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UK Arctic Principles

Principles to Inform a Policy Statement on UK Interests in the Arctic¹

January 2012

Preamble

The Arctic is one of the largest remaining ecologically intact regions on earth and home to Indigenous peoples and a unique and diverse ecosystem, which is especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. It also contains significant natural resources (including minerals and fish stocks), which are becoming more accessible as the ice melts, but whose exploitation carries significant risks, and in the case of fossil fuels, will drive further climate change.

The UK is recognised as one of the non-Arctic nations with the greatest interests in the Arctic (including science, shipping, insurance, and mineral resource activities). As such, it has an important role to play in the international stewardship of the region: by promoting resilience-based ecosystem management, by establishing best practices for industry and by promoting sound marine governance. Although the governance of the Arctic is the primary responsibility of Arctic nations, the UK Government has a legitimate interest in the protection of the region. This includes oversight of the activities of British companies operating in the area, obligations under multilateral environmental agreements (e.g. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Migratory Species), and the wider strategic challenges in the Arctic for the international community.

Recognising this, we believe the UK should apply a clear set of principles in its dealings with the Arctic, which will help to protect the region from the ongoing effects of climate change, and help to ensure that its natural wealth is not exploited at the expense of its Indigenous peoples, environmental security, ecosystems or wildlife.

¹ These Principles have been developed by a group of UK environmental NGOs (listed above) in consultation with academics and other individuals with expertise in Arctic issues. The Principles are open to support from all stakeholders, with a view to finding a common position on the issues the UK Government should reflect in its policy towards the Arctic

UK Vision for the Arctic

An Arctic (including its people, wildlife and ecosystems) safeguarded for the future and shielded from the damaging effects of rapid change and exploitation through ambitious action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, effective international stewardship (including resilience-based ecosystem management), good governance and responsible business practice - thereby promoting healthy living systems to the benefit of local peoples and all humanity.

UK Arctic Principles

1.	Use our Observer Status at Arctic Council Effectively
2.	Limit Climate Warming
3.	Go Beyond Fossil Fuels
4.	Understand and Adapt to Climate Warming
5a.	Regulate Offshore Mineral Activities Effectively
5b.	Regulate Onshore Mineral Activities Effectively
6.	Ensure that Fisheries are Sustainable
7.	Control Shipping Activities
8.	Respect the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
9.	Support the Conservation of Migratory Species

1. Use our Observer Status at Arctic Council Effectively

The UK's longstanding interest in Arctic affairs is reflected in its State Observer status to the Arctic Council. It is recognised that an influential and co-ordinated approach to UK engagement in the region is needed². This is particularly relevant today as the Council becomes institutionally stronger, with the creation of a permanent Secretariat and its capacity to agree legally binding instruments. The UK will respond by using its position as a State Observer to engage constructively with the Arctic nations, to promote continued international co-operation and to influence precautionary environmental stewardship and conservation principles over the Arctic.

2. Limit Climate Warming

The UK also has a legitimate interest in the future of the Arctic because of the global consequences of the melting Arctic ice. Without urgent action to curb greenhouse gas emissions and address dangerous climate change, the Arctic region will be severely impacted. The UK will

² UK Arctic Stakeholders Meeting , 2008

renew its commitment to securing a global agreement to limit average global temperature rises from pre-industrial levels to as far below 2°C as possible. The UK will work to accelerate this transition in the EU and in other international fora. The UK will recognise and promote the need for a finite Global Carbon Budget.

3. Go Beyond Fossil Fuels

The exploitation of new and remote sources of oil and gas from highly sensitive areas such as the Arctic is incompatible with the UK's commitment to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels and limit the damaging effects of climate change. The UK will aim for a strong and sustained reduction in its fossil fuel dependency in order to meet its legally binding target to reduce its domestic emissions by at least 80% by 2050. This will require rapid and significant improvements in energy efficiency, a comprehensive and decisive shift to the use of renewable sources of energy, more stringent vehicle efficiency standards and uptake of electrical vehicles by 2020 and beyond.

4. Understand and Adapt to Climate Warming

The UK has demonstrated its commitment to Arctic science by establishing the NERC Arctic Research Programme. The UK will provide scientific and technological expertise and capacity to contribute substantially towards an understanding of the implications of climate warming on the Arctic environment and associated ecosystems, and of interactions and potential feedback loops with the global climate system. The UK will also support efforts to develop adaptation strategies in the region alongside action to reduce climate warming.

