

RESEARCH/REVIEW ARTICLE

The effectiveness of the Arctic Council

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Abstract

Created in 1996, the Arctic Council has now been in operation long enough to justify a systematic effort to assess its effectiveness. To explore this topic, we created a questionnaire and circulated it to a large number of individuals who have participated in the work of the council in one capacity or another or who have followed the work of the council closely. This article analyses the quantitative and the qualitative input of those who responded to the questionnaire. The main conclusions are that: (1) the council has achieved considerable success in identifying emerging issues, framing them for consideration in policy venues and raising their visibility on the policy agenda and (2) changes now occurring in the Arctic will require significant adjustments to maintain the effectiveness of the council during the foreseeable future.

Created under the terms of a ministerial declaration signed in Ottawa, Canada, on 19 September 1996, the Arctic Council (AC) has now been in operation long enough to justify a systematic assessment of its performance. The language of the declaration itself is general and rather weak. It describes the council as a “high level forum” intended to promote “cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States.” It does not grant the council authority to make binding decisions or to develop policies regarding current Arctic issues (Bloom 1999). As a result, expectations about the performance of this new venture in Arctic cooperation were mixed as the council got underway and took over from its predecessor, the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, during 1997.

Despite this rather inauspicious beginning, the AC has emerged as a prominent player in Arctic affairs (Young 1996, 2002, 2009; Koivurova & VanderZwaag 2007; Stokke & Honneland 2007; Koivurova 2010; Axworthy et al. 2012; Fenge in press). It has found a useful niche as a producer of influential scientific assessments; it has become a mechanism for increasing the prominence of the concerns of the Arctic’s indigenous peoples, and it has provided a venue for the development of international initiatives such as the agreement on search and rescue in the Arctic signed at the Nuuk Ministerial Meeting in

May 2011. Another initiative, an international agreement on Arctic marine oil pollution preparedness and response, is underway and is expected to be presented at the next Ministerial Meeting in 2013. The Nuuk Declaration includes a decision to provide the council with a permanent secretariat as well as an initiative to consider ways to introduce the idea of ecosystem-based management into the work of the council. Overall, the effectiveness of the AC has exceeded the expectations of many of those who were present during its inception.

How can we move beyond impressionistic commentaries on the effectiveness of the AC? To the extent that the council has proven effective, what are the sources of its success? What are the prospects for continued or even enhanced effectiveness in the future? What steps can be taken to secure and improve the effectiveness of this body during the coming years? These questions have animated the analysis we present in this article. To arrive at well-documented conclusions, we created a survey instrument and circulated it widely in the form of a questionnaire among those who have been active in the affairs of the AC or followed its work closely from the sidelines.

Our goal has been to tap the knowledge of those in a position to articulate informed views regarding the activities of the council. A broader sampling of public opinion could also yield insights of interest regarding the

work of the council and, more generally, the recent developments in the Arctic. But that is not the focus of this study. Interested readers may wish to see the results of the Arctic Security Public Opinion Survey, a broader study of public opinion in and on the Arctic conducted by the Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation of Toronto (see <http://gordonfoundation.ca/>).

The analysis we present is based on the input of those who responded to our questionnaire. We start with a description of our data set. We then present in quantitative form the principal results derived from an analysis of the data. We continue with a discussion of the future of the AC, drawing on the qualitative input our respondents provided to identify challenges facing the council as well as strategies for addressing these challenges.

Our own involvement with the AC should be noted at the outset. PK worked on Arctic issues for the Finnish Ministry of the Environment in 1990s and participated in the Senior Arctic Officials and Ministerial Meetings of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy and the AC as well as meetings of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. During that time, she acted also as a Deputy Executive Secretary of the AC's Working Group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) for a year. Today, she is the Director of the Arctic Centre at the University of Lapland and participates in Arctic meetings. ORY has served as a leading figure in the Working Group on Arctic International Relations, the Arctic Human Development Report, the International Arctic Science Committee, the Board of Governors of the University of the Arctic and the Arctic Governance Project and as a consultant to the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic region. He has attended many Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy and AC meetings in various capacities.

The data

The questionnaire and the data collection process

We created a questionnaire about the AC's effectiveness designed to elicit the views of people familiar with the council and its work. The questionnaire includes 21 sets of questions asking for responses on a 0–5 scale and six open-ended questions asking for qualitative responses.

The questions address the overall success of the council, the effectiveness of its major products, the sources of its success, the impacts of participation on the part of different interest groups, efforts to strengthen the council, the availability of resources, the work of the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), issues of outreach and communication and the effects of the current "Arctic Boom."

During fall 2010 and winter 2011, we sent the questionnaire to a set of 859 individuals via e-mail and a Webropol-link. We started with participants in the recent AC and Working Group meetings (2008–10). Since we also wanted to hear from participants in earlier years, we sent the questionnaire to a group of individuals who participated in meetings during 1997–99. In addition, we reviewed participation lists from meetings of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy and the AC starting with the establishment of the strategy in 1991 and identified individuals we knew to have been active participants in the work of the strategy and the council.

Features of the data

On the scalar questions, we asked participants to respond on a 0–5 scale. There was no option for "neutral" or "don't know." Scores of 1 and 2 were negative (i.e., "no impact at all" or "very little impact"). A score of 3 had the positive meaning of "some impact." A score of 4 was distinctly positive ("clear impact"); 5 indicated a strongly positive result (i.e., "considerable impact").

Most responses to such questionnaires tend to cluster in the middle of the range of possible responses, forming more or less a bell curve. The results summarize the perceptions of the respondents; they are not based on objective evidence. However, by analysing the responses of individuals and comparing them to each other, we can identify general trends. Extreme scores constitute an especially interesting source of insights.

There have been new developments within the AC since the preparation of the questionnaire, especially those articulated in the 2011 Nuuk Declaration. A few individual questions are now outdated (e.g., whether the council would benefit from the creation of a permanent secretariat). However, these are exceptions. The great majority of the questions remain relevant at the time of writing this article.

