



The Arctic Council: A backgrounder

What is the Arctic Council?

The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic states, Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.

Who takes part?

The *Ottawa Declaration* lists the following countries as Members of the Arctic Council: Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States.

In addition, six organizations representing Arctic Indigenous peoples have status as Permanent Participants. The category of Permanent Participant was created to provide for active participation and full consultation with the Arctic Indigenous peoples within the Council. They include: the Aleut International Association, the Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North and the Saami Council.

Observer status in the Arctic Council is open to non-Arctic states, along with inter-governmental, inter-parliamentary, global, regional and non-governmental organizations that the Council determines can contribute to its work. Arctic Council Observers primarily contribute through their engagement in the Council at the level of Working Groups.

The standing Arctic Council Secretariat formally became operational in 2013 in Tromsø, Norway. It was established to provide administrative capacity, institutional memory, enhanced communication and outreach and general support to the activities of the Arctic Council.

What does it do?

The work of the Council is primarily carried out in six Working Groups.

- The Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP) acts as a strengthening and supporting mechanism to encourage national actions to reduce emissions and other releases of pollutants.
- The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) monitors the Arctic environment, ecosystems and human populations, and provides scientific advice to support governments as they tackle pollution and adverse effects of climate change.
- The Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group (CAFF) addresses the conservation of Arctic biodiversity, working to ensure the sustainability of the Arctic's living resources.

- The Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR) works to protect the Arctic environment from the threat or impact of an accidental release of pollutants or radionuclides.
- The Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group is the focal point of the Arctic Council's activities related to the protection and sustainable use of the Arctic marine environment.
- The Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) works to advance sustainable development in the Arctic and to improve the conditions of Arctic communities as a whole.

The Council may also establish Task Forces or expert groups to carry out specific work. The Task Forces operating during the United States Chairmanship (2015-2017) are:

- Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation (TFAMC)
- Task Force on Telecommunications Infrastructure in the Arctic (TFTIA)
- Task Force for Enhancing Scientific Cooperation in the Arctic (SCTF)

What are some of its accomplishments?

The Arctic Council regularly produces comprehensive, cutting-edge environmental, ecological and social assessments through its working groups. The Council has also provided a forum for the negotiation of two important legally binding agreements among the eight Arctic states. The first, the *Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic*, was signed in Nuuk, Greenland, at the 2011 Ministerial Meeting. The second, the *Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic*, was signed in Kiruna, Sweden, at the 2013 Ministerial Meeting.

How does it work?

Arctic Council assessments and recommendations are the result of analysis and efforts undertaken by the Working Groups. Decisions of the Arctic Council are taken by consensus among the eight Arctic Council states, with full consultation and involvement of the Permanent Participants. The Chairmanship of the Arctic Council rotates every two years among Arctic states. The first country to chair the Arctic Council was Canada (1996-1998), followed by the United States, Finland, Iceland, Russia, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. The second cycle began in 2013, as Canada assumed the Chairmanship for the second time. On 24 April 2015, the second Canadian Chairmanship concluded, and the second Chairmanship of the United States (2015-2017) began. The next country to assume the Chairmanship will be Finland (2017-2019).

What doesn't it do?

The Arctic Council is a forum; it has no programming budget. All projects or initiatives are sponsored by one or more Arctic States. Some projects also receive support from other entities.

The Arctic Council does not and cannot implement or enforce its guidelines, assessments or recommendations. That responsibility belongs to each individual Arctic State.

The Arctic Council's mandate, as articulated in the *Ottawa Declaration*, explicitly excludes military security.