



HOUSE OF LORDS

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10.40 am

Witnesses: Dr Martin Sommerkorn and Rod Downie

Members present

Lord Teverson (Chairman)
Lord Addington
Baroness Browning
Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Viscount Hanworth
Lord Hunt of Chesterton
Lord Oxburgh
Baroness Neville-Jones
Lord Soley
Lord Tugendhat

Examination of Witnesses

Dr Martin Sommerkorn, Head of Conservation, Global Arctic Programme, WWF, and **Rod Downie**, Polar Programme Manager, WWF UK

Q237 The Chairman: Good morning, and welcome to this evidence session of the Arctic Select Committee. This morning we will be talking to representatives from WWF as our witnesses, and to a representative of the European Commission in our second session. Presumably both of you have had a copy of our own interests and you will have some idea of the questions that we will put to you. I should remind you that you do not both have to answer all the questions. I will leave it to you as to who will lead, but if you have something important to say, please do so. Perhaps we could start by you both briefly introducing yourselves and then we will go straight into the questions. I am not sure why the screen has just come down, unless it is for a zany PowerPoint presentation that I was not expecting.

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: My name is Martin Sommerkorn and I work with the WWF Global Arctic programme. I'm a scientist and have worked on the Arctic for 10 years. I attend most of the Arctic Council working group meetings on behalf of the WWF.

Rod Downie: Good morning, everyone. My name is Rod Downie and I work for the WWF programme here in the UK.

The Chairman: Thank you for being so concise. I also thank you for the written evidence that you have already provided for the Committee. It will be most useful. Perhaps we can start by asking you about the WWF Global Arctic Programme. It has been operating since 1992, so you have been in this area for a long time. What has been achieved over that period, and what do you see as your current priorities for the Arctic?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: I can answer that. We started 22 years as a small shop that had been motivated by the opening up of Russia. We dealt with small-scale issues, affected areas, particularly in Russia, but always with international interactions on, for example, bird migration flyways. Over the past 20 years the Arctic has grown in global significance. We are very aware of that, so the Global Arctic Programme has grown with that increased global significance. Nowadays we regard the Arctic as a place of shared opportunities and shared responsibilities on a global scale. The WWF is uniquely placed to take care of this as we now have offices in all the Arctic countries except for Iceland, and through our global network we have the ability to connect across issues from the global scale to the local one. We work on the ground and all the way up to international arenas. We are often thought of as a biodiversity organisation, and yes, we often symbolise issues through that lens, but really we have a wider focus through emphasising the role of nature for people in human well-being, continued development and—a topic that is growing more important—making a critical contribution to people's ability to adapt to change. Our unique position in the Arctic is one that integrates across scales, sectors and interests, with a solid focus on a living Arctic with functioning ecosystems for people. We do this by empowering local people to do

conservation through co-operation and participating ourselves by leveraging funds to do so. There are many examples of this, and Rod will take a couple of them on in a moment.

We are a trusted observer and a knowledge contributor to the Arctic Council as the key international forum of the region. We also communicate the significance of Arctic ecosystems, species and biodiversity to many audiences. We publish a quarterly journal called *The Circle*, and critically through our global network we broadcast the Arctic essence of biodiversity and the threats posed to it through processes like the UNFCCC and the IMO Polar Code. The work we do in the Arctic contributes to the development of biodiversity conservation practices.

Q238 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Perhaps I may ask you one factual question. The word “circumpolar” appears rather frequently in your evidence but is never explained. Can you tell us what it means?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: When we talk about “circumpolar”, we could swap it with the word “pan-Arctic”. When nations refer to the Arctic, they often mean their own Arctic territory. We are talking about the Arctic biome—terrestrial on land and marine.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Are you talking about the area within the Arctic Circle or does it go wider?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: Actually, we would say that it is wider because we are issue focused. While there are many delineations of the Arctic—including ecological and geophysical ones, and those which use the Arctic Circle—our aim is to connect the issues. I can give an example. When we work on reindeer, we even have to reach out into some aspects of what are called boreal systems because caribou spend some of their time in woodlands. But these are the same issues that the Arctic Council is grappling with because

the working groups have several different delineations of the Arctic. They are all issue-based and are informed by politics.

The Chairman: Were you about to follow on from that, Mr Downie?

