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## **WWF ARCTIC PROGRAMME | POLICY PAPER**

# **DELIVERING ON THE ARCTIC COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN: WWF EXPECTATIONS ON MANAGEMENT MEASURES IN THE ARCTIC OCEAN ECOSYSTEM, ADAPTED TO A CHANGING CLIMATE**

WWF Arctic Programme warmly welcomes the goal in the Arctic Council Strategic Plan 2021-2030 on Healthy Arctic Marine Environment and stands ready to support the Arctic states and Permanent Participants in promoting conservation and sustainable use of the Arctic marine environment for the benefit of all current and future generations of Arctic inhabitants. We look forward to further emphasis on these aspects under the upcoming Nordic chairships in the Arctic Council.

The accelerating pace of dramatic climate change and nature loss means that there is no time to waste. The adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the finalisation of the Draft agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (hereinafter referred to as the “future BBNJ Agreement”) provide key tools for national and global work in protecting biodiversity, and needs to be urgently implemented, to resolve both the global climate and nature crises, also in the Arctic. Climate change is by far the most serious threat to Arctic biodiversity, and countries need to live up to their commitments under the Paris Agreement both through international cooperation and national actions.

WWF would like to offer its proposals on how the Arctic Council, building on its Strategic Plan 2021-2030, could act under the Norwegian leadership and the successive Danish and Swedish chairships for the benefit of the globally significant Arctic Ocean ecosystem. WWF stands ready to assist the Arctic Council in acting on its regional policy-shaping role, building on existing work and shaping emerging policies to advance whole ocean health across jurisdictions.

### **Network of protected and conserved areas**

Nature protection is one of the most effective tools to safeguard species, populations, habitats and thereby also human life. Establishing a representative and connected ocean-spanning network of protected and conserved areas is key to bolster the resilience

of Arctic marine life to climate change and expanding human activities in the region (IPCC, 2019 - SROCC SPM). The Arctic states have committed to establishing a pan-Arctic network of protected and conserved areas and have also made related commitments in global fora.

Building on the Framework for a Pan-Arctic Network of Marine Protected Areas and other Arctic Council products, WWF has developed ArcNet, an Arctic Ocean Network of Priority Areas for Conservation. ArcNet is a concrete proposal of areas to implement conservation measures, a blueprint for designing networks of protected and conserved areas, and an invitation to Arctic states, rightsholders, marine stakeholders, Indigenous knowledge holders, scientists and communities to contribute to, and cooperate in, establishing and managing the Arctic-wide network. As a long-standing and active observer to the Arctic Council WWF is ready to contribute to its work with our strong expertise.

## **Ecological connectivity between protected and conserved areas**

Ecological connectivity to, from, and across the Arctic Ocean is integral to ocean health and key to the conservation success of networks of protected and conserved areas (IPCC 2022 AR6 WGII SPM). Ensuring connectivity for marine life includes maintaining unimpeded movement and dispersal of different life stages for species to ensure natural recruitment into populations, for example, spawning fishes, as well as actively managing migration corridors between seasonal habitats, for example, for Arctic whales. The explicit inclusion of connectivity is necessary for an effective pan-Arctic network of protected and conserved areas, in order to promote the connectedness of the Arctic across national waters, into the high seas, and with the global ocean.

## **Implementation of the ecosystem approach with spatial measures and tools**

As a principal concept, WWF would like to highlight the ecosystem approach to management in and across the Arctic Large Marine Ecosystems. Addressed in existing PAME proceedings as well as ongoing projects, this approach promotes integrity of ecosystems and biodiversity while seeking to ensure that human use of the ecosystem is sustainable. It is vitally important to apply a whole-ocean approach in such endeavours, which includes considering the parts of the Arctic Ocean beyond national jurisdiction and carrying out Integrated Ecosystem Assessments for Large Marine Ecosystems, including those that require multi- or bilateral arrangements.

Building on the Arctic Council's Framework for a Pan-Arctic Network of Marine Protected Areas, PAME's work on the ecosystem approach in Arctic Large Marine Ecosystems, and the embedding of area-based conservation networks in the wider ecosystem approach, WWF would like to emphasise that the ecosystem approach must also be the overarching framework to inform integrated marine spatial planning in the region.

WWF encourages the Arctic Council to build on the ongoing work on the ecosystem approach and to initiate a programme of work advancing its implementation through integrated ecosystem-based spatial measures and tools. WWF will be pleased to contribute with our knowledge to inform broader discussions, including in the planned Arctic Marine Ecosystem Based Management Conference.

