

*Arctic Council*  
*Input to the Report on Oceans and the Law of the Sea*

***Regional co-operation***

The Arctic Council places high importance on ocean issues, not least because of the large number of people depending on the marine environment for food and income, as well as for their social and cultural identity. The Arctic marine environment is also of great importance to the world as a whole, because of its rich natural resources, unique socio-cultural aspects, economic potential and integral role in climatic processes.

There is mounting evidence that climatic and developmental pressures on the marine environment from shipping, dumping, offshore oil and gas development and land-based activities have been increasing in the Arctic.

***Arctic Marine Strategic Plan***

The Arctic Council is currently working on a strategic plan for the protection of the Arctic marine environment, launched by Ministers one year ago. This new strategy is based on an integrated approach to sustainable ocean management. The aim of the plan is to set priorities. It will not seek to reinvent principles, but develop and link existing ones. The strategy should assist in confronting existing conditions, including pollution, and provide a means to address new and emerging challenges. One such example is the possible opening of new Arctic sea routes, due to melting sea ice.

Through development of the strategic plan, the Arctic Council wishes to take an active role in the regional application of the ecosystem approach. An integrated approach would include partnerships among the different Arctic Council Working Groups, as well as with external partners. It will also provide links to other international initiatives, such as the UNEP Regional Seas Program, the EU Marine Strategy and the London Convention.

In October 2003, an international workshop was held under the auspices of the Arctic Council with the aim of providing a forum for exchanging information and ideas on the drivers of change and trends in ocean management. The main drivers of change identified include climate change and increased economic activity.

The Arctic Marine Strategic Plan is expected to be finalized by the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in fall of 2004.

***Assessment of Petroleum Hydrocarbons in the Arctic***

The Arctic Council has begun a comprehensive and wide ranging assessment of the potential socioeconomic, human health, and environmental impacts of oil and gas activities in the Arctic. The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) Working Group will organize the assessment with added expertise from the other Arctic Council working groups. The planned assessment will focus on: oil and gas activities; social, economic, human health, and sustainable development implications; sources, inputs, and concentrations of contaminants; biological effects of pollutants and disturbance; and environmental status.

