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Improving the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Arctic Council: A Discussion Paper

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Introduction

Having recently marked its tenth anniversary, it is appropriate to ask how and how best the Arctic Council should organize itself structurally and procedurally for the years ahead. This is not a new question. Only four years after the Council was established, the Barrow Declaration noted:

...the Arctic Council has evolved and taken over the structures established under AEPS, some overlap of functions has occurred among the new and existing institutional structures of the Council, and request that the SAOs with the assistance from the chairs of the Arctic Council subsidiary bodies, consider and recommend as appropriate ways to improve how work is structured in the Arctic Council and present a report at the next Ministerial Meeting.

The Salekhard Declaration requests Senior Arctic Officials to:

Examine the organization of the Arctic Council with a view to improve its effectiveness and efficiency, and report back to the next Ministerial 2008.

AAC's discussion paper is prompted by this request. Two recommendations in the 2006 SAO report to ministers are, in addition, of particular relevance to the structure, activities, and relationship of the Council to other institutions:

Encourage the Chairman of the SAO's to continue, in that capacity, outreach efforts of the Arctic Council aimed at the international community, regional organizations and academic and research communities with the aim of increasing awareness of the work of the Arctic Council and exploring possibilities for cooperation.

and

Continue to strengthen relations with Arctic Council observers and review applications of countries and others interested in becoming observers to the Arctic Council.

In line with these political commitments and in its role as incoming Chair of the Council, Norway announced its intention to:

initiate a process to examine the Council's organization with a view to improving its effectiveness and efficiency, building on the experience gained during 15 years of Arctic co-operation.

This commitment is similar to that adopted by Finland during its Chairmanship in 2000 to 2002.

The Interest of the Arctic Athabaskan Council in the Arctic Council

The Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), one of six “permanent participants” to the Arctic Council, prepared this short discussion paper to achieve three objectives:

1. to encourage Norway to carry through with its intention to set up a process to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council;
2. to signal to Council members the commitment of AAC to participate in the process envisaged by Norway; and
3. to propose a structure and agenda for the process Norway envisages.

When established as a “high level forum” by the eight Arctic states in 1996, the Arctic Council was variously described as innovative, precedent setting, and a potential model for other regions. Global interest in the Arctic is growing. Energy and mineral development, pollution, climate change, transportation and other issues in the Arctic are attracting increased attention internationally, and this process continues. In February 2003 the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme characterized the Arctic as the globe's barometer or early warning of environmental change. The International Polar Year is likely to direct and focus political as well as scientific attention on the circumpolar region.

Decisions made in non-Arctic states and by global institutions have a growing influence on the well-being of Athabaskans who continue to adjust to a rapidly changing world. Adapting to the impacts and effects of climate change is becoming a central task. In this rapidly changing world our objective is for the Arctic Council to effectively address the international dimension of economic, environmental, social, cultural and other issues of

concern to Athabaskans, and to other Indigenous peoples in the circumpolar world.

We view the Council as a good vehicle to articulate Arctic perspectives on issues to the international community. We want the Council to continue to do excellent technical work on an expanding array of issues, to be a forum for serious policy discussion, and to promote Arctic perspectives in international discussions and negotiations that affect our rights and interests.

The Council enjoys a significant degree of organizational flexibility and has

These goals remain valid and should form the basis of the project to improve

A comprehensive evaluation of the Arctic Council was conducted by Pekka Haavisto in 2001. Having surveyed numerous circumpolar organizations and interviewed approximately 30 people directly involved in the Council, he concluded:

1. **Nobody knows exactly what is going on in the Arctic Council.** This was thought to reflect poor communication between working groups, between the SAOs and the working groups, and a lack of institutional memory;
2. **No institutional memory.**

- 12. Sustainable development incoherent collection of projects.** No clear priorities for the SDWG;
- 13. All projects don't have circumpolar scope.** There is a wide range of geographical and conceptual scope of projects. The Arctic Council should not become a listing of local initiatives;
- 14. Wild market for project initiators.** Project initiators market their proposals to different working groups. There is a need to clarify the role of SAOs in this market;
- 15. The working groups are competing for the same financial resources.**

In its role as incoming chair, Norway circulated in late summer 2006 a short paper on reform of the Arctic Council. Four key problems were identified:

1. Financing the secretariats for the working groups;
2. Inadequate national resources to conduct mandated tasks;
3. Overlap between and unclear mandates of some working groups; and
4. Inadequate resources to support the involvement of the permanent participants.

In response, the Norwegian paper suggested restructuring the working groups along the following lines:

1. Monitoring and assessment of the Arctic environment and ecosystems group, (AMAP and part of CAFF);
2. Environmental Action Group to implement practical action, (PAME, ACAP, EPPR and part of CAFF);
3. Economy group, (part of SDWG); and
4. Social and Cultural group, (part of SDWG).

This reform proposal stressed that ad. hoc. teams of “experts” could be established in each group, as necessary. Norway suggested that its proposal

To live up to the instructions in the Salekhard Declaration quoted earlier, AAC suggests that a task force composed of members and permanent participants be mandated by the SAOs at their April meeting to discuss and recommend the future direction, structure, procedures, priorities, financing, relationships, and communications of the Arctic Council—all appropriate topics if the council's efficiency and effectiveness are to be improved.

The task force might best be chaired by Norway and draw upon the technical support of the Tromsø-based secretariat. The Indigenous Peoples Secretariat could co-ordinate the involvement of the permanent participants in the task force. The task force should engage state and nss and anerou()TJ-15.9362 -1.1519 TD0.0319

1. Structure, demarcation and relationship between the working groups;
2. Ensuring that adaptation activities in the SDWG inform debate and activities in all working groups;
3. SAOs as a forum to discuss policy options;
4. The role and financing of a central secretariat;
5. Designing ministerial meetings;
6. Funding permanent participants and the Indigenous Peoples Secretariat;
7. Outreach and communications to northerners and their governments;
8. Outreach and communications to agencies of the United Nations;
9. Increasing the role and participation of observer states in activities of the council, and opening a dialogue with China, Japan, India and Brazil about their potential involvement in the council;
10. Use the ACIA and AHDR (and other assessments) as the context in which to evaluate the ability of economic development policies in the circumpolar world to deliver benefits to the region's Indigenous peoples from resource development in their homelands.