Survey research has become an important means of data collection in studies of human attitudes and behaviours in recent decades. All survey research is subject to several types of errors. Total error is a composite of measurement error (attributable to interviewers and respondents), coverage error and sampling error. While sampling error can be reduced by increasing the sample size, the other sources of error are more difficult to minimize. In interpreting the results of a study like this one, it is important to recognize that "total survey error" is greater than just sampling error (Weisberg 2005).

We used a sampling frame that resembles the population of interest as much as possible by approaching

individuals involved with the AC and its work. Ninety individuals completed and returned the questionnaire. While our response rate of 11% is low, the insights of 90 individuals deeply familiar with the work of the AC constitute a valuable data set.

Those who responded to the questionnaire were diligent; 83 respondents (92%) replied to all the questions included in a long questionnaire. Response rates to different sets of questions were somewhat varied. The questions about the SDWG were most difficult; the average response rate was only 82% (74 respondents). Respondents were more confident regarding their views on the question about the outreach and communication activities of the AC; 88 (98%) respondents answered these questions.

Analysts have noted that response rates in survey research have declined considerably as the use of surveys has increased. There is also evidence of some public suspicion or scepticism regarding surveys (Weisberg 2005). This factor may have been particularly important in this study, as the activities of the AC have become increasingly politicized in recent years. This may account for relatively low response rates from Senior Arctic Officials, members of the council's Working Groups and, especially, the Russians who have been involved in the work of the council.

The text of our questionnaire and a set of tables displaying all of the data we collected for each question are available at the following website: www.arcticcentre.org/arctic_council_study.

The respondents

The respondents were distributed quite evenly among the Arctic States. Each Arctic State provided 11–16% of the responses, with the exception of Russia at only 2%. Taken together, 7% of the responses came from China, Germany, Italy, Korea, the Netherlands and Poland.

We received responses from all AC components, including the Senior Arctic Officials and the Working Groups. The respondents associated themselves with various groups as follows: member states 40%; permanent participants 2%; AC organizations 7%; local or regional organizations 4%; observer states 7%; non-governmental or international observer organizations 19%; and science, business or industry 21%.

The respondents included both old-timers and recent participants. Most (64%) had participated in the 2000s and over half had been active, especially in the most recent years. Twenty percent had been active in 1991–95.

Men outnumbered women (81–19%), reflecting the gender ratio of the recipient list. A majority of the respondents (60%) were in the age group of 41–60.

Results

Effectiveness/success of the AC and its products

Changes in attitudes and behaviour. A sizable majority of the respondents (84%) think the AC has had some or even a clear impact. The average grade for the overall success of the AC was 3.36 out of 5, where 5 = “considerable impact” and 1 = “no impact at all.” The small deviation ($SD = 0.67$) indicates that the respondents generally agree on this judgment. Asked to choose among areas in which the AC has been effective, the respondents judged the council to be especially effective in increasing international co-operation in the Arctic ($\bar{x} = 3.94$, $SD = 0.88$) and raising general awareness about the Arctic ($\bar{x} = 3.81$, $SD = 0.9$). They felt that the council has some impact on the ability of the Arctic's indigenous peoples to influence local, regional or international policies ($\bar{x} = 3.44$, $SD = 0.81$) and on the coordination of national Arctic policies internationally ($\bar{x} = 3.34$, $SD = 1.07$). Impacts on strategies adopted by the Arctic states ($\bar{x} = 3.05$, $SD = 0.89$) and on changes in international agreements, treaties and conventions ($\bar{x} = 3.00$, $SD = 1.00$) are still seen as positive.

Not surprisingly, changes in attitudes and behaviour are judged to be greatest among those actually participating in AC meetings ($\bar{x} = 3.55$, $SD = 0.90$). The respondents also judged the impact on decision makers in the Arctic states to be somewhat positive ($\bar{x} = 3.37$, $SD = 0.88$). However, even those respondents who gave positive responses regarding the work of the council concluded that its activities have had little effect on attitudes and behaviour among members of the general public ($\bar{x} = 2.66$, $SD = 1.03$) and on decision makers in non-Arctic countries ($\bar{x} = 2.55$, $SD = 0.89$).

Judgments regarding concrete actions relating to environmental protection locally or regionally within the Arctic show little variation. In all cases—protection of biodiversity and protected areas ($\bar{x} = 3.29$, $SD = 0.88$), protection of the marine environment ($\bar{x} = 3.22$, $SD = 0.89$), pollution control ($\bar{x} = 3.17$, $SD = 0.88$), reduced risks of environmental emergencies ($\bar{x} = 2.98$, $SD = 0.84$)—the council is credited with modest success.

Responses regarding the effectiveness of concrete local or regional actions in the area of sustainable development were less positive. None reached an average score of 3 indicating “some impact.” The most positive results include impact on individual health, education and

welfare ($\bar{x}=2.89$, $SD=0.78$) and cultural identity ($\bar{x}=2.89$, $SD=0.84$), while impacts in the areas of local and regional governance and economic opportunities scored only 2.54 ($SD=0.90$) and 2.41 ($SD=0.85$), where a score of 2 indicates “very little impact.”

Clear differences emerged in rating the effectiveness of the council’s working groups. The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) received an average score of 4.07. CAFF and Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) also received positive grades, getting mean scores of 3.41 and 3.36, respectively. The rest of the working groups are seen as having little impact: the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) Working Group scored 2.91, the Arctic Contaminants Action Programme (ACAP) 2.80 and the SDWG 2.78. The deviations in these responses were small, ranging between 0.78 and 0.86.

Impacts of the AC’s products. As expected, respondents were almost unanimous in regarding scientific assessments as the most effective products of the AC ($\bar{x}=4.42$, $SD=0.69$). In addition, overview assessments ($\bar{x}=4.08$, $SD=0.88$), popular reports ($\bar{x}=3.98$, $SD=0.95$) and environmental monitoring efforts conducted by AMAP ($\bar{x}=3.57$, $std=0.93$) received positive scores.

There was less agreement among the respondents on other categories of products. Environmental guidelines, codes of conduct and best practices, AC efforts in enhancing the “Arctic voice” in global forums and technical reports were all judged to have “some impact” ($\bar{x}=3.19$ – 3.31 , $SD=0.96$ – 1.13).

