

UK-Arctic Stakeholders

Report of the Conference held at The Scottish Association for Marine Sciences (SAMS), Oban (10-12 March 2008)

Executive Summary

The speed of climatic change in the Arctic and the associated impacts and opportunities mean that ‘business as usual’, with respect to the way the UK interacts with the region (both politically and commercially), is unlikely to be a sustainable or viable approach.

The wide-ranging discussion focusing on the UK’s interests in the Arctic led to a number of conclusions and specific actions or deliverables including:

- i) Greater coordination and communication is needed across Government, Research Councils and wider Stakeholders;
- ii) Development of an overall UK “Arctic Statement” could help discrete policy areas such as energy security, shipping, tourism etc to determine their importance and relevance to Arctic matters.
- iii) The UK should continue to engage with the Arctic Council and continue to draw attention to areas of interest.
- iv) UK-Arctic State bilateral engagement on key Arctic issues of interest to the UK should be increased/maintained. The UK should also continue dialogue with Arctic States to discuss how Arctic policy areas should be best taken forward.
- v) A UK Arctic stakeholder mapping or family tree exercise should be carried out to show the main areas of interest and activity and the key players involved;
- vi) An ‘Arctic Network’ of key UK Arctic players should also be developed.

The key areas for further UK future engagement were identified as being mainly commercial and scientific in nature.

Introduction and Background

The International Polar Year (IPY), launched in March 2007, provides a unique global stimulus for an increase in science in the polar regions. This unprecedented focus of attention, coupled with a number of recent UK-lead events looking at wider polar issues, presented a timely opportunity to discuss the key issues relating to UK interests in the Arctic.

Consequently, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office hosted an informal meeting of representatives of key Government Departments and bodies, NGOs, Polar Institutions, academics, researchers and relevant Arctic industry representatives (oil and gas, fishing, tourism, shipping, etc) at the Scottish Association for Marine Sciences (SAMS) in Oban, Scotland, UK, from 10-12 March 2008. (See Annex I for full list of participants).

The meeting consisted of presentations by selected speakers (see Annex II for presentation summaries) followed by discussion in both plenary and breakout groups. All discussions were held under Chatham House Rules.

The principal aim of the meeting was to address the key issues and challenges the UK faces in the Arctic and to have in-depth discussions surrounding the UK policy approaches to the region. The Event aimed to answer questions such as:

- Is the UK collectively maximising its interests and opportunities in the Arctic?
- What are the future changes and challenges in the Arctic? How should the UK respond to these?
- How do we ensure that we maximise the benefits arising from UK science in the region?
- Should we have an overarching UK-Arctic policy or strategy?
- How should the UK engage on matters of Arctic Governance?
- What sort of Governance framework would best deliver to the priorities of the UK?

Discussion

Building on the presentations, and the series of questions above, the subsequent discussion groups and feedback sessions focussed on the following areas:

- The key themes, main challenges and identification of gaps
- Governance and policy issues

The discussions came up with an overview of how the UK could address differing Arctic interests and activities: Grouped into four areas; Sustain, Exploit, Understand and Influence - summarised below:

Sustain	<p><u>Arctic Wildlife</u>: Ensuring that present flora and fauna populations can adjust to climatic changes</p> <p><u>Fisheries</u>: Maintaining viable commercial stocks and ensuring adaptation to climatic change</p> <p><u>Pollution Mitigation and Reduction</u>: Moving towards the enforcement of the polluter pays principle</p> <p><u>UK Nationals</u>: Supporting the UK tourism industry in the region and ensuring the well being of ‘British citizens in the Arctic’</p>
Exploit	<p><u>Oil, Gas, Minerals</u>: Support the success and activities of British companies operating in the Arctic</p> <p><u>Tourism</u>: Support UK companies operating in the region</p> <p><u>Shipping</u>: Work to ensure freedom of navigation and international consensus in the region</p>
Understand	<p><u>Science and Research Strategy</u>: Striving for better coordination and higher profile UK Arctic Science</p> <p><u>Hazards</u>: Understanding and predicting Arctic environmental hazards</p> <p><u>Climate Change</u>: Understanding and predicting the short and long term effects of climate change in the Arctic</p>
Influence	<p><u>Svalbard</u>: Work towards greater clarity and look for positive ways forward</p>

	<p><u>Knowledge Transfer:</u> Look to increase the flow of knowledge transfer between the UK and Arctic States, as well as between UK Stakeholders</p> <p><u>International Cooperation:</u> Increase and maintain the amount of UK bilateral, multilateral and regional engagement in the Arctic where appropriate</p> <p><u>Defence:</u> Maintain the <i>status quo</i></p>
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Discussion outcomes and points made:

Key Themes

a) Commercial Interests

Hydrocarbon industry representatives felt that it was important to have a level playing field in the region. An agreement like the 1992 OSPAR Convention for the protection of the marine environment of the North East Atlantic could be applied to the Arctic.