Rod Downie: I would be happy to give the Committee a few concrete examples of what we have achieved over the past 20 years. I like to think that we have achieved a lot, so please interrupt me if I give too many. We support and fund research in the Arctic because we are a science-based conservation organisation. We have funded the University of New York to undertake research into the effects of climate change on the Greenland ice sheet. We support the study and conservation of polar bears across the Arctic, which includes tracking bears to determine the effect of changing sea ice cover, and we also do work to minimise human/polar bear conflict in remote villages in the northern Arctic. We have trained more than 4,000 volunteers in coastal communities to respond to oil spills in the Arctic, and we have worked with local communities and Governments in 35 protected areas covering more than 370,000 square kilometres right across the Arctic, mostly in the Russian Arctic. In 2008 we also helped to create Canada's first Arctic whale sanctuary, the bowhead whale sanctuary off Baffin Island. We help to protect Bristol Bay as a no-go zone for oil and gas development. Of course, Bristol Bay is America's fish basket. We have in place temporary protection of Bristol Bay until at least 2017—the duration of the Obama Administration. We have worked with the fishing industry, particularly in the Barents Sea, to commit to Marine Stewardship Council assessment, which we see as a benchmark for sustainability in fisheries. Currently, more than 50% of the Barents Sea fisheries are MSC certified. We have helped to develop sustainable Arctic tourism guidelines, particularly within Svalbard. Those are just a few examples of what we have achieved over 50 years, and we have published a celebratory brochure that we will be happy to provide for the Committee.

Viscount Hanworth: You say that you have no office in Iceland. Does that imply that you are absent from Iceland? If that is the case, why?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: We do not have an office in Iceland, that is correct. The reason is that there is no strong funding base for us in Iceland. In the past we have had some intensive co-operation with local NGOs which has worked well with regard to land-based issues, especially in the area of hydro power, but currently we do not have an arm in Iceland.

Viscount Hanworth: Does that distress you?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: I do not think it distresses us because we participate in many fora in which Iceland participates as well. Those are at the international level and therefore not necessarily with any strong domestic engagement.

Rod Downie: I would add that we have 13 offices in the seven other Arctic nations.

Q239 Lord Hunt of Chesterton: I have to declare a rather strange interest. My sister Perdita Jago used to be the public relations person at your office in Godalming. One must declare these things.

My question concerns Arctic biodiversity and which particular aspects merit your attention. One thing that we not talked about explicitly is radioactive waste. There was quite a considerable programme on that issue. In fact, the NGO I am connected with, the Advisory Committee on the Protection of the Sea, was involved in a programme on it. A huge amount of pollution results from the metal extraction industries and of course as a result of the Cold War. There are still many problems in the area. Is it part of your campaign to look at these issues? Also, I would be interested to know which aspects of the biodiversity of the area you regard as being particularly fragile.

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: I will start with your first question. We are not currently working on radioactive waste, mostly because there is a lot of good activity around it. Basically, we think

that these issues are in good hands with the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme. It is a benchmark for monitoring programmes worldwide and does a really good job in the Arctic. I would add that recently quite a number of clean-up programmes have been established, especially in the Russian Arctic. These also take care of some aspects of radioactivity. The third aspect, which may explain the strategic element of our position, is that while radioactivity is an issue and will remain one for a long time in certain places in the Arctic, we need very much to focus these days on the broad range of issues that affect the Arctic. We focus on the issues that affect biodiversity through larger-scale global drivers that we can abate and mitigate, and on threats that occur at the population level, or at the species level and the habitat level. Not only are these the biggest threats, they are also the most worthwhile to mitigate in order to have the greatest effect on resilient biodiversity.

On your second question, Arctic biodiversity is both tough and fragile. It is tough when it comes to the extreme and variable conditions that prevail in the Arctic, but the biodiversity is fragile when it comes to things like the destruction of habitats and limiting the range that wildlife needs to maintain a viable population. These ranges can be huge in the Arctic. Polar bears can feed here today and be hundreds of kilometres away a couple of days later. That reflects the fact that it is an environment where the resources are often sparse and few and far between.

A second element of fragile Arctic biodiversity is the key threats that endanger species which, due to the nature of the Arctic food webs, are not only species but key elements of the Arctic food chain. They are short food chains with not much biodiversity at each level. By threatening a certain species you can take out an entire functioning ecosystem. Because the resources and the production of material and biomass are concentrated at certain points, threats to these places can actually endanger the wider functioning of whole eco-regions.