The respondents regarded environmental emergency training and capacity-building efforts (e.g., demonstration projects) as having even less impact ($\bar{x}=3.05$ and 2.96 , $SD=0.93$ and 1.02 , respectively).

When asked to list three main council products that have made a difference in enhancing sustainable development and environmental protection, the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) came out on top; 54% mentioned it first. In listing three main products without priority, the result was ACIA (32%), AMAP reports (24%), Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA; 16%), Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR; 8%), CAFF reports (5%), PAME reports (3%), ACAP activities (2%) and others (10%).

The respondents regard the reports as effective in increasing general awareness about the Arctic (14%) and enhancing international cooperation in the Arctic (11%). On the contrary, respondents were less likely to see effective results with regard to harmonization of national Arctic policies (5%), changes in international

agreements, treaties and conventions (6%), concrete actions locally and regionally (6%) and capacity building (6%). Impacts on new or revised public policies and strategies of the Arctic States and on the political weight of the Arctic’s indigenous peoples received only modest scores (7% each).

Sources of effectiveness

Respondents judged the fact that the council allows for dialogue among different knowledge groups as the most important factor contributing to the effectiveness of the AC ($\bar{x}=4.23$, $SD=0.74$). Other important factors include the participation of indigenous peoples’ organizations as permanent participants ($\bar{x}=4.14$, $SD=0.95$) and the rising political interest in the issues the council addresses ($\bar{x}=4.09$, $SD=1.24$).

Additional significant factors include the role of individuals and groups that seek to facilitate science–policy interactions ($\bar{x}=3.77$, $SD=0.92$) and the openness of the council to non-state actors as observers ($\bar{x}=3.57$, $SD=0.93$).

Less important but still relevant sources of success include openness to non-member states as observers ($\bar{x}=3.59$, $SD=1.04$), the emphasis on informal discussions rather than legally binding decisions ($\bar{x}=3.52$, $SD=0.88$) and the fact that the council is a small body, including only eight member states ($\bar{x}=3.41$, $SD=1.12$).

Factors contributing to the effectiveness of the working groups.

Not surprisingly, respondents judged that commitment on the part of those individuals who actually do the work is critical in this realm. In the view of the respondents, representatives of member states play the most prominent role ($\bar{x}=4.29$, $SD=0.74$), participation on the part of scientists is important ($\bar{x}=4.23$, $SD=0.73$), a good chairman makes a real difference ($\bar{x}=4.16$, $SD=0.83$) and the performance of the secretariat is important ($\bar{x}=4.00$, $SD=0.96$).

Factors regarded as less important but still significant include support from indigenous peoples, links to relevant organizations outside the Arctic and responsiveness to interests of local stakeholders ($\bar{x}=3.75$ – 3.80 , $SD=0.84$ – 0.86).

Factors limiting the effectiveness of the AC.

Respondents believed that the greatest hindrance to the effectiveness of the council is the lack of a reliable source of funding to cover general operating expenses ($\bar{x}=4.05$, $SD=0.96$). Other serious limitations arise from the facts

that the AC does not follow up on the implementation of its recommendations and on the use of its products ($\bar{x}=3.76$, $SD=0.93$), that the member states do not attach high enough priority to Arctic issues ($\bar{x}=3.75$, $SD=0.96$) and that the council lacks the authority to make binding decisions ($\bar{x}=3.60$, $SD=1.06$).

The respondents identified a number of other limitations on the effectiveness of the council ($\bar{x}=3.07$ – 3.48 , $SD=0.99$ – 1.13). In order of priority, they include the lack of a permanent secretariat, weak coordination with global organizations, insufficient coordination with regional organizations, lack of participation on the part of industry and the private sector, the fact that decisions are made exclusively by consensus, and a lack of sufficient commitment on the part of the Senior Arctic Officials.

The respondents did not regard the low level of participation on the part of local stakeholders as a significant problem ($\bar{x}=2.96$, $SD=0.91$). Nor did they see the fact that AC's materials are available mostly in English as a source of weakness ($\bar{x}=2.52$, $SD=1.06$). But these findings may be attributable to the fact that only 4% of the respondents represented local or regional organizations and only 2% were from Russia or represented indigenous peoples' organizations.

Participation of policymakers, scientists and other stakeholders. Respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of actors as participants in the work of the council. Here, we group the actors into four categories and list them in priority order: good impact ($\bar{x}=3.6$ – 4.0 , $SD=1.06$), more than a little impact ($\bar{x}=3.1$ – 3.5), some impact ($\bar{x}=2.6$ – 3.0) and very little impact ($\bar{x}=2.0$, $SD=2.5$).

The respondents judged officials from the governments of member states, representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations, representatives of scientific organizations and individual scientists to be the most effective participants in the work of the council.

The activities of representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations have more than a little impact. There is no significant difference between men and women representatives: 3.48 ($SD=0.84$) for men and 3.38 for women ($SD=0.90$).

Representatives of observer states, local and regional officials and elders have some impact. Young people, other Arctic residents and representatives of private industry have very little impact.

Strengthening the AC

Proposed reforms. Respondents ranked support for research on issues identified by the council as priority

concerns as the most important measure to improve the effectiveness of the council ($\bar{x}=4.04$, $SD=0.90$). A close second is the need for a permanent secretariat for the council ($\bar{x}=3.93$, $SD=1.14$) and for stronger secretariats for the working groups and task forces ($\bar{x}=3.76$, $SD=0.87$). The decision to establish a permanent council secretariat under the terms of the Nuuk Declaration is a constructive step in this connection.

Other suggestions include motivating the senior representatives of the Arctic states to play a stronger role in the work of the council ($\bar{x}=3.87$, $SD=0.74$), arranging for the SDWG to have more contact with scientists who study social issues ($\bar{x}=3.72$, $SD=0.90$) and organizing a meeting of the council at the heads of government/state level ($\bar{x}=3.59$, $SD=1.12$).

Less important but still significant measures ($\bar{x}=3.1$ – 3.5 , $SD=0.83$ – 1.13) listed in priority order include restructuring the organization of the council; improving the participation of local decision makers and stakeholders; enhancing the participation of indigenous peoples; providing more opportunities for introducing policy perspectives through bodies like the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region; increasing the participation of observers and raising the profile of industry representatives.

