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**Report to the Nordic Council of Ministers****Co-operation in the Arctic Region, 2009****Nordic co-operation in the Arctic Region, 2009**

The impact of climate change on the Arctic Region is all too clear. The average temperature in the Arctic is rising faster than in the rest of the world, and glaciers and sea ice are melting faster than ever before. New challenges posed by climate change necessitate adaptation by human, animal and plant life, as well as the region's economies. Less sea ice means that new transport routes open up and new natural resources become accessible, which has a consequent impact on nature and the environment. Internationalisation means that the peoples of the Arctic are increasingly affected by the decisions made by individual countries and regional forums that are geographically based outside of the Arctic Region. These developments have moved the Arctic Region up the political agenda.

**The Arctic - A priority in the Programme for the Icelandic Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2009**

The Nordic Council of Ministers aims to promote sustainable development in the Arctic Region. Priority areas are action on climate change, hazardous materials and heavy metals, as well as initiatives to enhance the quality of life of the Arctic peoples and improve the ecological and economic conditions for continued human settlement. One of Iceland's main priorities during its Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2009 has been closer Nordic co-operation to protect the North Atlantic and the Arctic. The Presidency has therefore launched a project to identify risk areas in the North Atlantic. At present, there is increased shipping activity in the Arctic due to the growing demand for natural resources. The project will therefore facilitate systematic contingency plans in the event of environmental disasters at sea.

### Arctic Co-operation Programme 2009–2011 and sectoral initiatives

The principal tool for the Council of Ministers' activities in the Arctic is the Arctic Co-operation Programme 2009-2011, which funds projects in the region. Funding priorities are:

Nordic activities and collaboration within the framework of the Arctic Council

following up and publicising the results of Nordic research in the Arctic initiatives that help secure a long-term legacy in the wake of the International Polar Year (IPY) 2007-2008.

In 2009, 32 projects received a total of approximately DKK 8 million in funding. To increase the impact of the programme's limited budget, attempts have been made to link up with projects where co-operation has produced obvious synergy effects – for example, closer collaboration between the University of the Arctic and the Arctic web portal led to particularly positive results in ICT use in teaching and communications. In response to growing interest in Nordic input in the Arctic, the Council of Ministers proposes increasing the budget for Arctic co-operation from DKK 8.3 million in 2009 to DKK 9.3 million in 2010.

The SWIPA project, which studies the effects of climate change on snow, water, ice and permafrost, is a prime example of an Arctic Council project that benefits from Nordic funding. SWIPA's analysis of changes to the cryosphere aims to fill in several gaps in our knowledge and clarify associated areas of uncertainty. Its outcomes include the ACIA report on climate change in Arctic areas, which was produced by the Arctic Council in 2004. This year, the Nordic Council of Ministers' environment sector also helped fund a film about the SWIPA project, which will be screened during the UN Climate Summit (COP15) in Copenhagen in December 2009.

As part of the run-up to COP15, the Nordic Council of Ministers has used funds from the globalisation pool to support several projects designed to raise awareness of climate change in the Arctic and improve the living conditions of the region's indigenous peoples. At the same time as the Climate Summit, the Danish Energy Agency, with assistance from the NMR, will construct a so-called "Arctic Venue" on the North Atlantic House in Copenhagen. A building will be transformed into an iceberg that appears to be melting into the harbour entrance. Inside, a number of Arctic projects will be on display for the benefit of the public, experts and politicians alike. The Council of Ministers is also expected to present NMR-funded Arctic projects at an exhibition stand in the Bella Center, in conjunction with COP15. A Nordic fringe event on the theme "Nordic Climate Solutions" is also planned.

Recent studies have shown that mercury emissions are having a particularly serious impact upon health and the environment in the Arctic. The Nordic countries have been actively involved in working towards a global mercury agreement that will include protection of vulnerable Arctic areas. As a result, the UN has initiated negotiations that are scheduled to conclude in 2013. The first negotiation meeting will take place in June 2010. The Nordic Region, via Sweden, has offered to host it using funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers. A global mercury agreement is expected to lead to a significant reduction in emissions.

The Nordic Top-Level Research Initiative (TFI) is the largest-ever Nordic research and innovation effort on the climate, the environment and energy. With a budget of DKK 400 million over five years, as well as national funding, the programme aims to establish a basis for sustainable energy solutions in co-operation between the research, innovation, industrial and business sectors. The Arctic is one of three horizontal priorities within the initiative. One of the six TFI sub-programmes, "Interaction between cli-

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mate change and the cryosphere”, is particularly relevant to the Arctic. The deadline for the programme’s first call for tenders within the sub-programme “Impact studies and adaptation to climate change” is 13 November 2009.

In order to further develop the legacy of IPY, the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research has decided to establish a network of former Nordic IPY co-ordinators and other relevant stakeholders. The intention is to co-ordinate research and expertise in skills policy in order to strengthen the knowledge base on Arctic issues within Nordic co-operation.

NordForsk already funds several environment-related research networks, three of which have an Arctic perspective and deal with, e.g. sea ice, paleo-climatology, and modelling of the atmospheric environment and climate effects. NMR also continues working with the Nordic Sámi Institute.

