

A photograph of a snow-capped mountain peak under a cloudy sky. The text 'Arctic NGO forum' is overlaid on the left side of the image in white.

Arctic NGO forum

Report of the First Arctic NGO Forum Meeting

**Arendal, Norway
19 - 20 January 2012**

Background

The Arctic NGO Forum will provide a regular opportunity for dialogue and will give NGOs concerned with Arctic environmental issues an opportunity to work together and gain access to policy makers. It will look at ways to respond to present and potential future pressures on the Arctic environment and assist NGOs in focusing attention on the rapid changes taking place, and the need for action.

The Forum will contribute to the elaboration of policies that support the sustainable development of the Arctic. These policies may be national, EU-centred or circumpolar. The Forum has a role to play in directing attention to areas of common interest, raising awareness, and providing expert opinion on emerging issues.

The Forum will meet twice a year over the next three years. Three thematic workshops will be organized related to the state of the Arctic environment with wider NGO and stakeholder participation.

Forum Meeting #1 – Arendal, Norway

The first day consisted of wide-ranging discussions about the purpose and goals of the Forum. It also gave participants an opportunity to meet each other and learn about one another's organizations and backgrounds. The day focused on why the Forum was created and what it is supposed to accomplish. It also included a discussion on themes of common concern and the development of objectives to guide its work. A representative from the European Commission commented that there are a number of EU initiatives about to begin in which the Forum could be engaged.

Day 1 included a brainstorming session on issues of concern that included:

- Climate change
- Resource management
- Governance
- Economic Development of the Arctic
- Civil society participation

- Global ecosystem services provided by the Arctic
- Information dissemination
- Science cooperation
- Creating “global ownership” in the Arctic

Break out groups discussed how the Forum would work, its goals and how a collective strategy might be developed. There were many ideas about what the group should do, including developing ways to strengthen NGO capacity in the Arctic, developing joint activities, communications, and creating conditions for sustainable development in the Arctic. As for how it should operate ideas included campaigns, policy statements, position papers, developing an internal and external online platform to share information and injecting the Forum perspective into various stakeholder consultations.

On Day 2, the conversation focused on the mechanics of how the forum will operate and potential workshop themes. Participants also developed a common statement about the creation of the forum and its goals:

Forum Goals

1. Promote better cooperation among NGOs to increase their effectiveness and influence with decision-makers, both public and private;
2. Increase NGOs’ ability to use scarce resources in Arctic fora by sharing knowledge and information, and building capacity;
3. Create opportunities for understanding and dialogue between NGOs and Indigenous and local people in the Arctic;
4. Raise awareness about the threats to the Arctic environment and their potential solutions;
5. Use the forum as a way to identify emerging issues and place them on the public agenda.

Workshop Themes

Among the potential workshop themes were oil and gas exploration, land use change, fisheries, and shipping in the Arctic.

Participants decided to hold the first workshop on the theme of oil and gas development in the Arctic, with an emphasis on exploration and avoiding spills and disasters. It will be held in the autumn of 2012 and will have a dual purpose. On the first day the focus will be on capacity building and information sharing, drawing from the collective expertise and networks of organizations taking part in the Forum. The second day will be used to define and build common strategies.

A second workshop, to be held in autumn 2013, will focus on the changing tundra.

Coordination and Development

The idea of creating an Arctic NGO Forum was laid out in the European Commission's 2008 Communication *The EU and the Arctic Region*, which stated that the Commission should "promote permanent dialogue with NGOs on the state of the environment in the Arctic region." UNEP/GRID-Arendal and Ecorys are responsible for managing the project under contract to the European Commission.

These two organizations will act as a secretariat and ensure the smooth operation and development of the Forum. The secretariat's role is to provide coordination and continuity to ensure that the Forum continues to develop.

Next Steps

A number of important steps were identified by participants and the secretariat to further develop the Forum in the run-up to the first workshop, planned for autumn 2012. These include:

- Creating a steering committee to guide the development of the first workshop;
- Clarifying membership, decision-making procedures, and needs for support by participants;
- Further developing internal communications between forum members, as well as external communications, including the website www.arcticngoforum.org
- Developing a fundraising strategy to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Forum.

The organizers will be contacting organizations that expressed interest in participating but which were unable to attend the first Forum meeting due to logistical or financial reasons.

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www.arcticngoforum.org

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Statement by the Arctic NGO Forum at its first meeting in Arendal, Norway 19 - 20 January 2012

The Arctic is vital to the Earth's cooling system and its environment is unique and fragile. Arctic marine and terrestrial ecosystems provide a variety of ecosystem services, which are of fundamental importance to the livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. However, the image of a frozen, timeless Arctic is being dramatically altered by each new scientific study, replaced by a new reality of rapid change. Governments are staking their claims to the offshore at the same time as industry begins to focus on the economic opportunities that come with an ice-free Arctic. More than ever before, the Arctic is on the geopolitical agenda.