Opinions regarding the need to restructure the organization of the council ($SD=1.13$) showed the greatest variation.

Funding and material resources. The respondents generally agreed that the current method of funding the work of the council is inadequate ($\bar{x}=2.41$, $SD=0.78$). The preferred way to alleviate this problem would be for the Arctic states to invest more in support of national participation in council activities ($\bar{x}=4.02$, $SD=0.84$). Respondents supported the establishment of coordinated (though nationally controlled) budgets to support the council's activities ($\bar{x}=3.75$, $SD=0.87$).

Opinions varied regarding other responses to the problem of funding. Still, many responded favourably to the establishment of commonly subscribed and administered budgets for management activities (e.g., the operation of a permanent secretariat) ($\bar{x}=3.80$, $SD=1.05$) and for specific projects ($\bar{x}=3.56$, $SD=1.03$) of the council. The idea of an AC foundation or permanent fund ($\bar{x}=3.56$, $SD=1.26$) received significant support in the survey.

Although the need to improve the current funding mechanisms was clearly expressed, respondents did not reject the current system of allowing member countries to select projects of interest and to allocate funds to them on a case-by-case basis ($\bar{x}=3.01$, $SD=0.92$).

Other options received little support. These include participation fees for observer countries (\bar{x} = 2.71, SD = 1.36), for private-sector actors (\bar{x} = 2.60, SD = 1.26) or for non-state observers (\bar{x} = 2.19, SD = 1.19). But opinions regarding such fees exhibited a high level of variation.

Strengthening the SDWG. Respondents felt that the SDWG should focus on truly circumpolar projects (\bar{x} = 3.81, SD = 0.90) and reduce the number of small and unrelated projects (\bar{x} = 3.65, SD = 1.10). The group should do a better job in publicizing opportunities for activities to become SDWG projects (\bar{x} = 3.68, SD = 1.03).

There was some support for the ideas that the SDWG should organize ministerial meetings on sectoral themes like economic development, transportation and infrastructure, social welfare, education and capacity building, culture and art, and so forth (\bar{x} = 3.34, SD = 1.04) and that the SDWG could be restructured into two or more groups dealing with those sectors (\bar{x} = 3.21, SD = 1.09). Here, again, the opinions of the respondents varied significantly.

When asked about suitable themes for SDWG attention, respondents emphasized environmental and social impact assessments (\bar{x} = 3.86, SD = 0.87) and precautionary and ecosystem-based approaches to resource management (\bar{x} = 3.36, SD = 0.99). Local and regional implementation of sustainable development strategies as set forth in Agenda 21 also received support (\bar{x} = 3.51, SD = 0.96).

Outreach and communication

The respondents did not give the council high grades regarding efforts to influence public perceptions. The general image of the council is positive (\bar{x} = 3.49, SD = 0.82). But more specific perceptions of the council—internationally, regionally, nationally and locally—are not flattering (\bar{x} = 2.73–2.90, SD = 0.92–1.03). Scores on questions relating to the clarity of the council’s goals and strategies, the role of the council as the voice of the Arctic in global forums and the overall “brand” of the AC all ranged from “very little” to only “somewhat” positive (\bar{x} = 2.73–2.94, SD = 0.89–1.03).

The respondents judged the working groups to be more successful in this realm with scores ranging from “somewhat” positive to “clearly successful” (\bar{x} = 3.56, SD = 0.96). The products of the council were seen to be only “somewhat” widely distributed or easy to find (\bar{x} = 3.03, SD = 1.00). The Senior Arctic Officials were regarded as having “very little” success with regard to outreach and communication (\bar{x} = 2.43, SD = 0.80).

The “Arctic Boom”

Public attention concerning Arctic issues has increased dramatically in recent years. But respondents judged that the impact of this shift on the council has been only “some” rather than “clear” or “strong” (\bar{x} = 2.93, SD = 0.85).

There has been “some” increase in political support for the AC (\bar{x} = 3.29, SD = 0.90) as well as growth in the capacity of the council to work effectively (\bar{x} = 3.04, SD = 0.79). Respondents suggested that the 2007–08 International Polar Year had been “somewhat” helpful to the work of the council (\bar{x} = 3.15, SD = 0.88).

The respondents did not see the “Arctic Boom” as having much effect on the ability of the working groups (\bar{x} = 2.83, SD = 0.78) or the senior Arctic officials (\bar{x} = 2.72, SD = 0.77) to mobilize resources. At the same time, increased competition from other bodies is not seen as having reduced the capacity of the council (\bar{x} = 2.79, SD = 0.91), and increased attention to matters of outreach and communication is not likely to reduce resources available for core activities (\bar{x} = 2.67, SD = 0.97).

The future of the AC

Given the transformative changes now occurring in the Arctic, questions arise regarding the prospects for the AC during the coming years (Young 2009; Koivurova 2010; Axworthy et al. 2012). Will changing circumstances erode or undermine the role of the council? Can the council adapt to changes in such a way as to become a more significant force in circumpolar affairs? What insights did our respondents provide regarding these matters?

In general, respondents expressed mixed responses to these questions. Some see room for optimism regarding the role of the council. Thus,

[t]he Arctic Council should be seen as a body that can help resolve Arctic issues and develop and implement strategies that will mitigate adverse impacts in the region ... The Arctic Council enables countries to approach the Arctic as a global region and it facilitates an integrated approach for discussions.

But others see trouble ahead arising from the shifting politics of the region. As one respondent put it,

[d]ue to more difficult and growing political tension between the Arctic countries themselves and between the Arctic countries and non-Arctic countries, the overall effectiveness of the Arctic Council can decline in the next decade.

In this section, we seek to unpack these observations about the future of the AC drawing on the qualitative input of those who responded to the questionnaire's open-ended questions. The written replies were surprisingly consistent. The following discussion is informed by this fact together with evidence from other studies of the AC (Downie & Fenge 2003; Carlson et al. 2010; Axworthy et al. 2012) and our own decades long experience in Arctic affairs.