The third element connects with your starting point. Low temperatures in the Arctic inhibit the breakdown of substances, and because of the nature of the Arctic food chain, can make for their extremely efficient transport and accumulation. Substances can quickly reach toxic levels in the higher predators, for example. Nowadays we are very concerned about the cumulative impacts that come from a number of the threats that I have mentioned, and those are on top of the stark changes that we are seeing already and which we have been advised will become even stronger over the coming decades. So the cumulative effect of threats arising from human use on top of climate change are issues that the current system in the Arctic is not prepared to deal with.

Q240 The Chairman: Does that cover everything that Members wanted to ask? Perhaps I could follow up briefly. We are to some degree only scratching the surface of biodiversity. Can you explain the dangers of what could happen if this is not managed properly? I am trying to get a feel for what the dangers are if we manage to cross into these areas. What will the result be? I am looking for a bit more touchy-feely evidence about what might happen and what we are looking at here. Do you see what I am trying to say? I am interested in the thresholds.

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: Let us start with two significant thresholds that are both related to aspects of the Arctic that are unique, globally unique – they are globally unique ecosystems. An example of one of these globally unique systems is the sea ice ecosystem. We can see that the threats that come to the Arctic contribute to potential thresholds on populations of, for example, polar bears, walrus and ice whales. That is because very often receding ice means that the contact between that ice and coastlines or with shallow shelf seas is lost. There is no longer any overlap between the ice layer and either the coastline or the shallow seas that provide food for the polar bear, walrus and ice whale populations. When the ice

recedes in the summer, we will have a threshold crossed for many populations of polar bears. They cannot survive on ice alone. They need to come out of their dens in the spring, for example, on land. That is one key issue.

Another is that we have a very dynamic system that produces most of the marine biomass and thus most of the energy that enters the Arctic food chain—the sea ice marginal zones. Wherever the ice is in the spring when the sunlight is at maximum levels—that would be the summer for us, but it is spring in the Arctic—at those times when the ice breaks up, sunlight can penetrate, which generates plenty of plant and animal activity. These zones are not fixed places. They can occur here today and somewhere else the next year, with an overall trend for the zones to move northwards, of course. We have hardly any instruments to protect these flexible places from oil spills, accidents on ships carrying heavy fuel oil, exploratory drilling and so on. There is just one instrument that could lend itself to a more flexible protection mechanism. We can see that if we do not put such an instrument into place in a proactive fashion, there is a danger that there will be significant threats to critical parts of the ecosystem. They will be taken over the threshold of productivity.

The Chairman: Are you saying that these areas move around each year? In the UK we are implementing marine conservation zones that are strictly delineated areas set out on charts and that must not be crossed, but you are saying that that form of management could not work in the Arctic because the zones change so regularly. Is that the case?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: There are examples of areas that change every year while others do not change. An ocean upwelling will not change significantly over a period of years and it will still provide, together with other drivers, the key productivity that underpins many Arctic ecosystems. We are saying that we need to be proactive and look ahead. We need to take the information that we have on the changing ecosystem in order to establish a core

conservation-oriented regime now: that is, before these additional destructive activities become key threats.

Lord Soley: I understand why it is important to identify the critical tipping points, but I am not sure that that is fundamentally different from other areas. Let us take the example of coral. A very minor change in sea temperature can wipe out whole areas of coral. Are we talking about something that is essentially different, or are you saying that you want to identify the tipping points in the Arctic because we are not clear enough about them?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: The short answer is that I am talking about the latter. I am talking about identifying them and incorporating them into planning.

Viscount Hanworth: Is it not the case that viciously unstable prey/predator cycles can be set in motion in the Arctic by human intervention? I am thinking of the classical mink/muskrat cycle. Do you have any evidence of this?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: I would say that in a broad sense there are two issues in the Arctic in respect of food chains and predator/prey relations. First, our knowledge is only of certain spots in a certain area. We do not have a good handle on or plenty of knowledge of something that can penetrate areas more deeply. We have plenty of knowledge, but in many cases we cannot assess the population levels of a given animal.

The second thing is that the global community, regardless of whether we are talking about the Arctic, does not have a good handle on the question of how ecological connections are going to pan out, given the geophysical changes that will take place over the coming years. We can model where critical elements for wildlife would still be a given for these species to survive. An example of this can be found in the north of Canada and Greenland where the ice is projected to remain for the longest period over the summer. However, we do not have

much knowledge of how the ecological interactions will pan out in terms of what kind of species will migrate north, and have the ability to do so, as well as at what speed.

