

TOGETHER TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ARCTIC

ICELAND'S ARCTIC COUNCIL
CHAIRMANSHIP 2019-2021



ARCTIC COUNCIL

TOGETHER TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ARCTIC

The theme of the Arctic Council Chairmanship program for 2019-2021 reflects Iceland's commitment to the principle of sustainable development and refers to the necessity of close cooperation between the states and peoples of the region and beyond.

Sustainable development and protection of the Arctic environment have been at the core of the Arctic Council's mandate since its foundation in 1996. With rapid environmental changes underway, its role has become ever more important.

Temperatures in the Arctic continue to rise at more than twice the global annual average. Rising temperatures accelerate the melting of snow and ice and affect the Arctic's interconnected ecosystems in direct and indirect ways, with various economic and social implications for Arctic communities.

Effective mitigation and adaptation strategies are needed to address the adverse impacts of Arctic climate change. The Arctic States and their partners must also ensure that new economic activities made possible by the decline of sea ice will be pursued in a sustainable manner. Balance must be sought between the three pillars of sustainable development – economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.



ICELAND'S CHAIRMANSHIP

In partnership with the other Member States and Permanent Participants, the Chairmanship will continue supporting many ongoing activities of Working Groups and other subsidiary bodies, as well as introducing a number of new projects in the Arctic Council work plan for 2019-2021.

With sustainable development as an overarching theme, Iceland will highlight four priorities: The **Arctic Marine Environment**, **Climate and Green Energy Solutions**, **People and Communities of the Arctic**, and a **Stronger Arctic Council**.

Iceland is honored to assume Chairmanship of the Arctic Council for the second time and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to strengthened Arctic cooperation.



During its Chairmanship, Iceland will highlight plastic pollution in the Arctic marine environment.





ARCTIC MARINE ENVIRONMENT

Arctic Council Working Groups have contributed significantly to scientific knowledge and understanding of the Arctic marine environment. The Arctic Council will continue its work on monitoring and assessment, protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, and promotion of sustainable use of marine resources.

During its Chairmanship, Iceland will highlight plastic pollution in the Arctic marine environment, drawing on the findings of the first desktop study on marine litter in the Arctic. The Arctic Council will work on the development of a Regional Action Plan to reduce marine litter, including micro-plastics, along with other efforts to monitor and limit its impacts.

The Government of Iceland plans to convene an international symposium on the threat of plastics to Arctic marine ecosystems in April 2020 and the possibility of a high-level political dialogue on marine issues is under consideration.

Innovative methods to improve the utilization of living marine resources may have considerable potential for driving sustainable economic growth in coastal communities. Iceland is leading the development of a project on the Blue Bioeconomy in the Arctic, exploring opportunities to increase the value of marine products.

Iceland will continue to promote safe and sustainable shipping in the Arctic. With increasing marine traffic and activities, it is essential to maintain close and effective cooperation among the Arctic States on search and rescue, as well as emergency prevention, preparedness and response. Circumpolar meteorological and oceanographic cooperation also serves to improve safety at sea and should be developed further, in collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization.

