

# EXPLORING COMMON SOLUTIONS — FINLAND'S CHAIRMANSHIP PROGRAM FOR THE ARCTIC COUNCIL 2017–2019

Finland builds the 2017–2019 Chairmanship of the Arctic Council on strong Arctic traditions and expertise. International Arctic cooperation at the governmental level started at the first-ever Arctic ministerial meeting in Rovaniemi, in 1991. This meeting adopted the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, which in turn led to the creation of the Arctic Council in 1996.

Over its first twenty years the Arctic Council has evolved into a recognized international forum. The active involvement of indigenous peoples' organizations and a deep-rooted connection with the scientific community makes it unique. As the Chair of the Arctic Council, Finland aims to further strengthen Arctic cooperation by looking into the possibility of setting commonly agreed long-term goals. In favorable international conditions, Finland is prepared to host an Arctic Summit to facilitate this process.

The Arctic Council Member States and the Permanent Participants representing indigenous peoples are committed to environmental protection and sustainable development of the Arctic. All Member States have pledged to maintain the Arctic as a region of peace, stability and constructive cooperation. This was confirmed in the joint statement issued on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Arctic Council in 2016. Inclusive cooperation and exploring common solutions to common challenges is the point of departure for the Finnish Chairmanship.

Finland wants to highlight two recent milestones which have major relevance to the Arctic.

The international community adopted a universal, legally binding climate agreement in Paris in 2015. Global warming is still expected to continue for decades with considerable impact on the Arctic. It is necessary to continue working to mitigate climate change and strengthen resilience and adaptation, and to raise awareness of Arctic issues in global climate talks.

The goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, are global in scope and apply also in the Arctic. Sustainable development is at the core of the Arctic Council mandate. Accordingly, Finland proposes to explore how the Agenda 2030 framework can be used in Arctic cooperation for the benefit of humans and nature.

The Arctic is developing into an important hub of the twenty-first century. The economic potential of the region should be harnessed in a way that brings prosperity to, and guarantees the livelihood and social progress of, Arctic inhabitants and communities. Sustainable economic development is the key to resilient communities.

Finland strives to increase the cooperation between the Arctic Council and the Arctic Economic Council to support the goal of facilitating business-to-business activities and responsible economic development. Common areas of interest include capacity building, risk management, connectivity, cold-climate technologies and services, maritime transport, energy, bioeconomy, tourism, housing and mining.

In 2017 Finland celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its independence. Among the planned Arctic events are the international *Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit* conference and a scientific expedition in Arctic waters on board a Finnish icebreaker.

## FINLAND'S PRIORITIES

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Environmental protection lies at the core of Arctic cooperation. The Arctic region is often equated with a clean environment and plentiful natural resources. Healthy ecosystems and human well-being in the Arctic require effective environmental protection measures. Finland invites the Arctic Council to further focus on biodiversity conservation and pollution prevention, as well as mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

The Arctic Council and its Working Groups have produced a wealth of top-quality assessments on the state of the Arctic environment, along with recommendations for action. Finland encourages Member States to put the recommendations into practice and to communicate the results also in global forums. Finland proposes intensified exchange of information on best practices and emerging technologies to promote sustainable and responsible development in the Arctic.

## CONNECTIVITY

Well-functioning communication networks and services are a lifeline for human activities and a prerequisite for economic development in the Arctic. Electronic communication services improve safety and quality of life for those who live in or visit the Arctic. Access to broadband facilitates e-learning, enables the development of digital health and social services, and allows connectivity to media.

Finland proposes to continue the Arctic Council's work on telecommunications and explore ways to enhance the connectivity and availability of broadband services in the Arctic. This work would take into account the needs of indigenous peoples, local communities and businesses, tourism, and researchers. It would build on the recommendations of the Task Force on Telecommunications Infrastructure in the Arctic (TFTIA) and the Arctic Economic Council. The potential communications technologies include satellite connections, mobile communications systems, low-bandwidth transmission and sea cables.

## METEOROLOGICAL COOPERATION

Circumpolar meteorological and oceanographic cooperation will improve public safety, benefit international shipping and air traffic, and enhance Arctic climate science. By further developing meteorological cooperation, it is possible to improve monitoring and observation networks and the management of climate and water-related risks.

Intensified monitoring on land, at sea, in the atmosphere and in space will provide better data coverage and fill geographical gaps in data collection. This leads to better services and forecasting of meteorological phenomena in the Arctic and contributes to making much-needed climate change scenarios as accurate as possible. Finland proposes to deepen meteorological and oceanographic cooperation among the Arctic States in collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization.

## EDUCATION

The Arctic region is characterized by sparsely populated communities, cultural diversity, a wealth of minority languages, differing socio-economic conditions, and long distances. Fair educational opportunities in remote areas are key for creating sustainable development and building resilience in Arctic communities. Equal access to good basic education opens the doors to learning trades, to higher education, and to finding a place in working life. It also lessens the risk of marginalization and the associated unfortunate consequences.