Q241 Lord Addington: I have a small advantage over the rest of the Committee in that I was in Reykjavik over the weekend. Can you confirm how different the ice formation is in different areas from year to year? This point was made clear to me when considering the northern sea route. In one year the route would be blocked even though the ice had been shrinking because it had moved off to a totally different place. That had not occurred to me. There is no guarantee that with reducing ice or expanding ice it will remain in the same place. I think that that is relevant to what is being said.

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: That is similar to the many perceptions of the Arctic as an area covered in ice, lifeless and very far away. Actually, to our minds the Arctic sea ice shrinks quite uniformly, but really the climate develops differently in different parts of the Arctic. Wind can drive the ice to different places. Ice can be created in different places every year. You are correct. We are not able to guarantee that the sea routes will be open and that there will be areas where non ice-class vessels can move around in safely.

The Chairman: We will come on to that aspect later.

Q242 Viscount Hanworth: Are the right mechanisms in place for balancing economic development and environmental protection in the Arctic? Can the desire of native Arctic communities to pursue their traditional lifestyles be easily reconciled with their evident desire to participate in and profit from modern economic environments? Additionally, what measures would the World Wildlife Fund like to see in place to support biodiversity and environmental protection?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: In a nutshell, I must response to your first question by saying, sadly, that the simple answer is no. We do not see these mechanisms in place, as neither policy

integration nor governance instruments are fit to deal with the challenges posed by change. By rapid Arctic change, I am talking not only about climate change but about industrialisation, social change and so on. One tends to believe that these are all developed nations with good environmental regimes in place. Many good things have been done, but there are two large gaps. The first of those is how to deal proactively with change and how to incorporate what we know is coming in the future into our current policies and practices. We need to be strategic in our use of resources and about what that means for biodiversity conservation. The second point is that there is a threat that comes from a lack of Arctic-specific and Arctic-adequate protocols, standards and rules for industrial operations in the Arctic. They should be based on a thorough and future-oriented understanding of the Arctic environment and its significance for people.

Coming to the second part of your question, currently we do not have sufficiently good instruments in place to capture the many values that Arctic biodiversity has for people living in the Arctic, let alone putting them into a form that will actually inform our economic decisions. I can give an example of this. I am leading a joint WWF and Arctic Council study on scoping for ecosystem services in the Arctic.

The Chairman: The phrase “ecosystem services” is used very regularly by witnesses and I think I know what it means. However, could you explain it for everyone?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: It can be broadly understood as a term to describe all the benefits that we receive from nature: that is, from functioning ecosystems. It covers all the values that we place on those benefits.

Viscount Hanworth: Do you think that sufficient emphasis been placed on the interests of the native Arctic peoples or do you think that their interests are currently being over-emphasised?

The Chairman: We will come on to that area a little later. The question is fine but I do not want to broaden the conversation too much. We will talk later about the work of the WWF with indigenous peoples.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Would you elaborate slightly on what you have just said about Arctic-specific versus general regulation? Are you basically saying that practically none of the overall global systems on human rights and on oil and gas developments and so on are of any use in the Arctic unless there are Arctic-specific variants?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: I am saying that they should be specifically tested for their applicability and appropriateness in Arctic areas. That means that risk, and therefore the whole financial side of operations, is calculated with Arctic-specific risks. That brings us back to the value questions. What is being risked here? What values do people have with regard to functioning Arctic ecosystems and functioning Arctic biodiversity? That is needed in order to demonstrate the risk. All this is part of the operational standards that I have in mind when I talk about Arctic-appropriate standards.

The Chairman: Viscount Hanworth, I rather cut you off.

Viscount Hanworth: No, that is fine. I can see that my question is subsumed into another question.

Q243 Lord Soley: I want to be clear about WWF's role in relation to mining and oil and gas. Would you campaign against developments if you thought they were wrong, or do you just evaluate and monitor and then decide? How do you see your role in relation to those things?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: We are definitely not saying no to development. In the wider sense, economic development relates to human development and we would not deny anyone who has the right to develop resources to do so. We do not view several recent developments as necessarily a good idea, but in a wider fashion we are also desperately urging, in the 21st

century that we are in, where the world is a connected place and we see the limits of our planet in front of us, that policies on development and ecology come together and become integrated.

Lord Soley: Which of those developments do you think are not a good idea?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: With respect to developing fossil fuels in the Arctic, we think that there is an overarching problem and a clearly demonstrated issue with our need to leave additional fossil fuel resources in the ground; we saw it just yesterday in the IPCC synthesis report. There is a clear road to keeping our planet on an even keel.

