



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROTECTING ARCTIC BIODIVERSITY

LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS



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The Arctic region is characterized by some of the largest continuous intact ecosystems on the planet, but is facing increasingly larger threats. These threats include the full range of stressors known from other parts of the world, namely habitat loss and fragmentation from infrastructure and industrial development, chemical pollution, overharvesting, climate change and invasive species infestations. Many of these pressures are mainly globally driven, including climate change, long-range transported pollution and invasive species infestations. Others, such as harvesting and fragmentation are directly under Arctic governance, though often driven from demands outside of the Arctic region.

This report takes a broad view of existing multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and examines the role of the global environment in impacting and influencing the efficiency of Arctic MEAs in protecting biodiversity and in sustainable development.

The report identifies four major areas where the Arctic nations must strengthen further their funding, ambitions and activities, addressing both Arctic and global issues that influence the future sustainable management and development in the Arctic:

Firstly, **climate change is increasingly impacting Arctic biodiversity**. With low emissions originating from the Arctic itself, Arctic governance must focus primarily on increasing adaptation and resilience of wildlife, fisheries and societies in the Arctic, including through the promotion of indigenous knowledge. As the sources of greenhouse gas emissions are not actually located in the Arctic, the primary search for mitigative solutions needs to be outside the Arctic region. The Arctic region should strengthen investments in co-management and in

supporting programmes of adaptation. However, a coordinated global approach is needed with actions required at all levels.

Secondly, **Arctic nations need to substantially increase the extent of protected areas**, especially in the coastal zone as well as the marine environment. Currently, only a fraction of the marine environment is protected. Only a small part of this is adjacent to terrestrial protected areas, so crucial for Arctic ecosystems. There seems to be a consensus in the literature that existing MEAs are not being implemented to the full extent of their terms for the Arctic. It is difficult, therefore, to determine whether there are inherent problems within the substantive provisions of an agreement or whether a failure of political will, lack of resources and capacity, or other factors are impinging on the effectiveness of MEAs. With this in mind, the protection of areas still remains one of the most effective tools available in



“We are currently witnessing unprecedented change in the Arctic, which will have important and far-reaching consequences not only for the region itself, but for the rest of the world.”



Achim Steiner

United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme

“I remain convinced that Arctic states will continue to lead the way to address both Arctic and global issues that influence the future sustainable management in the Arctic.”

management of Arctic resources, and so is the development of co-management programmes.

Thirdly, **increased monitoring of Arctic wildlife**, and especially of migratory species of birds and marine life, is strongly needed. Much of Arctic breeding wildlife spend their winters in habitats outside of the Arctic region and are severely impacted and threatened by harvest or habitat loss far beyond the Arctic. The Arctic Council’s Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Programme (CBMP) and Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA) should address more strongly the role of habitat loss and impacts on “Arctic” migratory species also outside of the Arctic, as many seasonal wintering grounds are located in (non-Arctic) developing countries with limited financial capacity. This also includes harvest of migratory wildlife. Many of the Arctic MEAs that have been most effective, such as the protection of polar

bears, have been specific and targeted. The Arctic Council should play a more active role in supporting the development of specific conservation efforts of migratory Arctic wildlife with regard to binding agreements with such non-Arctic states, as a complement to existing global conventions. Non-Arctic states that share particularly high responsibility for migratory Arctic wildlife should be identified and prioritized for further collaboration on conservation efforts.

Fourth, **many MEAs are based on the understanding of the past** and may not be fully effective in protecting Arctic biodiversity in the coming decades where increasing exploration and receding sea ice will open up for new exploration of a wide range of terrestrial and marine natural resources. Many parts of the Arctic have previously been inaccessible to development. This is rapidly changing, and trade nations also outside of the Arctic region are increasingly interested in the Arctic for shipping, transport and exploration. Hence, the Arctic nations, with their long-standing history in the region, bear a particular role in understanding the fragile ecosystems of the Arctic. The Arctic Council should therefore provide an even more progressive role in ensuring and further supporting its work related to strengthened protection and sustainable use of natural resources in the Arctic. Further, cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary thinking by policy-makers, scientists, and other stakeholders is needed in order to efficiently address biodiversity loss. A holistic approach in dealing with the conservation of Arctic biodiversity could ensure governance systems and management practices that are resilient and quickly adaptable.





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