The Arctic Council should play a role in ensuring the ocean-scale conservation effectiveness of the Arctic Ocean network of conserved and protected areas and measures to safeguard ecological connectivity. While implementation and monitoring is driven by national, subregional, and individual stakeholders and rights-holders who are knowledgeable and able to contribute, marine biodiversity is connected across the Arctic Ocean, which needs to be taken into account for conservation measures. Identification and implementation of conservation measures, as well as monitoring and implementing dedicated management of marine mammal migratory corridors should benefit from Indigenous leadership and Indigenous Knowledge.

## Sustainable shipping in Arctic waters

Shipping in the Arctic presents several significant risks for ocean health, and is expected to increase in the future. Minimising risks from shipping through voyage planning in the Arctic should be considered as part of a broader work on marine spatial planning, under the leadership of PAME and also with the eyes on effective implementation and strengthening of the IMO's Polar Code. Shipping-related marine spatial planning measures and tools contribute to the implementation of the ecosystem approach that protects the integrity of ecosystems while ensuring that human activities are sustainable.

## Milestones in oceans management 2025-2029

To further implement the Arctic Council Strategic Plan 2021-2030, and contributing to regionally coherent implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework and the future BBNJ Agreement, WWF encourages the Arctic Council to build a strong programme of work on area-based conservation for the coming three chairships.

By 2029, we would like to see an Arctic Council that has contributed to the **establishment and effective management of a network of marine protected and conserved areas covering at least 30% of the Arctic Ocean**; augmented with measures **maintaining ecological connectivity** across the Arctic Ocean and seas to the South; and embedded in **integrated ecosystem-based marine spatial planning frameworks** of the surrounding seascape, to enhance and deliver the ecosystem-based management of Arctic Large Marine Ecosystems.

## WWF proposals for key Arctic Council deliverables by 2025

- An Arctic Ocean spatial database of marine biodiversity, to enable ocean-scale monitoring and making data of conservation features available for national or subregional conservation planning and implementation (potentially as a joint work under CAFF and PAME).
- A framework for safeguarding ecological connectivity across the Arctic Ocean to enhance conservation in and across protected area networks. This work could build on the PAME MPA-Network Toolbox and oceanographic aspects of ecological connectivity. The framework should guide the development and implementation of monitoring and management tools for all aspects of ecological connectivity across the Arctic Ocean.
- An initial review on how the obligations under the future BBNJ Agreement can be implemented in the Central Arctic Ocean: how to advance proposals of marine protected areas and related draft management plans; whether the adoption of and

how Arctic littoral countries could jointly implement obligations of Environmental Impact Assessments in conjunction with the areas under their national jurisdiction.

- Toolkit for marine spatial planning for shipping, based on the ecosystem approach, including vessel re-routing requirements, speed reduction, low impact corridors as well as measures to manage underwater noise from shipping at safe levels for marine life; informing Indigenous and coastal communities about the navigation plans and schedules of ice-breakers; and incorporating Indigenous knowledge and local knowledge in marine spatial planning.

## **Key deliverables by 2027**

- Assessment of regional scale implementation of area-based conservation measures both in priority areas for conservation and for safeguarding ecological connectivity, including recommendations for regional scale priority actions for coming years.
- Arctic region-specific framework for establishing ecosystem based integrated marine spatial planning, with measures and tools consistent with the ecosystem approach and accompanied by guidance to states on how to implement the framework.
- Adoption of appropriate regional governance measures to implement area-based conservation measures under the future BBNJ Agreement in the Central Arctic Ocean.
- Review of progress in designating marine protected areas in the Central Arctic Ocean and drafting of associated management plans, and in applying the environmental impact assessments/strategic environmental assessments in relation to projects and plans affecting the biodiversity in the CAO.

## **Key deliverables by 2029**

- Assessment of regional/ocean scale progress on area-based conservation, including ecological connectivity, towards the implementation of relevant GBF targets, in particular Target 3 and related targets and taking into account the state of establishment of area-based conservation measures under the future BBNJ Agreement.
- Proposals of area-based conservation measures in the Central Arctic Ocean towards an Arctic Ocean network of marine protected areas, also as a contribution to the implementation of global commitments under the Global Biodiversity Framework and the future BBNJ Agreement.
- A unified and Arctic region-specific guidance on voyage planning based on highest environmental and safety standards as recommended by the Arctic Councils' Arctic Shipping Best Practice Information Forum, including mapping of region-specific Areas to be Avoided (ATBA), especially in the areas where high shipping volumes converge with the migration routes of marine mammals and ecologically sensitive marine areas.