



## Arctic Council

---

 [drishtiias.com/printpdf/arctic-council](https://drishtiias.com/printpdf/arctic-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 on issues of **sustainable development and environmental protection** in the Arctic.

The Arctic Council works as a consensus-based body to deal with issues such as the change in biodiversity, melting sea ice, plastic pollution and black carbon.



## History of Arctic Council

---

- The formation of **Arctic Council** can be traced in the establishment of the **Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS)** in 1991 as a framework for **intergovernmental cooperation on environmental protection** initiatives among the Arctic States including **Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and the United States.**

- The AEPS tried to consult and engage **Arctic indigenous people** in recognition of their right over their ancestral homelands.
  - Three **Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs)** representing **Inuit (Inuit Circumpolar Council, ICC)**, **Saami (Saami Council, SC)**, and **Russian indigenous peoples (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, RAIPON)**, respectively, were welcomed as observers in the AEPS.
  - As a consequence of a growing recognition of the special relationship of indigenous peoples to the Arctic region, the Arctic countries assigned the **special status of Permanent Participants (PPs)** to the three IPOs, thereby giving them a **privileged status** compared to the other AEPS Observers.

## Formation of the Arctic Council

---

- The **Arctic Council** is a **high-level intergovernmental body** set up in 1996 by the **Ottawa declaration** to promote **cooperation, coordination and interaction** among the **Arctic States** together with the **indigenous communities** and other **Arctic inhabitants**.
- The Council has the **eight circumpolar countries** as member states and is mandated to protect the Arctic environment and promote the economies and social and cultural well-being of the indigenous people whose organizations are permanent participants in the council.
- **Arctic Council Secretariat:** The standing **Arctic Council Secretariat** formally became operational in 2013 in **Tromsø, Norway**.  
It was established to provide administrative capacity, institutional memory, enhanced communication and outreach and general support to the activities of the Arctic Council.

- The Council has **members, ad hoc observer countries** and "**permanent participants**"
  - **Members of the Arctic Council:** Ottawa Declaration declares **Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden** and **the United States of America** as a member of the Arctic Council.
 

Denmarks represents **Greenland and the Faroe Islands**.
  - **Permanent participants:** In 1998, the number of Permanent Participants doubled to make up the present six, as, the **Aleut International Association (AIA)**, and then, in 2000, the **Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC)** and the **Gwich'in Council International (GGI)** were appointed **Permanent Participants**.
  - **Observer status:** It is open to **non-Arctic states**, along with **inter-governmental, inter-parliamentary, global, regional** and **non-governmental organizations** that the **Council determines** can contribute to its work. It is approved by the Council at the Ministerial Meetings that occur once every two years
    - Arctic Council Observers primarily contribute through their engagement in the Council at the level of **Working Groups**.
    - Observers have **no voting rights** in the Council.
    - As of May 2019, **thirteen non-Arctic states** have Observer status.
      - Germany, 1998
      - Netherlands, 1998
      - Poland, 1998
      - United Kingdom, 1998
      - France, 2000
      - Spain, 2006
      - China, 2013
      - India, 2013
      - Italy, 2013
      - Japan, 2013
      - South Korea, 2013
      - Singapore, 2013
      - Switzerland, 2017

## Criterion for Admitting Observers

---

In the determination by the Council of the general suitability of an applicant for observer status the Council will, inter alia, take into account the extent to which observers:

- Accept and support the **objectives of the Arctic Council** defined in the Ottawa declaration.

- Recognize Arctic State's **sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction** in the Arctic.  
India has therefore officially recognised the territorial jurisdiction and sovereign rights of the Arctic states.
- Recognize that an **extensive legal framework** applies to the Arctic Ocean including, notably, **the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, and that this framework provides a solid foundation for responsible management of this ocean.  
India has also accepted the UNCLOS as the governing instrument for the Arctic implying that jurisdiction over both the continental shelf and maritime passage, and the resources of the ocean will primarily lay with the eight Arctic States.
- **Respect the values, interests, culture and traditions** of Arctic indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants.
- Have demonstrated a **political willingness** as well as **financial ability** to contribute to the work of the Permanent Participants and other Arctic indigenous peoples.
- Have demonstrated their **Arctic interests and expertise relevant** to the work of the Arctic Council.
- Have demonstrated a concrete interest and **ability to support the work of the Arctic Council**, including through partnerships with member states and Permanent Participants bringing Arctic concerns to global decision making bodies.