5. a. Regulate Offshore Mineral Activities Effectively

The risks and potential impacts on local ecosystems associated with Arctic offshore oil development are currently unacceptably high and unmanageable.

Despite these risks, oil and gas development in the Arctic is occurring now, and is predicted to continue to occur in the near future. During the UK's strong and sustained reduction in its oil dependency, there remains the need to reduce these risks and potential impacts.

As such, no new drilling for offshore oil and gas should be authorised or undertaken by UK based companies in the Arctic until three existing 'gaps' are filled: gaps in (i) **Knowledge** (a comprehensive understanding of Arctic ecosystems and how they might respond to the effects of oil and gas exploration and climate warming) (ii) **Technology** (to reduce the risk of spills and 'blow-outs' occurring in the Arctic marine environment, and to respond effectively to oil spills in ice-infested waters and harsh climatic conditions); and (iii) **Governance** (the requirement for a legally binding international instrument on Arctic oil and gas, as well as Arctic-specific sectoral standards). At present, the knowledge, technology and legal instrument do not exist to fulfil these conditions.

Existing licensed UK Oil and Gas activity in the Arctic shall adhere to the highest operational standards that protect local ecosystems from seismic, exploration, production and decommissioning related impacts.

The UK also recognises that there are many areas in the Arctic which are too ecologically sensitive to exploit oil and gas, regardless of other considerations. Lofoten/Vesteralen (Norway), Bristol Bay, Alaska (USA) and West Kamchatka Shelf (Russia) have already been identified as

such areas. The UK will support the identification of further areas, in conjunction with local communities, which should be set aside by governments as permanent ‘no-go-zones’ for oil and gas development.

5.b. Regulate Onshore Mineral Activities Effectively

The extraction of minerals from onshore deposits have historically produced detrimental impacts on wildlife, fisheries, ecosystem services, and indigenous communities throughout the Arctic. To minimize or eliminate these impacts, the UK government will demand onshore extractive activities adhere to the principle of free, prior, informed consent for indigenous and tribal people as adopted by the United Nations and the World Bank. Further, the Government will not support mining activities that: (i) destroy or impair anadromous³ or freshwater fish habitat, such that the sustained genetic diversity and abundance in the watershed is placed at significant risk; (ii) require water withdrawals that may exceed ecological flow needed for fish and wildlife; (iii) need active management in perpetuity to avoid environmental contamination or (iv) result in toxic mine drainage (including acid mine drainage) that cannot be eliminated by proven methods and technology established at comparable sites and scale.

6. Ensure that Fisheries are Sustainable

All UK fisheries in the Arctic shall be sustainable, harvested with minimum impact, and follow sound ecosystem-based management approaches.

The UK Government will support the initiative of the US Government to restrict fishing in previously ice-covered waters until the ecosystems are better understood. The need for broad and precautionary fisheries management, including the establishment of Marine Protected Areas and marine reserves, should be led and supported by the UK, to ensure future fishing in the Arctic Ocean can happen in a sustainable and regulated manner, and not destroy ocean life before it has been identified.

7. Control Shipping Activities

The UK will continue to play an active and influential role in the development of a mandatory Polar Code for shipping through the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). UK influence will ensure that shipping operations in the Arctic will be based on a suite of environmentally sound navigational and operational measures related to construction, design and equipment, operations and planning, environmental protection and response and action to reduce black carbon emissions, as well as crew training, search and rescue capabilities, monitoring and information systems, port state control, and compliance for all vessels operating in Arctic waters.

8. Respect the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

All UK industry activity in the Arctic and UK-government supported policies and programmes that affect the Arctic must acknowledge and support the rights of indigenous people to make decisions over their future. These include the rights outlined in “A Circumpolar Inuit

³ Anadromous fish are those that spend all or part of their adult life in salt water and return to freshwater streams and rivers to spawn

Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic” and “A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development Principles in Inuit Nunaat.”

9. Support the Conservation of Migratory Species

In addition to the many important species that depend on the Arctic habitat year-round, the Arctic is critically important for many migratory species, including birds, cetaceans and fish. For example, many birds that breed in the Arctic spend their winter in the UK or use the UK as a stopover on longer migrations. Our conservation work in the UK could be seriously undermined by unmanaged exploitation of the Arctic. The UK is a signatory of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Migratory Species and, more specifically the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement, and should ensure it meets these obligations through cooperating with Arctic nations to conserve these species and their habitats.

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