Lord Soley: But that is not Arctic-specific, is it?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: No, it is not.

Lord Soley: But your argument is that these developments are not desirable worldwide, not just in relation to the Arctic?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: What I just said we are saying in relation to everywhere on earth, including the Arctic. We think that the Arctic is a good place for understanding this issue because it is the most affected.

The second issue for us relates particularly to offshore oil and gas development in ice-infested waters, because we do not think that the technologies to clean up spills or the preparedness to deal with them in Arctic countries exist, so given that risk and all the values that an accident could destroy, we would advise not doing it before such practices are proven and in place.

The Chairman: We need to move on from that question and start moving through the others.

Q244 Lord Oxburgh: In your pan-Arctic network of priority protected and managed areas I think you said there were 35. Is that right?

Rod Downie: That is 35 that WWF has been explicitly involved in in planning for a future pan-Arctic network, including marine protected areas.

Lord Oxburgh: What role do you play in advising Arctic Governments on this, and do you feel that you are listened to? Does it have a bearing on fisheries management, wildlife and so on? What is your interaction with the Governments?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: We have numerous ones and different ones for different countries. We are advocating pan-Arctic networks of protected areas, because they would be a strategic conservation planning and implementation instrument. We are saying that these have to be placed within spatial planning schemes in wider ecosystem-based management approaches. That sounds like a bit too much terminology, but it means that they should be centred in wider schemes that operationalise the goal of keeping the ecosystem in a functioning state.

Lord Oxburgh: You are saying that there has to be a system approach to this.

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: Yes, there has to be a system approach. Similarly, the network of protected areas would be a strategic conservation element inside such schemes. That does not mean only that there are areas that are off limits for everything; there is a key focus on the future and on where we need to invest strategically in order to address key features that are a kind of nucleus of biodiversity functioning. As a first example we develop tools ourselves and bring them out through the Arctic Council working groups and others to identify such places. We have developed a tool called RACER, which we referenced in our written evidence. We are also working on how to identify potential places where protection can be done, and on exemplifying the management that can be done in these places. It is not all fences, it also has to be flexible.

I am part of an expert group called PAME—the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment working group of the Arctic Council—which is now issuing a framework for a network of protected areas. A document on the marine environment that we are sending to the ministerial meeting next spring shows how this can be done, which instruments are available and what the objective and use of such a network would be. Through for example WWF Russia we are working specifically on gap analyses in the Russian Arctic that will show where to prioritise the establishment of marine protected areas.

As a last point, it seems to be very politically opportune at the moment, surprisingly—and suddenly, I have to say—to talk about this in the Arctic. Some of this is embedded in the wider conventional biological diversity—CBD—goals in relation to the need to protect certain percentages of our marine and terrestrial environment for biodiversity. The US declared its chairmanship programme under the Arctic Council just last week, and one of the things that it would like to see is building on the PAME framework document and urging Arctic Council nations to seek specific next steps on the implementation road. It seems to be politically opportune at the moment to talk about this, even though some nations might not yet be there.

Lord Oxburgh: You did not discuss this with the individual countries. You have basically done this through the working group. Is that right?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: No, that is not correct. We are working on all these levels. As the Global Arctic Programme, we see ourselves not as a small office of 10 people co-ordinating and giving expert advice but very much as an integrated group across all Arctic countries and beyond. So whenever we do something at the Arctic Council, we also, critically, involve all our offices and relevant political people in the Arctic countries.

Lord Oxburgh: How damaging will it be if some countries do not take action on the areas that you have identified so that the system approach is disrupted, to an extent?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: An honest answer is that that is reality. There are different rates of progress at different times. We are trying to stimulate that through various activities. We are advocating, for example, a regional sea approach and the implementation of ecosystem-based management schemes in Arctic countries. I am also an expert in the ecosystem-based management group of the Arctic Council, so there are various ways in which to contribute to knowledge building and maybe also to the political momentum.

Lord Oxburgh: I have a final question. This goes back a little to what we were discussing before. You were discussing the fact that the gaps in the ice, and the geography, vary from year to year. On average, one is going to see an increase in photosynthesis in the Arctic Ocean. Have you looked at all at the effect that that is going to have on the whole ecosystem balance? That is one of the few things that can be said with some degree of certainty.

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: We could talk about this for hours.

Lord Oxburgh: We do not have hours.