Respondents replied vigorously to the open questions, producing 8541 words of bulleted (i.e., quite condensed) text. We grouped these responses into seven equally weighted themes. The overriding theme was the "policy role of the Arctic Council and the main tasks of the Arctic Council" (30% of the text of the replies). Next were "the organizational structure of the AC" and "the role of observers" (20% each). The rest of the themes (5–10% each) covered outreach of the AC, the role of science, the capacity of the AC and implementation of council decisions.

We present our analysis in three subsections dealing with: (1) consolidating the roles that the council has played well during the last 15 years; (2) moving from policy-shaping to policy-making activities in well-defined areas and (3) adapting to changes in Arctic politics accelerating in the years since the recession of sea ice in the Arctic Basin during 2007 and increases in the prices of natural resources globally. Our overall message is that the council can continue to play a significant role in the Arctic but that doing so will require a proactive effort to maintain the council's relevance as the biophysical and socioeconomic conditions prevailing in the Arctic continue to change.

Solidifying the AC's primary role

There is consensus on the proposition that what the AC has done best is to identify emerging issues, carry out scientific assessments addressing these issues and use the results of the assessments both to frame issues for consideration and to set the agenda in policy settings. A number of analysts have documented the links between AMAP's 1997 *Assessment report: Arctic pollution issues* and the negotiations leading to the 2001 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (Downie & Fenge 2003). Others have examined the role of the AC's 2004 *ACIA* in shaping the evolving discourse in global forums on the sources and consequences of climate change (Nilsson 2007). AMSA (Arctic Council 2009) is the council's most recent success story. It played an important role in the development of the search and rescue agree-

ment signed during the AC's May 2011 Ministerial Meeting in Nuuk.

As our respondents made clear, however, there are weaknesses in the current practices of the AC in this realm, and there is no basis for assuming that the council can continue to play these roles effectively without streamlining and strengthening these practices. The respondents devoted particular attention to the work of the AC's Working Groups.

AMAP has played a particularly prominent role in this realm, introducing the practice of scientific assessment into the work of the AC and providing precedents to be followed by the other working groups. Various factors may explain AMAP's success. The task of monitoring pollution may lend itself more easily to assessment than the tasks assigned to other working groups. AMAP's commitment to the procedure of peer review may have made a difference. AMAP may have benefitted from independence and flexibility arising from the fact that it is funded largely by Norway and does not need to rely on more complex shared funding arrangements. By contrast, EPPR and ACAP, which received the lowest scores in our data, have secretariats that follow the chairmanship, rotating typically at two-year intervals. This suggests that both stability regarding material support and flexibility regarding operating procedures contribute to success in the activities of the AC's Working Groups.

The production of scientific assessments has strengthened the AC's role in bridging the gap between science and policy. But some respondents expressed concern about the danger of science "becoming blurred" in the process. Although the interplay of science and policy can be mutually supportive, the resultant mix can harm the credibility and legitimacy of both in the absence of careful management (Mitchell et al. 2006). Many felt that the council must decide whether the working groups should engage in the conduct of research or function as technical coordinators of information produced by outside scientists and scientific organizations.

Among the other products of the council, respondents gave positive grades to best practices, guidelines and efforts to provide a voice for the Arctic in various international fora. However, in all of these cases, success was modest and opinions about effectiveness varied. Respondents found the effectiveness of AC actions at the local and regional levels limited; many subscribed to the observation that "... the Arctic Council has been ineffective at following up the reports with action." These respondents concluded that "... strengthening the path from recommendation to implementation should be part of the AC's agenda."

Respondents regarded emergency training and capacity-building efforts as the least effective activities of the council. ACAP has carried out concrete projects on the local level in the Russian Arctic, including improving hazardous waste management and eliminating sources of pollutants such as mercury, dioxins, obsolete and prohibited pesticides and polychlorinated biphenyls (Arctic Council 2011a). But, whatever ACAP's success in terms of project implementation, there are questions regarding the extent to which these efforts have contributed to capacity building at the local level. (Note, however, that the very small number of Russian responses to our questionnaire may have biased this finding.)

Some respondents worried about a decline in the transparency of the activities of the WGs. They commented, for example, that

[d]iscussions are often done behind closed doors, and there is little to no opportunity or encouragement for local and regional governments, the business sector or other potential partners to get involved.

This concern is heightened by the fact that the implementation of AC recommendations depends to a large degree on communication with local and regional officials as well as with national officials. Thus,

... the Barents Regional Council and the Northern Forum represent the regional governments. AC studies that have bearing at the local and regional level should be transferred to the local residents through these two organizations.

... there is a strong need for improved AC coordination at the national level.

It is a source of concern that Arctic businesses and the private sector are generally major drivers of the changes occurring in the Arctic but are seen to have almost no influence on the work of the AC.

This leads to the following question about the role of the AC: Does the council aspire to play an operational role in the pursuit of environmental protection and sustainable development on the ground in the Arctic? Or is it content to be a discussion forum for general debates framed in terms of the circumpolar region as a whole?

The SDWG. Our respondents took the view that the AC can benefit from expanding its efforts to include more disciplines and a broader scientific community, especially in strengthening its work in the area of sustainable development through the efforts of the SDWG.

Some respondents regarded the flexibility of the council in taking on projects supported by one or a few proponents truly motivated to carry out the projects as a source of strength. But others agreed with the observation that

... unless [the Arctic Council] succeeds in finding ways to restrict national interests over-riding Arctic interests and in clearly describing what it can practically do with regard to sustainable development, I anticipate that its role and visibility will decrease in the next decade.

Although this is a concern for all of the working groups, it is particularly relevant to the work of the SDWG. To address this problem, some respondents called for a restructuring of the SDWG:

The Arctic needs a body for seeing the Arctic picture, for preparing joint knowledge, identifying and meeting common management challenges, and for discussing overall policies. However, the organization must be significantly improved with coordinated mandates and stronger presence of issues presently only found as 'SDWG projects'.

In this view, the SDWG should be restructured as a discussion forum for sustainability in the Arctic. Instead of trying to manage a hodge podge of unrelated projects, the SDWG could become a mechanism for promoting the discourse of sustainable development as articulated in Agenda 21, which calls for local engagement in global problem solving.

