

Memorandum 2/11/2018

IAB8: Status, challenges and opportunities for Arctic Ocean protection and governance

This memo provides a summary of reports submitted on the session IAB8 organized at the Arctic Biodiversity Session in Rovaniemi, Finland, October 9-12 organized by Greenpeace.

Attendance: 30

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

- Identifying and safeguarding important areas
- Ecosystem-based Management

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

- Development of an Arctic protected area network is lagging behind the target set for year 2020 - according to CAFF data, less than 5% of Arctic seas are currently designated as marine protected areas.
- Arctic MPAs are important to mitigating impacts of climate change on biodiversity - but even protected areas are under threat (and very widely in their protective measures and legal status)
- In some regions the development is actually going backwards - for example, spatial protection around Franz Josef Land has been decreased by 40 000 km² in order to give way for oil exploration interests, and those same interests threaten protected areas in Laptev Sea. At the same time the buffer zone of the Great Arctic Reserve is facing construction of coal terminals, extraction, and transportation.
- Existing international legislation could already allow measures to protect the Arctic Ocean through regulating activities of sectors such as shipping, fishing
- The zonal approach of the current Law of the Sea Convention does not reflect the reality at sea which requires an ecosystem-based approach
- Negotiations towards a new legally binding agreement to conserve biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction under UNCLOS are underway and this agreement could enable establishing ocean sanctuaries in the Central Arctic Ocean in the coming years
- Identifying important ecological areas of the ocean for maintaining ecosystem health can help prioritize areas and identify targeted management measures to protect those areas' ecological integrity
- In the discussion following the presentations it was also noted that along with designating protected areas, management of those areas as well as other areas becomes important

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

- Establish a regional seas agreement that can anticipate and address combination of sea ice retreat with both oil and gas and shipping impacts

- Combining information about sensitive areas in a thoughtful way can create a comprehensive picture of areas needing protection.
- Arctic coastal states have the responsibility and legal competence of developing the network of marine protected areas and reserves within territorial waters and EEZs
- International law should be further developed to allow an ecosystem-based approach to biodiversity conservation in the Arctic Ocean and proactively ensure effective conservation both within and beyond national jurisdiction.
- Oceana has developed a mathematical method for identifying Important Ecological Areas i.e. geographically delineated areas which by themselves or in a network have distinguishing ecological characteristics, are important for maintaining habitat heterogeneity or the viability of a species, or contribute disproportionately to an ecosystem's health, including its productivity, biodiversity, functioning, structure, or resilience, based on all available information, including traditional knowledge
- The Central Arctic Ocean has been recognised as an Ecologically and Biologically Significant Area under the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) and warrants urgent protection based on its unique environmental characteristics and unprecedented pressures facing the region. Through constructive engagement in the UN negotiations, Arctic states and bodies such as the Arctic Council now have an opportunity to become the true stewards of the Arctic sea and help protect healthy ocean ecosystems worldwide.

Take home message(s) from the session:

- As the Arctic seas and their unique life is under unprecedented pressure due to rapid climate change and increasing industrial activity, protecting their biodiversity is lagging behind agreed targets and scientific recommendations. Current international law allows for measures to protect biodiversity and can be further developed to address existing gaps. Methodologies are available to identify targeted management measures to protect ecological integrity of important ecological areas. Constructive engagement in the negotiations towards a new UN Ocean Treaty, and stepping up in ambition for developing a network of effectively managed ocean sanctuaries in the Arctic are recommended for the Arctic states.
- There are tools available for the international community - regional seas agreement, UNCLOS - but it takes a long time to implement international agreements so action is needed now
- Actual mechanisms in place for protection (and enforcement) are as important as the designation of "protected" areas