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: We have not worked on this ourselves, other than through the RACER tool that I have talked about. I will just give you a quick story and another fact. We had a workshop last year in Iqaluit, on Baffin Island, on one of our projects up there, and we involved a lot of Inuit fishermen and hunters from Greenland and northern Canada. These fishermen said, "We have been catching a lot of big fish lately. We have no idea what they are, but they are big and they sure taste good". As long as there is productivity, and increased productivity, many indigenous peoples will be very happy about their increased livelihood. However, and this is a scientific fact, this is not how this dimension of change that is forecast for the Arctic will actually happen and will affect it. To bring this to a point, it

might not be bigger and better fish tomorrow, it could be all jellyfish. We do not know how the system will react.

Viscount Hanworth: What were the big fish called?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: We did not know. They did not know either.

Q245 Lord Hunt of Chesterton: I visited Iceland in the 1990s, and they commented that in north-west Iceland the fishing has been very successful over many years—once they got the Brits out and preserved all their fisheries, as you know. It has the highest income per capita almost anywhere in Europe, maybe even the City of London.

You have talked a lot about the marine side, but there has been a huge change in the ecology that is associated with the melting permafrost. I am surprised at how few of our witnesses talk about the permafrost melting. It is a huge effect and it is not being modelled in the IPCC. Why are you people not banging on about it more?

The Chairman: A brief answer, please, although it is a big question.

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: A brief answer is that I am a permafrost researcher, so I should not have forgotten it. We will see huge changes to the tundra, which is extremely important. The result will be drying in some places and increased wetness in other parts of the surface when the permafrost melts. There is also a global effect on top of that: that will release potentially significant amounts of carbon into the atmosphere as either CO₂ or methane. That might be why so few people bang on about it: because we have no mechanism in place that could capture this kind of stuff. There is no policy mechanism even at the UNFCCC, and believe me we have tried, to capture this aspect. That might be the real reason why we are not talking about this more.

Q246 Baroness Browning: We had an impressive sample from Mr Downie of the projects that you have been involved in, but, given your Arctic Council observer status, can you say

something about recent changes in the structure of the council, and in particular whether you have concerns about longer-term projects? We get the sense from evidence that there is a bit of worry about the short-termism and the lack of structure in looking at the projects. Would you like to say something about that?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: The Arctic Council is also wrestling with the opening up of the Arctic, and we believe that it should move forward on the premise that this is a shared opportunity and a shared responsibility that must include the observer nations. Many of the threats to the Arctic are actually coming from outside the region; they come through industrialisation, climate change et cetera. The Arctic Council is wrestling with this because while it realises this, it also wants to keep as much sovereignty and control over the place as possible.

We are saying that it should do so by moving very fast and more efficiently on enforcing policies that ensure that the development is sustainable and the environment is protected. We would like to see the council take on, as a more urgent programme of work, accommodating change, being proactive, and ensuring stronger implementation and stronger connections between the economic and the environmental issues. Sadly, what we see for some of that is the opposite. An economic council was recently established through the Arctic Council that we do not think is set up properly in order to contribute to the integration of policies; rather, it is somewhat free-ranging and uncontrolled. While that might not be particularly harmful, it is also not particularly constructive.

I come back to the ecosystem services work. What we need for this—and this is also a recommendation of the Arctic biodiversity assessment recently issued by CAFF—is the mainstreaming of biodiversity throughout all policies and practices. If we keep them separate from economic practices, we will not actually come up with a proper, let us say,

overall sustainable regime in the Arctic. The Arctic Council should really take hold of its remit on sustainable development and spearhead this.

Baroness Browning: When the chair changes every two years, does the focus move automatically on to whatever are the priorities for that particular chair over their term?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: That is correct, but the work programmes for the working groups are mostly longer term, so there is a buffer mechanism in place for that. The working groups are quite strong: indeed, some would say that they are the strongest element of the Arctic Council.

The Chairman: Has the influx of observer states, including from some regions that are quite far away, affected the chemistry of the Arctic Council, your own influence, or that of other observer bodies?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: It has affected the number of people who sit in the working group meetings, and sometimes it allows quicker links to be made to existing expertise and capacity beyond the Arctic nations by the countries offering them, especially in the area of science. But I do think that it has changed the essence of the game. Most of these observers are just observing; they are not stepping up to the plate and saying, "Well, shared responsibilities, shared opportunities".

The Chairman: That is fine as an answer, and thank you. It is very useful.

Lord Soley: I have a brief question. Is there more that the UK could or should do?