UK industry is finding it difficult to move into new oil and gas fields, there are no voices to protect UK interests in the region – industry would welcome a UK policy on the region. UK power companies are coming together to tackle climate change – is there scope for UK industry to do so for the Arctic? It was suggested that there is a need for a mechanism to bring together UK commercial interests and the various research institutions.

The point of view of the fishing industry was that there are clear future opportunities in the region stemming from the predicted redistribution of fish stocks and the possible emergence of new RFMOs.

In terms of shipping, it was recognised that the issues and challenges facing the region are of great importance; however, they are not necessarily high on the agenda of the shipping community at present primarily because of the time-scales involved.

The UK-Arctic Tourism industry also took the view that increased accessibility to the region from the expected ice-melt would give rise to increased commercial tourism activity from the UK.

Given the £10 million estimated value of the UK-Arctic fishing industry, it was suggested that a fiscal analysis of the entire region for UK engagement could be a good exercise. (Treasury and BERR would need to be consulted)

b) Science Interests

It was suggested that there needs to be further international coordination of existing Arctic data – large amounts of data are held by the Russians, and not easily accessible. IPY has demonstrated that international data collaboration works.

The UK needs to promote greater bilateral scientific relationships, as well as highlighting that the UK science community is a leader at dealing with environmental uncertainties.

The science into policy interface should also be developed further to identify how the science can best support the policy – it was mentioned that the contributions of some 200 UK scientists are not feeding into UK policy in any tangible way. There should be more use of tools such as databases and the harnessing of current non-Arctic UK expertise in areas such as engineering, petroleum geology and fisheries. The social sciences could also be further developments in the social sciences, around areas such as environmental management, law, history, education and economics.

There was broad agreement that a UK Secretariat or Forum would be useful in the science arena. Not necessarily a British Arctic Survey, but possibly based on the JNCC model, to help with coordination, (both across research councils and HMG as well as institutions, industry etc) and possibly be involved with processes such as sustainable extraction for example.

The underlining question of funding was a major factor in the discussions. How can any further work be funded? It was suggested that now was a good time to apply to NERC for potential funding – NERC have staff dedicated to Arctic affairs.

It was suggested that an overarching UK-Arctic science strategy could provide a suitable framework for future work.

c) Environmental Protection

There is a need for more science to be undertaken to look at specific species, especially fish, and how they will be effected by climate change and reducing ice cover.

Alien species were an important omission. Increases in shipping through the region and carriage (and discharge) of ballast water could give rise to introduction of invasive alien species as well as increased incidence of algal blooms. The UK is in a strong position to take forward work on this area because of its relevance in relation to fishing and the increased likelihood of Arctic species taking hold in UK waters.

There is potential for the UK to get involved with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) to further our Arctic Biodiversity interests.

d) Governance and Policy

It was noted that the Arctic is highlighted in many international forums, (such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants) and that the UK is active in a number of these.

The UK is a State Observer to the Arctic Council (only Arctic States are Members) and makes regular contributions to the work of the Council, for example the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA). The number of State Observers to the Arctic Council is growing on an almost annual basis, with China being the latest addition to the group.

There was general agreement that ‘business as usual’ was no longer an option and that the UK now needs to ‘punch above its weight’ at the Arctic Council and have a much more coordinated approach in its engagement with the region.

In conjunction with Arctic Council work there should be further use of bilaterals and engagement with the Rim States, especially Canada, the US, Norway, Denmark and Finland to gain better understanding of their policies and approaches. The UK should make it clear to the Arctic States that it wants to take a more strategic role and become more involved in the issues facing the region.

The concept of a regional seas programme was discussed on a number of occasions, there was general agreement that this might be a useful model in considering maritime governance.

Sending resources (staff) to the Arctic Council secretariat could be a useful way of asserting influence. However it was noted that the Arctic Council have difficulties with engaging State Observers and that they would be unlikely to listen to UK-Arctic Governance policy ideas. NATO was also considered as being an important field for engagement with the Arctic States.

Conclusions

The main conclusion or headline of the conference was the need for better coordination across the whole of the UK sphere of interests. Another key take-home message was the need for identifying gaps and engaging Ministers as appropriate, to take work forward and to commit necessary resources. However it was clear that there was a need to provide some form of governance framework to address issues not covered by the Arctic Council and to facilitate greater stakeholder participation in decision making. It was agreed that the UK should continue to input into the Arctic Council and to consider how to strengthen its role in that and associated fora.

The future security of the region was another important area identified for further consideration in light of recent territorial claims to the region and associated resource access issues.

The future ice-melt and rapid changes expected in the Arctic and how the UK intends to respond to these challenges was highlighted as a key work area for the future.

The Polar Regions Unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office would like to thank all participants for attending the event and for their lively, positive and thought-provoking engagement.