



Waves of Change
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Research Report

Forum: The United Nations Framework Convention
on Climate Change

Issue: Combating, the Alarming Decline of Arctic
Ocean Wildlife due to Human Interference

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Introduction

The Arctic Ocean is the smallest and shallowest of the world's major oceans. It is considered as the ocean with the least amount of biodiversity and climate change has a huge influence on this issue; the region is experiencing unprecedented challenges as a result of anthropogenic activities. The damaging effects of climate change, over-exploitation of resources, pollution and the expansion of industrial activities are threatening the fragile balance of this pristine environment and making it harder for the unique species. Even without the direct contribution of humans on the North Pole, the damage made over the years has made the Arctic ice faster and faster, making it impossible for the iconic species to live in peace in the already harsh and cold environment they have succeeded to adapt to. Arctic Ocean's significance extends beyond regional boundaries, impacting the entire planet that's why the responsibility to safeguard the Arctic's biodiversity and mitigate the adverse effects of human interference falls upon the international community. It is imperative that we address these pressing issues head on.

Definition of Key Terms:

Arctic Ocean

Waters, mostly covered with solid ice or with ice floes and icebergs surrounding the North Pole

Biodiversity

The variety of plant and animal life in the world or in a particular habitat

Ecosystem: a community or group of living organisms that live in and interact with each other in a specific environment.

Environment

The surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates.

Anthropogenic activities: activities that are created or induced by humans and are frequently used with a negative connotation.

Climate change

The change in the environmental conditions of the earth such as long-term shifts in temperatures, and weather patterns.

Overexploitation of resources

The unsustainable use of natural resources for economic growth.

Pollution

The introduction of harmful materials (pollutants) into the environment.

Depleting resources: The renewable and non-renewable natural resources become scarce because they are consumed faster than they can recover.

Wildlife

Wild animals collectively; the native fauna (and sometimes flora) of a region.

General Overview

The Arctic Ocean is home to a variety of unique species, including polar bears, seals, fungi, fish, and plants. However, compared to other continents, its biodiversity is not extensive. The issue is influenced by various factors, including the size and climate of the Arctic Ocean. As previously mentioned, the harsh climate makes it impossible for only a limited number of species to inhabit this cold environment, and so does its size. The area faces a myriad of threats stemming from climate change, overfishing, pollution, and industrial activities. To effectively combat these challenges, a multifaceted strategy integrating environmental conservation laws, international agreements, and sustainable practices is essential.

The Arctic Ocean, a critical component of the global ecosystem, is experiencing a rapid decline in wildlife populations. The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5C confirms the Arctic is already experiencing warming “two or three times higher” than the global annual average. Melting ice, a consequence of climate change, disrupts habitats and migratory patterns. Overfishing further exacerbates the issue, depleting fish stocks and disrupting the delicate food chain. Pollution from shipping, oil and gas exploration, and plastic waste poses additional threats to Arctic wildlife.

Major Parties Involved

Canada

Canada is a member of the Arctic Council, a prominent intergovernmental forum that facilitates cooperation among Arctic nations on various issues, including environmental protection, sustainable development, and wildlife conservation. It also has a significant portion of its territory within the Arctic Circle, including the Arctic Archipelago and portions of the mainland. The country is actively engaged in asserting its sovereignty over its northern regions.

Denmark

Denmark plays a significant role in the Arctic region due to its sovereignty over Greenland, an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, and its strategic interests in the broader Arctic. It retains control over foreign affairs, defense, and financial policy. The country is also a member of the Arctic Council.

Norway

Norway's role in the Arctic is characterized by a commitment to environmental conservation, scientific research, and collaboration with indigenous communities. The country actively participates in international forums to address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the Arctic region in the Arctic Council.

Russian Federation

Russia is a member of the Arctic Council and has a significant portion of its territory within the Arctic Circle, including the Russian Arctic archipelago and the Northern Sea Route. The country actively asserts its sovereignty over its northern regions.

There is an increased military presence and activity in the Arctic, driven by strategic interests and concerns about territorial integrity. Russia's military buildup in the region has raised security concerns among Arctic and non-Arctic nations.

United States

The United States, as one of the Arctic Council member states, plays a significant role on this issue. The United States has developed a National Strategy for the Arctic Region, which outlines the country's approach to Arctic issues. The strategy addresses various aspects, including environmental stewardship, sustainable development, and the well-being of Arctic communities. The Arctic region surrounding the North Pole is divided among several countries including the United States. Alaska, a state within the United States, has a significant portion of its territory within the Arctic Circle. As such, the U.S. federal government and the state of Alaska collaborate on policies and initiatives related to Arctic conservation, wildlife protection, and sustainable development.

Arctic Council

The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum established in 1996 to promote cooperation and coordination among Arctic states on issues related to sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic region. The Arctic Council consists of eight Arctic states: Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States.