NMR has entered into a project with joint Nordic funding and management, the purpose of which is to study overarching trends in the Arctic. The aim is to collate data and provide an overview of current development trends and mechanisms in social, environmental and natural conditions in the Arctic, which will be critical to the future development of the region. The project was initiated by Denmark, and will be presented to the Arctic Council by Denmark and Finland at a meeting of ministers in 2011.

#### **Nordic co-operation in the Arctic Council, and the Nordic Region’s co-operation with its neighbours to the west**

The period 2006-2013 will see three Nordic presidencies of the Arctic Council in a row, so there is great potential for closer co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Arctic Council. Denmark took over the Presidency from Norway at the Arctic Council’s meeting of foreign ministers in Tromsø in April this year. Sweden will take over the position in April 2011. The meeting adopted a declaration that welcomes both closer collaboration with the NMR and its support for circumpolar co-operation.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has observer status on the Arctic Council, which this year discussed the possibility of a more strategic joint Nordic approach within the framework of the Arctic Council. It was proposed that it may be appropriate to support more targeted projects in addition to the regular funding programme.

In addition to closer co-operation with the Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers has earmarked DKK 2 million in this year’s budget to promote co-operation on, e.g. research, innovation and the climate with the Nordic Region’s neighbours in the West, especially Canada. It is envisaged that the funds will be used, for example, as part of a project on sustainable energy solutions in sparsely populated areas with extreme weather conditions. Other potential projects include co-operation on fisheries management and innovation in the North Atlantic aquaculture sector.

Work on social and health issues includes the initiation of a collaboration between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Canadian Department of Health (Health Canada), the aim of which is to convene an expert group that will focus on indigenous peoples and health under the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Wellbeing. The objective is to contribute to innovative solutions that improve the health of vulnerable groups in the Arctic.

In late 2008, Nordic Atlantic Co-operation (NORA) conducted a fact-finding mission to Canada to explore the possibility of closer collaboration

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with the Nordic Region's neighbours to the west, primarily the Canadian Atlantic provinces. In 2009, the resulting networks have, among other things, contributed to broad Canadian participation in Iceland's Presidency conference on "Innovation in the Nordic Marine Sector" and a co-operation agreement on the development of the "North Atlantic Knowledge Network" IT project, which will be jointly funded.

NAPA - the Nordic Institute of Greenland - has established good contacts in the cultural field in Canada and Alaska. This co-operation has resulted in, among other things, the Arctic Winter Games, which take place every two years and have a clear cultural-policy dimension. Close co-operation has also been developed on training and exchange programmes for young artists.

### **Nordic contribution to the Communication on the European Union and the Arctic Region**

During the Swedish Presidency in 2008, the Nordic Council of Ministers organised the Conference "Common Concern for the Arctic" in Ilulissat. Participants included representatives from the EU Parliament, the European Commission, the Council Secretariat, EU member states and other Nordic countries, other member states of the Arctic Council and its permanent members (who represent the Arctic indigenous people, other NGOs, research institutions and the media).

The aim of the conference was to increase awareness of and commitment to Arctic issues among the EU and other international stakeholders. The timing of the conference also enabled it to provide input into the drafting of the EU Commission's Arctic Communication, which was published on 20 November 2008. The Council's consideration of the communication is now underway and is expected to be completed in autumn 2009, during the Swedish Presidency of the EU.

The Nordic Council of Ministers subsequently received positive signals from the EU Commission that the conference had contributed to a growing awareness among those preparing the communication that consideration should be taken of the impact of EU policies on the Arctic and the Arctic peoples. However, the Nordic Council of Ministers notes that the European Parliament's decision to ban trade in seal products is a major blow for the Arctic peoples' living conditions – particularly in Greenland, where small-scale, local, traditional food and handicraft production are often based on seal.

The Nordic position on the seal question is illustrated in the Växjö Declaration "Seals and Society", which was adopted by the Nordic Council of Ministers for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry in June 2008. The Declaration stresses the importance of achieving a balance between conservation and utilisation of marine resources that takes account of the needs of both coastal communities and indigenous peoples. The EU ban on trade in seal products means that the seal question has entered a completely new phase. In the light of the new circumstances, the NMR wishes to contribute to a broader dialogue on the sustainable use of living marine resources, including seals, in order to provide a better understanding of the holistic perspective in policies in this area.

The Council of Ministers is working on the follow up to the Ilulissat conference, and has earmarked funds for this purpose.

### **The Stoltenberg Report**

Closer Nordic co-operation in the Arctic was also addressed in the Stoltenberg Report, drafted by former Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Thorvald Stoltenberg. The report, which looked at Nordic foreign and security

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co-operation, was presented at an extraordinary meeting of Nordic foreign ministers in February 2009. The report stresses that the Nordic countries should develop more practical co-operation on issues such as the environment, climate, security and emergency services, including in the Arctic. In a declaration adopted at the Nordic foreign ministers' meeting in Reykjavik in June 2009, ministers welcomed the report's proposals and highlighted them as important sources of inspiration for closer Nordic co-operation, particularly on foreign, security and defence policy.

In the immediate future, closer Nordic co-operation is envisaged on a number of additional priorities.

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