Memorandum 2/11/2018

Plenary panel 1: Our knowledge, our actions: Addressing biodiversity conservation in a changing Arctic

This memo provides a summary of reports submitted on the Plenary Panel 1 organized at the Arctic Biodiversity Congress in Rovaniemi, Finland, October 9-12.

- Moderator: Martin Breum, Denmark
- Panelists:
    - Vladimir Kattsov, World Climate Research Program, Russian Federation
    - Mike Gill, Group on Earth Observations - Biodiversity Observation Network (GEO BON), Canada
    - Gunn-Britt Retter, Saami Council, Norway
    - Tasha Elizarde: Arctic Youth Ambassador

Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57SPtD8zPh8

Attendance: 500

Arctic Biodiversity Assessment recommendation themes most prominently addressed in the session:

- Climate change
- Identifying and safeguarding important areas
- Improving knowledge and public awareness
- Mainstreaming biodiversity

Key points raised in the session that were important to note:

- The Arctic is changing more rapidly (climatically) than the rest of the world, and this will continue even if we manage to reach the 1.5 degree target. There is a lot of knowledge that allows for good decisions at the overarching global level, but knowledge gaps for decision making are more prominent at the regional and local level.
- Because of good cooperation and institutional infrastructure, the Arctic is a promising region for taking action (at the first ABC in Trondheim it was stated that if there is one region that can reach the CBD Aichi-targets, it is the Arctic). But still we can learn from good examples from other regions.
- Indigenous peoples need to be involved at all levels. Most challenging are the sub=regional and local levels.
- Participation of industry is important. A few people at the Congress represent industries, and they do not always feel welcome at this kind of events.
- Need to learn from each other.
- Importance of having engagement strategy that includes all stakeholders, specifically youth, Indigenous Peoples, science, local government.
- Need to raise awareness both in Arctic and outside to raise profile.

- Iceland has a youth group that advices government on SDG goals.
- Need to collaboratively develop strategies and plans so have shared vision, goals, etc.
- Need to show concrete examples of what we have done in delivering SDGs.
- Need to show people that MPAs mean something different today than it used to and there are many models of how to protect and manage an MPA -- for example Canada's new Indigenous Conservation Areas.
- Need to establish more MPAs.
- Need for a balance between use and protection important and must have inclusive process.
- Countries need to work together with shared vision starting with Arctic nations.
- The Arctic Council and CAFF are doing a good job and could be used as a model.
- The leave no one behind concept is important.
- Industry needs and wants to be part of solution.
- Although need to raise awareness beyond Arctic can't wait -- must act now ourselves where we can (i.e.to reduce black carbon) and use our success to raise awareness with other countries perhaps through use of other Conventions..
- A bigger problem than climate change is the current political landscape in the world.
- Indigenous peoples need to strengthen their institutions if they are going to be able to full partners and contribute their knowledge.
- Canada has new Arctic Strategy that is being developed in cooperation with stakeholders and local communities from beginning (including Indigenous Peoples, youth, all levels of government, etc) that will guide Canada's Arctic policies for next 10 years (inclusive approach to have broad buy-in). Norway also has an integrated oceans management plan that has been developed cooperatively with oil and gas industry, fishing and conservation.
- How do we go from traditional statistics to understanding increasing variability and extreme events?
- How do we shift toward to more science and culturally based proactive ways to mitigate, react and adapt?
- Long tradition of cooperation between scientific and indigenous communities.
- Knowledge gaps remain: quantification of processes (e.g. shrinking of sea ice), the role of permafrost with carbon content in atmosphere.
- Perfection is the enemy of the good, action needs to be taken.
- There are questions that have received responses: global warming is unequivocal, chemical composition of the atmosphere is changing in a way that is unprecedented in the known past, humankind is responsible for that to a great extent.
- Arctic is warming quicker than the rest of the world, will warm fast (amplify global warming by 2–2.5), one of the most vulnerable areas in the world.
- Reference to indigenous people knowledge on high level is currently sufficient due to the activities of the indigenous peoples, but gaps exist on local and regional levels in recognizing indigenous peoples' rights and having enough participation in the decision-making.
- Gaps and insufficiencies remain in communication and interpretation for decision-making.

- Mainstreaming means that we speak a language that the people understand.
- Crosscutting collaboration best supported by providing funding.
- How do we involve industry in a more efficient way: CAFF already engaged in a project involving mining industry; dialogue is vital, and much money can also be wasted without science, science must demonstrate what it can do.
- To understand the Arctic you have to understand the people and the conversation behind the conservation.

Recommendations/actions identified for how to deal with the issues raised in the session:

- All Arctic states should take same commitment to COP 24 (UNFCCC) so can arrive with commitment to act
- To take synergies approach, for example restoration of wetlands serves several agreements and purposes i.e. climate, wetlands, conservation, water.
- Consider broadening work to include geology and it is very connected to the biology.
- Every country needs to increase funding for monitoring.
- CAFF should include key risks and build future alterative models.
- Need to be more open about sharing data and science.
- Important to prepare summaries for policy makers but need to communicate in a way that the average person understands and in other languages so that communities can understand and then take action.
- There will always be knowledge gaps so need to act.
- Community-based monitoring needed.
- Need to address increasing variability and extreme events.
- Need to shift towards scientifically and culturally based proactive ways of resilience, mitigation and adaptation.
- Need to include indigenous peoples in local and regional decision-making, also in the science and the development of the knowledge basis, in particular in more rural communities (also requires effort from indigenous communities to respond to all invitations).
- Need to invest in indigenous peoples' institutions to involve indigenous knowledge holders.
- More effective and comprehensive communication and interpretation for decision-making needed.
- Innovations need to be harvested and cooperation strengthened among different parties.
- Funding needed for crosscutting collaboration.
- Need to mitigate emissions: energy-efficiency, low-emission pathways

Take home message from the session:

- There is a sense of urgency that we need to act.
- Scientists often focus on perfection, but should focus on the most important knowledge gaps that prevent us from making the right decisions.

- Dialogue between science and other knowledge systems and decision makers is important. Science should now prove what it can do.
- The Arctic is among the most vulnerable areas in the world as to global warming
- Gaps exist in particular on local and regional levels in recognizing indigenous peoples' rights and them having enough participation in decision-making.
- Knowledge gaps need to be filled within a reasonable time, and they cannot be an excuse of not taking action (cutting emissions etc.).
- More effective and comprehensive communication and interpretation for decision-making and mainstreaming needed, innovations for that can also be harvested in international cooperation.