Some respondents identified the Arctic resilience, ecosystem-based management and AHDR II initiatives as opportunities to engage local and regional actors in a manner that also could strengthen the work of the SDWG (Larsen 2010; Arctic Council 2011b; Fig. 1). The new initiative on Adaptation Actions for a Changing Arctic (AACA), launched at the meeting of Deputy Ministers in May 2012, aims to promote informed, timely and responsive decision making related to adaptation in a rapidly changing Arctic; it will identify existing national, regional and local adaptation efforts within or relevant to the Arctic region. The goal is to consider how these efforts can contribute to and inform the "development and application of adaptation tools that offer practical and effective solutions and best practices for adaptation actions in response to opportunities and challenges in a changing Arctic" (Arctic Council 2012a). These efforts call on the AC to fill gaps in dialogue among local and regional actors as well as between the private sector and the AC. The AACA process could provide the backbone for a renewed SDWG.

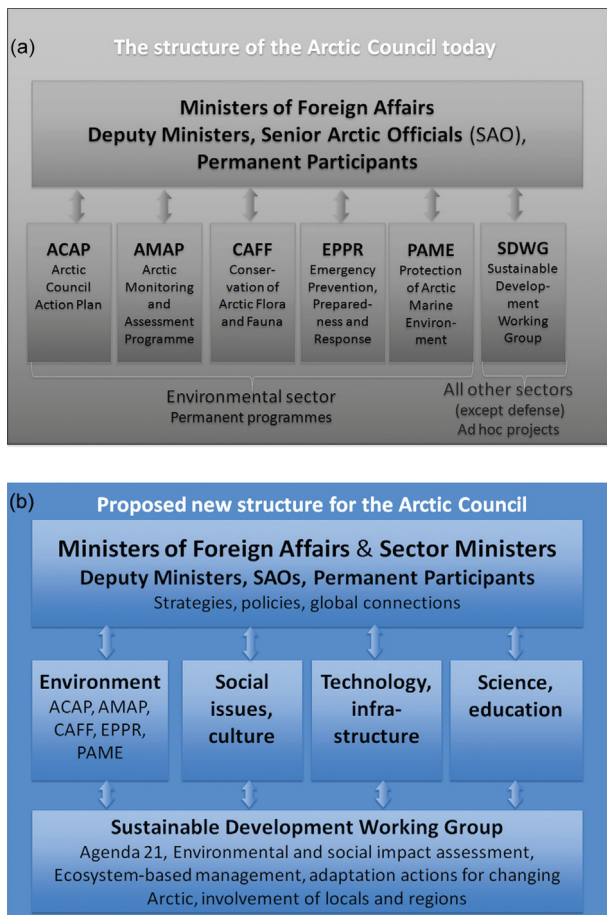


Fig. 1 (a) The structure of the Arctic Council as it is today and (b) a proposed new structure for the council.

Issues dealing with focused topics like transport, culture, education and research could be assigned to issue-specific task forces. This would allow the relevant ministries and departments in member country governments to make stronger links to the work of the AC and might generate enhanced funding for council activities. Such a strategy would enable the Senior Arctic Officials to focus on broader policy concerns. As one respondent put it, this would allow the Senior Arctic Officials to

... discuss overall issues rather than small projects of which they know little (ministry of foreign affairs should not spend 2 days discussing environmental monitoring, the status of sea birds or ice-balance flux of Greenland—this should be left with WG's).

Outreach, organization and resources. Although respondents emphasized the importance of the role of the AC in outreach and communication, the council has

found it difficult to perform this role effectively. Respondents identified a need for co-ordination between departments/ministries at the national level and between the national level and the local/regional level in this connection. One suggestion was to recruit “communications agents” in every member country to get the word out about the AC’s activities and accomplishments. Respondents also saw room for more efficient use of information technology. One respondent suggested that the AC could “[c]reate a common website and identity using [a single] logo—rather than the current 7 competing websites.” Another proposed that the council also could broadcast some of its proceedings “using live web-based media so that more people and more constituents can stay informed.”

These issues have been under consideration for some time. In the 2011 Nuuk Declaration, the council adopted a set of Communication and Outreach Guidelines (Arctic Council 2011c) followed by the adoption of a communication strategy for the AC at the Deputy Ministers Meeting in May 2012 (Arctic Council 2012b). The communication strategy is a major improvement that not only aims to improve outreach activities but also to build up the identity of the AC leading to enhanced inclusiveness that will reinforce the success of the council. The strategy promotes the AC as the most prominent, credible and relevant international forum for Arctic issues, combining cutting-edge research with effective policy initiatives through cooperation between the Arctic states and the inhabitants of the region. The mission of the council is to ensure participation of indigenous peoples, sustainable development, environmental protection and adaptation to climate change.

The strategy pinpoints six main target groups: policy makers, including regional, national and international decision makers, Arctic inhabitants, non-governmental organizations, the research community, the business sector and the media. It also proposes measures to improve internal communication within the AC system to facilitate co-operation and create synergies and to avoid overlap by establishing a permanent contact group for communication, a newsletter, regular dialogues and timely communications.

In recent years, there have been meetings of Senior Arctic Officials and Permanent Participants just prior to the main Senior Arctic Officials meetings limited to two participants per delegation. These “closed Senior Arctic Officials sessions” have caused frustration among experts working for the AC; they may become a liability with regard to the outreach and communication strategy whose main emphasis is on transparency and inclusiveness.

Pursuing this strategy will require additional resources. This is one rationale for the establishment of a permanent secretariat for the AC to be located in Tromsø, Norway, slated to become operational at the start of the Canadian chairmanship in 2013 (Arctic Council 2011c, d). The secretariat (expected to grow to 10 staff members) will strengthen the administrative capacity of the council substantially and may be able to provide help in identifying new activities for the working groups (especially the SDWG).

Nevertheless, as some respondents observed, this will not solve the problem of inadequate resources to support the on-going work of the working groups. Most of the work of the working groups is carried out on a voluntary basis, and there is evidence of a rising "... fatigue level at the scientific and secretariat end of the WG process." There is a growing need for "[c]ommitment from the Arctic states in supporting participation of their individual scientists in various expert groups."