The Chairman: We are coming on to that.

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: Perhaps I may make a brief further comment about the working groups. Some 20 years ago they were set up for conservation purposes, protection of the environment and then sustainable development. In the 21st century, what we probably

need is different working groups. It is now really important to integrate the working groups and establish processes between them so that they can deal with the issues of our time.

Q247 Lord Tugendhat: How does your organisation work with the indigenous communities of the Arctic? Is there a great difference between the work that you do with these communities in, say, the western countries of the Arctic on the one hand and Russia on the other? Can you also say a word about how these relationships have changed over the past few years?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: Our relationships with indigenous peoples have grown over the past 20 years, and I would say that recently there has been quite a bit of co-operation as we come to realise that there are some things we agree about and perhaps can work on together. This is happening even at the level of pan-Arctic organisations like the Permanent Participant organisations of the Arctic Council. Their work is not officially funded by the council. They are granted participation and a voice, but they lack the funds to do that. The WWF, along with the Arctic Council, has stimulated moves towards the building of a Permanent Participant fund, an engagement fund that would allow them to follow up on the responsibilities and opportunities presented at the level of the Arctic Council. To that end, we would ask the observer nations to contribute to the fund too.

At the local level, for a long time we have seen good co-operation on conservation-enabling efforts, particularly through our small offices in the Canadian Arctic. But throughout all this we have been fighting, especially at the organisational level of the indigenous peoples, against being thrown into an animal protection bucket where we do not want to be and that does not fit with our work programme.

What we are interested in is the sustainable use of Arctic biodiversity. We are interested in viable populations, and as long as that is guaranteed, we do not interfere with or set up

policies on hunting and so on. I think that this misperception has been cleared up a great deal over the past decade, although you can still find people who will not engage with us. We have always had huge success in engaging with indigenous peoples in Russia, and that has been the core of the programme for a long time. One place where we are currently making the greatest progress, because the situation was not good until a couple of years ago, is in Greenland. We now have a strong work programme in place which offers WWF's capacity to deal with local issues, or at least to help and assist with them.

Viscount Hanworth: The Norwegian Sami people have told us that they have insufficient funds to participate fully in the Arctic Council, and they seem to be in a good place relative to others, so I think that your point is well taken.

Lord Addington: I was, as I said, in Reykjavik over the weekend, and there seemed to be a greater level of engagement with the indigenous peoples we saw there. What would you say is needed in order to bring them on towards talking to you? What is the tipping point? I ask that having spoken to Greenpeace about its very poor relationships. What is the difference for you?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: The difference lies in us being able to be understood and our putting ourselves across as an organisation that is interested in nature for the benefit of people. Once that is understood, we have a solid basis on which to co-operate. We did not make those mistakes in the past, and specifically not in the Arctic where we have never said that certain practices like seal and polar bear hunting are bad *per se*. We are simply interested in viable populations so that such use can continue. While that will produce clashes at certain points, we always try to be at the table in order to negotiate these issues.

Q248 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I wonder if we could now look at the EU ban on the import of seal products. First, what has the effect of the ban been on the population of Arctic seals

and on fisheries in Arctic waters? Secondly—this is really quite a different question—do the exemptions within the ban that were designed to favour the indigenous peoples and allow them to carry on some economic activity with seal products actually work in practice? In answering that question, if you have any evidence of your own as opposed to what the indigenous peoples or their representatives say, which may to some extent be a little biased, would you set that out for us?

Rod Downie: I will pick up on that, although it very much builds on what Martin has been saying. Our position on the seal ban is that we respect the diversity of experience associated with wildlife and with hunting. That can be seen at the individual level, the cultural level and the national level. As Martin said, we recognise that in some areas of the Arctic, the hunting of seals is an important part of the local economy, culture and heritage. We are a conservation organisation, so we are concerned with the impacts of human activity at the conservation level and in terms of populations. Currently, we believe that the hunting of seals in the Arctic is sustainable and has no impact at the conservation level, and so really does not require any further regulation.

On the impact on indigenous peoples, which you also asked about, I certainly would not evade the question. The WWF works closely with indigenous peoples wherever it is possible to do so, but we do not view ourselves as being experts in indigenous issues. I understand that the Committee is to hear directly from representatives of the Inuit in a later session, which will provide a great opportunity to hear their views at first hand.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Would it be unfair to say that your views have changed quite sharply over time, and that when the ban was first introduced you were rather strongly in favour of it? However, from the evidence you have just given, you are trying to detach yourselves from any question of advocacy in this matter.

