

Delegations agreed to recommend to the SAOs that the Ministers be asked to support a continued mandate for the Task Force to work towards a legally binding agreement during the U.S. chairmanship. Using the draft MOU as a starting point, delegations discussed the scope of the agreement, underlying issues related to customs and border regulations and the role of non-parties in relation to the agreement, and elements that could be included. It was recognized that as the next meeting would involve negotiation of a legally binding agreement, that the meeting would only go forward if all Arctic State delegations were ready to proceed at that point.

At the last Task Force meeting, delegations discussed the text of a legally binding agreement. It was understood that this work would not be considered formal negotiations on a legally binding agreement, but would focus on clarifying objectives, terms of reference and other parameters of the possible agreement.

In 2015 Ministers decided to extend the Task Force mandate, including to work towards a legally-binding agreement on scientific cooperation, with a view to completing its work no later than the next Ministerial meeting.