A possible future structure of the AC. Taken together, these suggestions could provide the basis for a major reorganization of the AC's structure, the first since its creation in 1996. Fig. 1 provides a schematic of a possible structure for the AC following such a reorganization.

The central idea underlying this proposed structure is that, while the leading figures of the AC are the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, sectoral ministers also would meet regularly with the framework of the council. The SDWG would manage interactions and dialogues across the sectors. It also would facilitate the participation of different interest/knowledge groups like local and regional leaders, the business sector and non-governmental organizations and follow up the prescriptions of Agenda 21 as they apply to the Arctic. The SDWG would work to ensure that ecosystem-based management and environmental impact assessment procedures are followed in all AC activities.

Making policy vs. policy shaping

Until recently, participants routinely characterized the AC as a policy-shaping body rather than a policy-making body. As the Ottawa Declaration puts it, the council should operate as a "high level forum" designed to facilitate consultation and promote cooperation among the Arctic states on issues of common interest. But recent developments have led to a significant shift in these terms. The development of the search and rescue agreement, in particular, has kindled interest in the emergence

of the council as a policy-making body (Arctic Council 2011c, d). As one respondent put it,

[t]he SAR [Search and Rescue] negotiations and the joint initiatives in IMO [International Maritime Organization] and PAME on shipping are positive signals to new directions of the work of the AC. The binding agreement on search and rescue has the potential to set a precedent that could lead to other binding agreements being negotiated.

How realistic is this scenario? Will the search and rescue agreement set a precedent to be followed regarding other issues or is it the product of a unique combination of circumstances? Will the effort to move into a policy-making role jeopardize the effectiveness of the council in its efforts to continue doing what it does best?

Efforts to follow up on the success of the Search and Rescue Agreement have begun already. At the AC Ministerial Meeting in May 2011, the ministers created a task force with a mandate to develop an international instrument on Arctic marine oil pollution, including matters of preparedness and response (Arctic Council 2011c, d). The task force will report on its work at the next Ministerial Meeting in 2013.

In its present form, however, the AC lacks the authority to make decisions about matters of policy, much less decisions that would be legally binding on its members. Unlike the International Maritime Organization, which has the authority to agree on the terms of a mandatory Polar Code governing shipping in the Arctic, or even the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations (UN) Framework Convention on Climate Change, which has the authority to make decisions about the negotiating process relating to efforts to strengthen the climate regime, the AC in its present form is a "high level forum" for the discussion of Arctic issues that is not authorized to make formal decisions regarding issues of common concern. Even in the case of the Search and Rescue Agreement, it is worth emphasizing that this does not formally constitute an AC action, even though the terms of the agreement were developed under the auspices of the council, and the agreement was signed by the foreign ministers of the eight Arctic States (Arctic 8) in the setting provided by the biennial AC Ministerial Meeting in May 2011.

There is nothing to prevent the members of the AC from changing the council's terms of reference in this regard. As one of our respondents observed: "The AC should examine its decision-shaping abilities—perhaps the AC should consider [becoming a] legally binding decision-making body." But pursuing this route would

require an agreement to make suitable adjustments in the provisions of the 1996 Ottawa Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council, a development that does not seem likely during the near future.

In thinking about this issue, it is worth reflecting on the question of whether there are identifiable topics or themes that lend themselves to policy making in contrast to policy shaping on the part of the AC going forward. Some issues now arising in the Arctic are likely to be suitable for treatment in other forums. The general expectation is that the International Maritime Organization is the proper body to deal with the development of a mandatory Polar Code. Matters relating to the rights of indigenous peoples may be handled best through the International Labour Organization, which developed and adopted the 1989 Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO Convention 169), or the UN Human Rights Council, which played the key role in the development of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the General Assembly in 2007. It seems unlikely that the council will emerge as an appropriate body for the development of a set of rules pertaining to the conduct of ship-based tourism in the Arctic.

More generally, the key issues now arising in the Arctic focus on the marine systems of the Arctic Ocean and include politically sensitive matters like the delimitation of the boundaries of coastal state jurisdiction over the prolongation of the seabed beyond the seaward limits of their Exclusive Economic Zones. It is this fact more than anything else that has motivated the states bordering on the Arctic Ocean (the Arctic 5) to hold meetings among themselves starting with the Ilulissat meeting in 2008 and to treat issues like commercial shipping and the development of oil and gas reserves in Arctic waters as matters that may be unsuitable for treatment within the framework of the AC. This is not to say that there are no opportunities for the council to assume a policy-making role. But it does underscore the observation of one of our respondents that “[w]e should not try to make the AC a body which creates new sovereignty in the Arctic.”

It is pertinent as well to ask whether an enhanced emphasis on policy making would pose problems for the role of the council as a body that acts to generate knowledge, frame issues and set agendas. This concern may give rise to serious tension regarding the proper role(s) of the council. One of our respondents noted that

The AC needs to be more politicized since today the agenda is too much set by the scientists and technical issues in the working groups. In order to meet the

challenges of new economic developments and a geopolitical changing situation, a reform is needed.

This sentiment is understandable in light of recent developments in the Arctic and could lead to a constructive division of labour in the activities of the council. But it also raises warning flags. Would a shift in this direction politicize the contributions of the working groups? Could it lead to a gap between the working groups, operating in a somewhat apolitical mode, and the Senior Arctic Officials, deputy ministers and ministers, operating in a more political mode?

Given the remarkable growth of interest in the Arctic worldwide, the sense that we need an authoritative policymaking body to address Arctic issues is understandable. These developments prompted one of our respondents to observe that “[i]f the Arctic Council does not create policy at the head of state level, it [will continue] on in its semi-influential, but mostly obscure role.” As several respondents observed, a meeting of the AC at the heads of government/state level could catapult the council to a new level of prominence as a body with the capacity to address Arctic issues authoritatively. But such a move could also raise the spectre of politicization with regard to the activities of the working groups mentioned above.