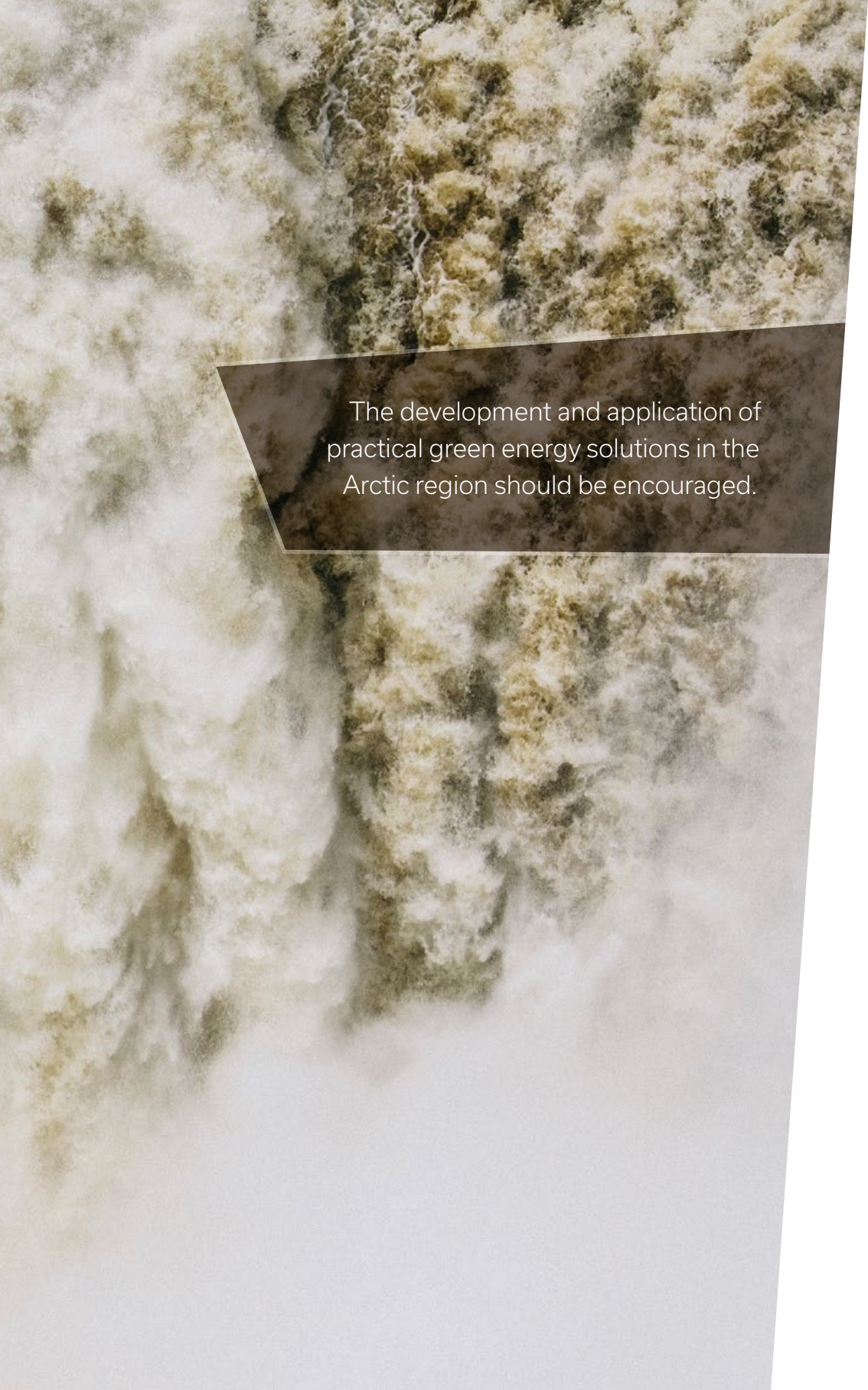
CLIMATE AND GREEN ENERGY SOLUTIONS

The impacts of climate change not only make their mark on the environment of the Arctic but also affect the economic and social wellbeing of Arctic communities.


Member States take action to address climate change in accordance with their respective international commitments and national policies. The importance of basing climate policies on solid scientific foundations cannot be overstated. The Arctic Council will continue observing and assessing climate impacts on Arctic marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems, and an update report on Arctic climate change will be prepared for the 2021 Ministerial meeting in Reykjavík.

Building on the work of the Expert Group on Black Carbon and Methane, efforts to identify opportunities to reduce emissions of short-lived climate pollutants will continue. Progress in this area could help slow the current pace of change in the Arctic while work is underway to reduce longer-term impacts.

The development and application of practical green energy solutions in the Arctic region should be encouraged, enabling communities to reduce emissions and improve air quality. Projects that promote knowledge exchange and aim to support small and remote Arctic communities in transitioning to sustainable energy will continue running in 2019-2021.

An aerial photograph of a dense forest with a central stream. The forest is a mix of green and yellowish-green, suggesting some autumnal change or a specific tree species. The stream is a light, milky color, possibly due to sediment or glacial meltwater. A dark, semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

The development and application of practical green energy solutions in the Arctic region should be encouraged.

A photograph of a man with short dark hair, wearing a black t-shirt and dark pants, holding a young child with light brown hair. The child is wearing a grey t-shirt and dark pants. They are standing in front of a window with white curtains. The man is looking out the window, and the child is looking out the window with their hand near their mouth. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window. The image is presented as a vertical strip on a white background.

Environmental protection and social inclusion must always go hand in hand with economic development.

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES OF THE ARCTIC

Initiatives that aim to promote the wellbeing of the roughly four million people living in the region will remain central to the Arctic Council's work.

Environmental changes can affect Arctic inhabitants and their livelihoods in various ways. Northern communities are already facing challenges that result from the impacts of climate change, demonstrating the need for action to strengthen resilience and facilitate adaptation.

New economic opportunities, including in shipping and tourism, can contribute to growth and prosperity of Arctic communities, if they are carried out sustainably. Environmental protection and social inclusion must always go hand in hand with economic development.

Reliable and affordable telecommunications are essential for Arctic inhabitants in order to access services and participate in the digital economy. Iceland's Chairmanship wishes to maintain a focus on improving connectivity, in close cooperation with the Arctic Economic Council, building on previous mapping of needs, gaps and solutions.

Gender equality is an important element for achieving sustainable development. Iceland will continue to lead a project that aims to promote dialogue on gender equality in the Arctic and strengthen a network of experts and stakeholders in the field.

STRONGER ARCTIC COUNCIL

Iceland's Chairmanship will strive to enhance the constructive cooperation that has always been a key strength of the Arctic Council.

Close consultations between the Member States and the Permanent Participants must continue, and further opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration with Observers should be explored.

Iceland wishes to strengthen cooperation between the Arctic Council and the Arctic Economic Council, on the basis of a new Memorandum of Understanding, with the shared objective of promoting responsible economic development.



A red boat is seen from a top-down perspective, navigating a narrow, winding channel through a vast field of broken ice floes. The ice floes are irregular in shape and size, creating a complex, maze-like path. The water in the channel is dark blue, contrasting with the white and light blue of the ice. The overall scene is set in a high-latitude, arctic environment.

Iceland wishes to strengthen cooperation
between the Arctic Council and the
Arctic Economic Council.

The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.

Established in 1996, the Arctic Council is composed of eight Member States: Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States. In addition, six organizations representing Arctic indigenous peoples have status as Permanent Participants: the Aleut International Association, the Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Saami Council. Observer status is open to non-Arctic states and organizations that can contribute to the Council's work.

The work of the Arctic Council is primarily carried out in its six Working Groups. Their efforts and analysis form the basis for Arctic Council assessments and recommendations. Decisions are taken by consensus among the eight Arctic Council States, with full consultation and involvement of the Permanent Participants.

Further information is available on the Arctic Council website, arctic-council.org

 @IcelandArctic #IceArctic

May 2019. Published by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Iceland. Printed on EU Ecolabel, FSC and PEFC certified paper.

**TOGETHER
TOWARDS A
SUSTAINABLE
ARCTIC**

ICELAND'S CHAIRMANSHIP
ARCTIC COUNCIL 2019-2021