Teachers who work in Arctic and northern communities and who are committed to and inspired by the Arctic are the key factor in providing good basic education. To develop teaching methods in early childhood and in primary and lower secondary education, Finland proposes to strengthen the network of education specialists in cooperation with the University of the Arctic. Developing modern methods such as digitalization of education will be at the core of this effort.

## AREAS OF WORK OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

### THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE

Addressing climate change in the Arctic is rooted in sound science and traditional and local knowledge. The conclusions of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (2004) have been largely confirmed by local environmental observations. Both Arctic communities and natural ecosystems are affected. The melting of ice and snow in the Arctic amplifies the global impacts of climate change.

Putting into practice the commitments of the Paris Climate Agreement will be the most important contribution from the Member States in addressing climate change. At the same time, the implementation of the Arctic Council's "Framework for Action on Enhanced Black Carbon and Methane Emissions Reductions" (2015) will provide a much needed additional measure. Finland encourages projects and actions aimed at reducing emissions, facilitating adaptation, and raising awareness of climate change.

The Arctic Council's scientific work has greatly improved our understanding of the effects of climate change in the region. Key drivers of change in the Arctic and possibilities for adaptation have been identified in projects on adaptation, resilience, ocean acidification, freshwater as well as snow, water, ice and permafrost. Finland will advance the follow-up of these assessments.

The findings of Arctic assessments should be integrated into the work of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Additionally, the work on short-lived climate pollutants could be linked to similar activities under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution.

Changing climatic conditions may have severe consequences for biodiversity and ecosystems in the Arctic. Protecting marine and coastal ecosystems and strengthening their resilience will be a major challenge for the Member States. The United Nations Aichi Biodiversity Targets should guide the work of the Arctic Council. The "Arctic Biodiversity Assessment" (2013) and the implementation of "Actions for Biodiversity 2013–2021" (2015) will be the main tools.

Finland encourages the monitoring and reporting of Arctic biodiversity through the Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program, the implementation of the Arctic Invasive Alien Species Strategy and Action Plan, and the continuation of the Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative. Raising awareness of the state of Arctic freshwater and its ecological, economic, social and cultural value is also important.

To enhance implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement and to follow up the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, Finland plans to organize a meeting of Arctic environment ministers. In addition, the second Arctic Biodiversity Congress will be organized in Finland to discuss the progress on implementing the recommendations of the 2013 Arctic Biodiversity Assessment. The "Arctic Resilience Action Framework" (2016), when adopted will provide a useful in strengthening resilience and adaptability. The implementation of the Framework will be elaborated at the first Arctic Resilience Forum to be organized during the Finnish Chairmanship.

Arctic climate science will benefit from improved access to data, which will facilitate monitoring, management, emergency preparedness and decision-making. Facilitated by the national mapping agencies of the Arctic States, the Arctic Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) provides tools for data distributors and end users, ensuring that geospatial data is easy to access, validate and combine with other data. Finland will strive for wider use of the Arctic SDI among the Working Groups.

Human activities both in and outside the Arctic have led to the accumulation of pollutants and hazardous substances. High environmental protection standards in economic activities will pave the way for reducing the overall risk of environmental pollution in the Arctic. Finland will highlight the need for further collaboration and outreach with regard to transboundary pollutants. Besides the multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous substances, the Arctic Council's report "Chemicals of Emerging Arctic Concern" (2017) will guide the work on pollution.

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is an important tool for sustainable and responsible development in the Arctic. Finland proposes to develop an Arctic-specific EIA tool in which public participation is an integral part of the process.

## THE SEAS

The Arctic Ocean is an important source of livelihood for communities along its shores. The demand for natural resources and the opening of new sea routes may bring prosperity to the region, but they will also increase the risks to Arctic inhabitants and nature. The global interest in the Arctic puts pressure on developing models for stewardship of Arctic sea areas to safeguard sustainable development of the region.

The "Arctic Marine Strategic Plan 2015–2025" (2015) provides a framework for protecting Arctic marine and coastal ecosystems and promoting sustainable development. Finland will strive for its effective implementation. Finland is ready to participate in the continued work of the Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation, recognizing the need for implementing an ecosystem-based approach to management and taking into account the positive experiences of cooperation in other sea areas.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for conserving at least 10 percent of coastal and marine areas by 2020. This is addressed by the "Framework for a Pan-Arctic Network of Marine Protected Areas" (2015). Finland welcomes a Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) workshop on marine protected areas and climate change.

Search and rescue capabilities remain a challenge with the increase in economic activities, shipping and air traffic in the Arctic. Effective implementation of the "Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic" (2011) is important. The establishment of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum is a welcome step. Under the auspices of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, the Finnish Border Guard will strengthen the cooperation with search and rescue stakeholders to promote safety at sea. The aim is to exchange best practices, align standard operating procedures and promote interoperability. The main exercise will take place in early 2019 during the Arctic Coast Guard Week.

The "Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic" (MOSPA) (2013) became operational in 2016. Finland aims to organize the first full-scale response exercise, which will be combined with an exercise under the "Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic".