Adapting to a changing Arctic

That the Arctic is now experiencing transformative change is beyond doubt. The rapidly growing demand for new natural resources (especially oil, gas and minerals) combined with the decline of sea ice in the Arctic Basin has triggered a sharp rise of interest in the potential of commercial shipping, oil and gas development, fishing and tourism in the region. These developments pose potential threats to the effectiveness of the AC during the coming years (Arctic Governance Project 2010). As one respondent put it,

[a] scenario is that the Coastal States will take an ever increasing role, sidelining the non-coastal states and indigenous people. Would-be observers get frustrated with their limited ability to participate in the work of the AC and start making bilateral deals with the coastal states. The non-marine aspects of the Arctic will become neglected. Overall, the AC will find its importance decreasing.

Like all scenarios, this one represents only one possible stream of development in a complex setting. Yet, it deserves to be taken seriously in any examination of

the future effectiveness of the AC. Here, we discuss the two distinct elements of this scenario: (1) potential frictions between the Arctic 5 and the Arctic 8 together with indigenous peoples' organizations and (2) the need to find ways to listen to the voices of non-Arctic states in Arctic affairs without undermining the effectiveness of the council. We can think of these concerns as internal threats and external threats to the effectiveness of the council.

In some respects, recent developments have opened up opportunities for the AC to play an enhanced role on the global stage. Partly, this is a matter of setting an example for others to follow. As one of our respondents put it,

The AC should act on its global responsibility and the fact that the Arctic has a higher potential than other regions to serve as the best example of intergovernmental environmental cooperation, and therefore [to provide] world leading examples of environmental and sustainability policies and implementation of such.

Similar remarks are in order regarding the role of the council in ensuring that Arctic issues are recognized and dealt with properly in various global forums. One of our respondents put it this way:

[the] legally-binding versus soft-law debate is [an] unnecessary distraction. The focus should remain within eight Arctic States and Indigenous Peoples to be a voice for the Arctic region. The AC should link its discussions and work to global agreements. The work of the Arctic Council will become increasingly important and relevant in the coming decade. The AC has a great opportunity to be a strong global voice for Arctic issues and for Arctic residents.

Yet, there are serious dangers from the perspective of the AC lurking in the transformative change now occurring in the Arctic. As issues of jurisdiction and security in the broad sense relating to the Arctic Ocean started to become increasingly prominent, the five coastal states initiated a dialogue among themselves regarding issues some deemed unsuitable for treatment within the setting provided by the AC. Not only did this shift the centre of gravity towards marine issues in the Arctic and away from terrestrial issues and some aspects of sustainable development of particular concern to Arctic residents it also engendered sensitivities among the remaining members of the Arctic 8 (Finland, Iceland and Sweden) together with the indigenous peoples' organizations about being cut out of the loop when it comes to addressing a major set of Arctic issues. Among other

things, this made it difficult to respond constructively to the concern of a respondent who observed that

[t]he AC states should engage better [with] regional views in practice. It needs to work more closely with local governments and to help bring resources to the local level where problems are solved.

Recent statements on the part of the foreign ministers of the Arctic 8 affirming the primacy of the AC as the principal forum for the consideration of Arctic issues have alleviated this concern. But the issue of internal cohesion is an important one that requires continuing attention to avoid internal divisions regarding Arctic issues.

Equally important are a range of issues focusing on the growing interest in Arctic affairs on the part of major non-Arctic states (e.g., Brazil, China, India, Japan and Korea) and intergovernmental bodies like the European Union. One of our respondents captured the challenge in these terms:

[e]fforts to enhance non-Arctic states participation in AC activities, and thereby increase their commitment to AC outputs, will be positive for AC effectiveness. If the AC can position itself as the most logical and appropriate venue for shaping international coordination in the Arctic, it will remain effective. It will have to balance the tensions between becoming larger through non-Arctic state observers and maintaining the spirit of hands-on working groups.

Ranged against this optimistic perspective is a more sceptical view rooted in a critical assessment of the recent preoccupation of the council with rules of procedure relating to permanent observer status. As one respondent put it, "[w]ithout meaningful ... observer participation from China, India and other large economies, we can forget about the AC altogether."

The core issue here goes well beyond the rules governing permanent observer status in the AC. Given the economic and political shifts occurring at the global level today, there is no way to address Arctic issues successfully without recognizing the heightened connectivity between the Arctic and the global system. Under the circumstances, one respondent observed, "[t]he AC must take the lead but involve non-Arctic [states] closely in its work on relevant issues." To the extent that the council succeeds in rising to this challenge, it may become an increasingly important actor in Arctic affairs and beyond. However, failure to develop an effective mechanism for engaging non-Arctic states that have both legitimate interests in what happens in the Arctic and the

capacity to play influential roles in addressing Arctic issues will lead inevitably to a marginalization of the AC as a force to be reckoned with in coming to terms with an array of new issues coming into focus in the region. All those responding to our open-ended questions recognized the importance of this issue.

Conclusion

No one doubts that the AC has made a difference since its establishment in 1996. While it would be naïve to exaggerate its effectiveness, the council has performed better than most observers anticipated at the outset, especially in the realms of knowledge generation, issue framing and agenda setting. But this does not ensure that the council will continue to be effective, much less become more effective, under the conditions arising in the Arctic today. As one of our respondents noted, the AC "... seems to be locked in old positions about how to organize itself and work. Since its creation, the AC has been a shot gun, firing in every direction at once." This is not a good recipe for success going forward.

This suggests that there is a growing need to assess the performance of the council so far and to use this assessment as the basis for making a series of adjustments in the structure and procedures of the council to maximize its effectiveness in the coming years. Some of these adjustments should focus on internal matters, such as the configuration of the working groups (especially the SDWG) and the division of labour between the working groups and task forces created to address specific issues.

Others should address external issues, in particular the challenge of finding suitable ways of expanding the scope of the council's work and engaging the interests of regional and local constituencies along with major non-Arctic states. This would make it necessary to integrate new actors into the activities of the council and to enhance both the transparency of the council's activities and its ability to communicate with broader audiences.

This is a tall order. But a failure to come to terms with these challenges will lead to a marked decline in the effectiveness of the council during this decade. Success, on the other hand, can create conditions under which the effectiveness of the AC will rise as we seek to come to terms with new issues arising in this increasingly important part of the world.

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