Rod Downie: As far as I understand it, the WWF has never expressed a strong opinion on the issue. We have not changed our position.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I see, so it was other organisations that campaigned so vigorously, and you were never involved in that.

Rod Downie: That is correct.

Lord Soley: I have been struck in the past by the WWF's position on the whaling ban. Is this part of the problem that you have with Iceland? As has been said, you do not have an office in Iceland, and I am puzzled as to why that is. Is it anything to do with the view of Icelanders about the banning of certain activities, or is it about something entirely different?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: I will take the second question first. I would not know whether that is a reason for it. I have been with the WWF for the past six and a half years and I have not heard that mentioned as a reason for us not having an office in Iceland. However, we are of course active at the International Whaling Commission, where we are working towards adequate population levels among the endangered species.

Lord Soley: What is your interpretation of why you do not have an office in Iceland?

The Chairman: We already covered that at the beginning of the session. Because of the time, I think that we must move on to the UK aspects.

Q249 Lord Addington: What assessment has the WWF made of the UK Government's Arctic policy framework? What should the UK Government be doing post-framework in relation to the Arctic? Lastly, what role should they seek to play under the US chairmanship of the Arctic Council?

Rod Downie: I will take those three questions. First, it is important to state that we welcomed the release of the UK's Arctic policy framework as a fairly modest and tentative first step by the UK Government towards establishing a clear and transparent policy on UK

activity in the region. Indeed, we worked with the polar regions unit and other government departments on the development of the policy. It contains some important guiding principles that include taking action to limit global climate change, promoting good governance of the Arctic through the existing fora, promoting the conservation and sustainable use of Arctic biodiversity, and respecting the interests of the indigenous peoples. These are principles, of course, so the proof of the pudding will lie in what action is taken.

One positive example I can give is that in their Arctic policy, the UK Government have committed to taking a leadership role at the International Maritime Organization Polar Code discussions. Three or four weeks ago I attended a meeting of the Marine Environment Protection Committee and it was great to see the UK chairing the Polar Code working group. So I hope that there is some substance there. However, as we have already touched upon, we were a little concerned that, through the policy framework, the Government are continuing to look at the Arctic for fossil fuels and energy security. For reasons that Martin has already discussed, we have some concerns about this.

On what the UK should be doing post production of the framework, we have three very immediate recommendations to make. The first is to commit to continuous improvement in UK Arctic policy. It is important that this is done on a regular basis, and we have suggested that it should be every two years, although clearly that is open to discussion. It should be noted that both the Arctic and the Arctic Council are evolving and changing rapidly, so a thorough review is needed. The second and perhaps the most important recommendation is that we would like to see a plan of action from the UK Government for better engagement across the Arctic Council working groups. It should look at how they are going to deliver these important principles through action within the council. The third recommendation made in our written evidence is that we would like to see the UK Government sharing their

Arctic policy and the experience of developing it in stakeholder engagement with other nations that have emerging interests in the Arctic. I am thinking particularly of China, which we know is currently developing its policy, India, Malaysia and Singapore, and the EU. That is really fundamental.

The Chairman: Is the UK pulling its weight? Are we doing what we should be doing and are we participating enough?

Dr Martin Sommerkorn: I will make one comment on that and link it to the remarks I made earlier about the participation of observer nations in the Arctic Council working groups. Having been based in research in this country for five years, I think there is actually an under-representation of the knowledge that is produced here in the UK in Arctic Council working groups. A more active role there would certainly be welcomed by the Arctic nations.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: The UK is pretty good on safety, but it is pretty damn bad on pollution in the Arctic. I have heard other people talk about that this week. The UK is not pulling its weight at the IMO to reduce pollutants from shipping, although we know that shipping in the Arctic will increase. Have you raised this issue at meetings in the IMO?

Rod Downie: We have certainly raised the whole issue of ocean stewardship and marine environmental protection with the UK Government, because it is critical. I agree that that is one area where the UK is not pulling its weight, particularly within PAME, the working group on the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment. The UK has a fantastic wealth of experience in pollution prevention and control in this country. I am thinking in particular of Oil Spill Response Limited, which is based in Southampton. The company is the world's largest spill responder. The UK is not currently engaging in the whole issue of oil spill preparedness and response through the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response working group, so there is certainly room for improvement.

The Chairman: Thank you both very much indeed for the evidence you have given the Committee this morning. I will now bring the session to an end.