## Mechanism of Council

---

- The work of the Council is primarily carried out in **six Working Groups**.
- **Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP)**: it acts as a strengthening and supporting mechanism to encourage national actions to reduce emissions and other releases of pollutants.
- **Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP)**: it monitors the Arctic environment, ecosystems and human populations, and provides scientific advice to support governments as they tackle pollution and adverse effects of climate change.
- **Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group (CAFF)**: it addresses the conservation of Arctic biodiversity, working to ensure the sustainability of the Arctic's living resources.
- **Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR)**: it works to protect the Arctic environment from the threat or impact of an accidental release of pollutants or radionuclides.
- **Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group**: it is the focal point of the Arctic Council's activities related to the protection and sustainable use of the Arctic marine environment.

- **Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG):** it works to advance sustainable development in the Arctic and to improve the conditions of Arctic communities as a whole.

## Working of Council

---

- Arctic Council assessments and recommendations are the result of analysis and efforts undertaken by the Working Groups. Decisions of the Arctic Council are taken by **consensus among the eight Arctic Council States**, with **full consultation and involvement** of the **Permanent Participants**.
- The **Chairmanship of the Arctic Council** rotates every **two years among the Arctic States**. The **first country to chair the Arctic Council** was Canada **(1996-1998)**.

The next country to assume the Chairmanship will be **Iceland (2019-2021)**.

## Accomplishment of Council

---

- The Arctic Council regularly produces comprehensive, cutting-edge environmental, ecological and social assessments through its Working Groups.
- The Council has also provided a forum for the negotiation of **three important legally binding agreements** among the eight Arctic States.
  - The first, the **Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic**, was signed in **Nuuk, Greenland**, at the 2011 Ministerial Meeting.
  - The second, the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic, was signed in **Kiruna, Sweden**, at the 2013 Ministerial meeting.
  - Third, the **Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation**, was signed in **Fairbanks, Alaska** at the 2017 Ministerial meeting.

## India and the Arctic

---

- India launched its first **scientific expedition** to the **Arctic Ocean in 2007** and opened a research base named "**Himadri**" at the **International Arctic Research Base at Ny-Alesund, Svalbard, Norway in July 2008** for carrying out studies in disciplines like **Glaciology, Atmospheric sciences & Biological sciences**.

- The **major objectives of the Indian Research in Arctic Region** are as follows:
  - To study the **hypothesized tele-connections** between the Arctic climate and the Indian monsoon by analyzing the sediment and ice core records from the Arctic glaciers and the Arctic Ocean.
  - To **characterize sea ice in the Arctic using satellite data** to estimate the effect of global warming in the northern polar region.
  - To conduct research on the **dynamics and mass budget of Arctic glaciers** focusing on the effect of glaciers on sea-level change.
  - To carry out a **comprehensive assessment of the flora and fauna** of the Arctic and their response to anthropogenic activities. In addition, it is proposed to undertake a comparative study of the life forms from both the Polar Regions
- India has been closely following the developments in the Arctic region in the light of the new opportunities and challenges emerging for the international community due to **global warming** induced melting of Arctic's ice cap.
 

India's interests in the Arctic region are **scientific, environmental, commercial as well as strategic**.
- **In July 2018, Ministry of Earth Sciences** renamed the “**National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research**” to the “**National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research.**”
 

It is a **nodal organisation** coordinating the research activities at the stations at the poles.
- India has also entered into MOU with **Norwegian Polar Research Institute** of Norway, for cooperation in science, and also with **Kings Bay** (A Norwegian Government owned company) at **Ny-Alesund** for the logistic and infrastructure facilities for undertaking Arctic research and maintaining Indian Research base ‘**Himadri**’ at Arctic region.
- In 2019, India has been **re-elected as an Observer** to the Council.
- India does not have an official Arctic policy and its Arctic research objectives have been centred on ecological and environmental aspects, with a focus on climate change, till now.

## Commercial and Strategic Interests

---

- The Arctic region is very rich in minerals, and oil and gas. With some parts of the Arctic melting due to global warming, the region also opens up the **possibility of new shipping routes** that can reduce existing distances.
 

Countries already have ongoing activities in the Arctic hope to have a stake in the commercial exploitation of natural resources present in the region.
- The Arctic Council **does not prohibit the commercial exploitation** of resources in the Arctic. It only seeks to ensure that it is done in a **sustainable manner** without harming the interests of local populations and in conformity with the local environment.

- Therefore, to stay relevant in the Arctic region, India should take advantage of the observer status it has earned in the Arctic Council and consider investing more in the Arctic.