Non-governmental organizations are looking at what this change means for Arctic ecosystems and human well-being. However, few mechanisms exist for NGOs concerned with Arctic environmental issues to get together, exchange ideas and perspectives and develop common strategies to influence policy makers.

A new Arctic NGO Forum has been created which held its first meeting last week in Arendal, Norway. It will be a platform for civil society dialogue, collaboration and action on Arctic issues.

We, the Arctic NGO Forum, will:

1. Promote better cooperation among NGOs to increase their effectiveness and influence with decision-makers, both public and private;
2. Increase NGOs' ability to use scarce resources in Arctic fora by sharing knowledge and information, and building capacity;
3. Create opportunities for understanding and dialogue between NGOs and Indigenous and local people in the Arctic;
4. Raise awareness about the threats to the Arctic environment and their potential solutions;
5. Use the forum as a way to identify emerging issues and place them on the public agenda.

The Forum will meet regularly and will organize workshops with wide participation to address the critical challenges facing the Arctic.

Among the meeting participants were the Arctic Alliance, Bellona Foundation, International Polar Foundation, Indigenous Peoples Secretariat, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, University of the Arctic, and Wetlands International. Other organizations have expressed interest and the Forum membership is expected to grow.

The Forum is coordinated jointly by UNEP/GRID-Arendal and Ecorys.

For further information:

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Participants at the 1st Forum Meeting

Name	Organisation
John Bennett	Arctic Alliance
Sigurd Enge	Bellona Foundation
Jaime Reynolds	DG Environment, European Commission
Nick Hanley	DG Environment, European Commission
Hans Bolscher	ECORYS
Oscar Wilderberg	ECORYS
Nikolaj Bock	European Environment Agency
Aase Refsnes	Friends of the Earth
Frida Bengtsson	Greenpeace
Truls Gulowsen	Greenpeace
Erik Gant	Indigenous Peoples Secretariat
Thierry Touchais	International Polar Foundation
Daniel Beard	Oceans North
Björn Alfthan	UNEP/GRID-Arendal
John Crump	UNEP/GRID-Arendal
Kathrine Johnsen	UNEP/GRID-Arendal
Peter Prokosch	UNEP/GRID-Arendal
Lars Kullerud	University of the Arctic
Tatiana Minayeva	Wetlands International

AGENDA

DAY 1 – 19th January 2012

09:00 - 11:00 Introductions and expectations (Hans Bolscher & John Crump)

- Welcome address and introduction to the agenda of the workshop
- Brief introduction of the purpose of the Forum
- Introduction of participants
- Q&A and comments

11:00 - 11:15 Coffee Break

11:15 - 12:15 Brainstorm (Hans Bolscher & Kathrine Johnsen)

We need to decide what the Forum should focus on. We will brainstorm to come up with what possible environmental themes the Forum/Workshops. The goal is to cluster the ideas into themes which will be the topics of the afternoon session.

12:15 - 13:30 Lunch

13:30 - 15.00 Jam Sessions (Hans Bolscher & Kathrine Johnsen)

In smaller breakout groups we will discuss and propose how the Forum might work on specific thematic issues – including target audiences, methods and types of outreach/communication, modes of operation, expected results, and current gaps to fill (e.g. geographical representation) in order to achieve expected results.

15:00-15:30 Coffee break

15:30-17:00 Sharing views and discussion (Hans Bolscher & John Crump)

- Sharing ideas from the Jam Sessions (10 min per group)
- Discussions on the ideas shared
- Discuss what missing for the Forum to reach its goals, e.g., what other NGOs should be invited to be part of the Forum
- Preliminary conclusions on the mode of operation for the Forum
- Present agenda for day two

-- Evening programme --

DAY 2 - 20th January

- 09:00 - 10:30 Kick-start the day (Hans Bolscher & John Crump)
- Recapturing Day 1
 - Discussion and agreement on the Forum goals, themes and mode of operation
- 10:30 - 10:45 Coffee break
- 10:45 - 12:15 Decide on next steps (Hans Bolscher & John Crump)
- Funding
 - How to keep the momentum going after this Forum meeting? Roles and responsibilities
 - Forum communications -- internal and external
 - Make recommendations about a time and place for future Forum meetings
 - Agree on topics for the first Workshop
 - Agree on draft workplan to guide the development of the Forum
- 12:15 - 13:30 Lunch
- 13:30 - 14:30 Looking forward (Hans Bolscher & John Crump)
- We would like to encourage you to present your NGO's work and key issues, as well as share information on your plans for relevant upcoming events (Arctic Frontiers, January 2012; Arctic Council Deputy Ministerial Meeting; IPY 2012 From Knowledge to Action, April 2012; etc.)
- 14:30 Departure