The Polar Code, which was adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and which entered into force on

1 January 2017, sets new standards for safety at sea and pollution prevention. Finland will organize an international conference to enhance safe ice navigation and harmonized implementation of the Polar Code in Arctic waters.

Satellite connections are essential for all transport modes and form the basis for positioning and navigation. In cooperation with stakeholders and end-user groups, Finland will launch a study on the reliability and performance of satellite navigation in the Arctic.

Finland is planning a demonstration of satellite data transfer to address the needs of connectivity in the Arctic. In this exercise, satellite data containing information on ice conditions will be received at the Finnish Meteorological Institute's Arctic Space Center, modified and forwarded in near-real time to a vessel sailing in the Arctic.

## THE PEOPLE

The wellbeing of the people living in the Arctic is supported by the three indivisible pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. The human dimension of the Arctic Council's work covers such areas as health, water, energy, infrastructure, and indigenous cultures and languages, and thus contributes to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

Finland proposes to explore how the SDGs can be further used in strengthening the economic and social progress and cultural self-expression of Arctic communities. Sustainable human development builds on strong basic education, sustainable work, and well-functioning health and social services. The goal must be to ensure the positive future perspectives of the inhabitants and to improve the safety of communities in the Arctic.

Finland supports the strong participation of indigenous peoples in the work of the Arctic Council and the integration of traditional and local knowledge into the programs and projects of the Council.

Finland highlights the socioeconomic dimension of freshwater bodies in the Arctic. These are used as sources of water supply, nutrition and recreation by many Arctic communities and they form an important part of the food security of the communities.

Health risks are increasing because of the changes in the living environment in the Arctic. Health security requires the ability to prevent, detect and respond to health threats across borders. Finland supports the continuation of the multisector *One Health* approach, taking into account the human–animal–ecosystems interface in the Arctic.

Mental wellness can be supported by building capacity for mental health promotion and by creating positive educational environments, which will enhance the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the development of the regions and countries. To address the challenge of suicide mortality, capacity building of professionals across administrative sectors is needed. Finland supports the continuation of the circumpolar cooperation on suicide prevention, initiated by previous Chairmanships.

Gender equality can be supported by raising awareness of the contribution of women and men to sustainable development. Finland supports the ongoing work on gender equality in the Arctic Council.

Occupational health and safety and wellbeing at work require special attention in the demanding Arctic working conditions. Finland proposes to establish a practice-based network of occupational health research institutes from the Arctic States to find solutions to the challenges of working life in the Arctic.

Finland will promote the development of basic education, especially by addressing teacher education. The second UArctic Congress will address this and other educational themes. An international symposium of teacher educators in the Arctic region will be hosted by the Finnish Educational Research Association.

Finland will host the next Model Arctic Council in which students from different universities convene to simulate the work of the Arctic Council. The main aim is to build capacity with regard to international negotiations on fundamental issues relevant to the Arctic and its inhabitants.

The Arctic region is rich in energy resources, yet many remote communities are dependent on a single, often expensive, source of energy. Energy-efficient housing could improve living conditions for many Arctic inhabitants. The fourth Arctic Energy Summit, to be held in Finland, will address energy development in the Arctic.

The digital revolution, including mobility as a service, will shake the foundations of the transport sector. The Lapland Host Committee for the Arctic Council Chairmanship will demonstrate the potential of intelligent transport systems in the Arctic region. The demonstration will be based on the outcomes of a testing area and experiences of a competence center located in Finnish Lapland.

## STRENGTHENING ARCTIC COOPERATION

Strengthening the Arctic Council is an ongoing process with the objective of enhancing Arctic cooperation in changing circumstances. Cooperation between outgoing and incoming Chairmanships supports the continuity of the Arctic Council's work. The deepened cooperation between the Chair and the Working Groups increases the effectiveness of the Arctic Council as a whole. Finland welcomes this development and will pursue it further.

The establishment of the Arctic Council Secretariat in 2013 has raised the profile of the Arctic Council in the international context and has helped to make the work of the Arctic Council more coherent. The Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat, which is now part of the Arctic Council Secretariat, provides welcome support for the Permanent Participants. Finland is looking at ways to further strengthen the role of the Arctic Council Secretariat.

The Arctic Council has made progress in communications and outreach. The new communications strategy strives to position the Council as an opinion-leader and further enhance its visibility. Finland will promote the Arctic Council's work and support effective implementation of the communications strategy.

The growing engagement of Observers is valuable for the Arctic Council's work and its international role. Special Observer sessions as part of the Senior Arctic Officials' meetings provide a much-needed method of interaction, and Finland intends to continue this practice.

The Arctic Council will continue to build mutually beneficial cooperation with entities such as the Arctic Economic Council, the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, the Arctic Offshore Regulators Forum and the University of the Arctic.

During its Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, the United States initiated a process of long-term strategic planning for the Council. Finland recognizes the need to set long-term strategic goals that extend beyond the two-year chairmanship periods. In favorable international conditions, these could be confirmed at an Arctic Summit.