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) is an international body established to regulate the whaling industry and conserve whale populations. Although its primary focus is on whales, the IWC plays a role in broader marine conservation efforts, including those related to the decline of Arctic Ocean wildlife due to human interference. It is the reduction and elimination of pollutants, including those affecting the Arctic environment in 2018.

International Whaling Commission (IWC)

An intergovernmental forum that includes the eight Arctic nations along with indigenous organizations. The Arctic Council addresses issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic directly. So does UNFCCC with a small difference that UNFCCC addresses climate change in general, not only in Arctic areas.

European Union

The EU has signed the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean and the Paris Agreement. These agreements make the EU a key player in addressing these issues. It is important for the EU to fulfill its commitments under these agreements.

Timeline of Events

1827-1914: Arctic trophy hunting expeditions get popular along with tourism and exploration.

1950s-1970s: Recognition of environmental impacts from persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and heavy metals.

1972: The Marine Mammal Protection Act.

1970s-1980s: Heightened awareness of global climate change, with the Arctic experiencing temperature increases at twice the global average.

2000s-2010s: Growing concerns about overfishing and its impact on fish stocks and the marine ecosystem.

2015: Paris Agreement to minimize global rising temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

2018: Agreement by The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean reflects international collaboration.

2018: The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has established standards for shipping in polar waters with the aim of reducing the environmental impact of vessels and the risk of oil spills.

2019: UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) project to prevent, halting and reversing the degradation of ecosystems worldwide

UN and International Involvement

Several international agreements and conventions address the protection of Arctic ecosystems and wildlife. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) establishes the legal framework for the conservation and management of living marine resources, aiming to prevent overfishing and protect the marine environment. The Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, signed in 2018 by Canada Iceland, the Kingdom of Denmark, Norway, the United States and the Russian Federation, China, Japan, South Korea and the

European Union, demonstrates a collaborative effort among Arctic nations to manage fish stocks in a sustainable manner.

Furthermore, the Polar Code, a set of regulations under the International Maritime Organization (IMO), sets standards for shipping in polar waters, aiming to minimize the environmental impact of vessels and reduce the risk of oil spills. The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants addresses the reduction and elimination of pollutants, including those affecting the Arctic environment.

Previous Solutions

Paris Agreement (2015): The Paris Agreement, adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), aims to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. As climate change is a significant factor affecting the Arctic, the goals of the Paris Agreement indirectly contribute to addressing the decline of Arctic Ocean wildlife.

Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (2018): While not a UN resolution, this agreement involves several Arctic nations and major fishing nations and seeks to prevent unregulated fishing in the high seas of the central Arctic Ocean. It reflects international cooperation to address potential threats to the Arctic marine ecosystem.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS): UNCLOS provides a legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, including living marine resources in the Arctic. It establishes the rights and responsibilities of nations

with respect to their use of the world's oceans, which is crucial for protecting Arctic biodiversity.

Arctic Council Initiatives: The Arctic Council, composed of Arctic states, indigenous peoples, and other stakeholders, addresses various Arctic issues. While not a UN body, the work of the Arctic Council contributes to discussions on Arctic environmental protection, including wildlife conservation.

UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030): Though not Arctic-specific, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration emphasizes the importance of restoring ecosystems globally. Efforts to restore and conserve Arctic ecosystems could indirectly benefit Arctic Ocean wildlife.

Possible Solutions

In order to solve this issue, good cooperation between every single country attending is necessary. This includes fostering dialogue to improve existing frameworks, addressing gaps in legislation, and promoting the development of innovative solutions. By collectively committing to and enforcing laws that protect Arctic Ocean wildlife, the international community can work towards a sustainable future for this fragile ecosystem, preserving its biodiversity for generations to come.

Although many attempts have been made, there are still some gaps that have to be fixed. Some factors present may complicate this good cooperation and we have to take them to count.

Addressing climate change related issues requires international collaboration and concerted efforts to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, which is not always easy.

Bear in mind that the Arctic region is governed by multiple national jurisdictions and international agreements, making it challenging to coordinate conservation efforts effectively. Differing national interests, economic priorities, and regulatory frameworks can impede the establishment and enforcement of consistent conservation measures.

Enforcing conservation measures in the vast and remote Arctic region is challenging. Limited surveillance and enforcement capabilities, combined with the difficulty of monitoring activities in the expansive ocean, make it easier for illegal and unsustainable practices to go unnoticed.

The Arctic is rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, and minerals, leading to economic interests that may conflict with conservation goals. Balancing economic development with environmental protection is a delicate task that requires careful negotiation and planning. Let's not forget the indigenous communities in the Arctic often rely on traditional practices for sustenance and livelihoods. Balancing conservation goals with the cultural and socioeconomic needs of these communities requires careful consideration and community engagement.

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