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Witnesses: HE Else Berit Eikeland and HE Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson

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Members present

Lord Teverson (Chairman)
 Lord Addington
 Lord Hannay of Chiswick
 Viscount Hanworth
 Lord Hunt of Chesterton
 Lord Oxburgh
 Lord Soley
 Lord Tugendhat

Examination of Witnesses

HE Else Berit Eikeland, Norway's Polar Ambassador and Senior Arctic Official to the Arctic Council, and **HE Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson**, Icelandic Ambassador to the United Kingdom

Q273 The Chairman: Your Excellencies, I welcome you to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Arctic for our 21st session in which, for the first time within Westminster, we are taking evidence from Arctic states themselves. You should have had a copy of our interests as a Committee. As you are aware, we are being broadcast. Perhaps I may ask you both to introduce yourselves, beginning with whoever would like to start.

Else Berit Eikeland: Thank you, Lord Chairman. My name is Else Berit Eikeland and I am the Polar Ambassador of Norway and the senior Arctic official to the Arctic Council. Thank you.

The Chairman: I thank you for coming from Norway for this evidence session as well. We very much appreciate it.

Else Berit Eikeland: It is always fantastic to come to London.

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: Thank you, Lord Chairman. I am Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson, the newly appointed ambassador of Iceland to the United Kingdom, coming from Canada, where we spent some time together as ambassadors. That is my short take on it.

The Chairman: Your Excellency, I welcome you to the United Kingdom. I am delighted that you can come to the House of Lords so early in your time here. I hope you will find many other times to return here.

Perhaps I could start off our questioning by asking what the priorities are for Iceland and Norway in the Arctic? How are your countries affected by the changes in the Arctic, and what are your key aims for the region over the forthcoming years?

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: Actually, the Icelandic policy on the Arctic is based on a document from 2011—a quite extensive document that you probably do not want me to read to you now. If I may summarise it, it includes promoting and strengthening the Arctic Council as the most important consultative forum and decision-making body; securing Iceland's interests as a coastal state within the Arctic region and developing agreements and promoting co-operation with other states and stakeholders in the Arctic region; safeguarding broadly defence and security interests in the Arctic region; and, lastly and importantly, working against any kind of militarisation of the Arctic. The present Government have this Arctic policy as the centre of their foreign policy. They have adopted a whole-government approach to these issues. As you understand clearly, these cover so many different aspects of the generality and of each Government. That is the short version of the policy.

Iceland is affected mainly by the environmental aspects. Climate change is an ongoing concern for all of us, and increasingly so. It affects the fisheries, as you probably heard in the previous session. We are also experiencing on our own grounds a more rapid melting of the glaciers. This where our focus lies: on the environment and how our resources will progress with the changes in the climate.

Then again, these changes are met with opportunities. Of course the Government are very focused on using those opportunities wherever they might arise. That could include co-

operating with other partners in the Arctic on resource development and changes in transportation, services, tourism, and possibly shipping lanes over the Arctic Ocean. That is for the future but it is where our focus lies. That is the short version.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Else Berit Eikeland: Thank you, Lord Chairman. The Norwegian strategy is very similar to the Icelandic strategy. The Committee, I believe, has visited Tromsø and Svalbard, and you are very much informed that the Arctic is not a homogenous region. In the Norwegian Arctic, where 10% of the Norwegian population lives, the areas along the northern coast of Norway are ice-free and comparable to some of the oceans further down towards the North Sea. A key for Norway, in line with interests of the people living in the north, is to promote sustainable economic, environmental and social development.

Norway has big neighbours. We have a very good and close co-operation with our neighbours, including Russia. It is also reflected in our strategy that we want—this is not a kind of academic lesson—to keep the Arctic peaceful and stable. We look at the cooperation in the Arctic Council and the close co-operation that we have with Russia as soft security, to engage our neighbours in close co-operation. For people living in the north, it is most important to live in a region with peace and stability.

The Chairman: Thank you. That was a very good introduction. I think that many of the supplementary points will come up during the rest of the session. Perhaps I can ask Lord Hunt to follow on.

Q274 Lord Hunt of Chesterton: I am sorry that the Chairman did not compliment you on coming from the oldest Parliament in the world to our rather new Parliament! I had a very interesting visit to Iceland some years ago. The question really is: how active are Norway and Iceland in the Arctic Council? You said that that is important. Can you give us some specifics?

One of the issues that you have just touched on is the question of military or non-military. The Arctic is a sort of military playground in some senses and there are some residual effects, particularly the radioactivity and radioactive wastes, associated with that, particularly in the Russia/Norway area. Would you like to comment on that?

Else Berit Eikeland: Thank you. We do not regard the Arctic as a military playground; we regard it as one of the most regulated areas in the world when it comes to regulation of fisheries and environmental issues. Also, the Arctic can be an example for other regions when it comes to very close co-operation on a state-to-state level. As you are aware, the Arctic Council was established in 1996 as an example of co-operation with Russia and an indication that the Cold War was over, so working in the Arctic Council is about much more than working on environmental issues, climate change and sustainable economic development; it is also a soft-security issue for Norway to engage with the other Arctic states in long-lasting co-operation. It is very important to Norway to strengthen the Arctic Council, to see it develop and to work with observers like the UK.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Could I ask a supplementary question?

The Chairman: Perhaps I could ask the Icelandic ambassador to answer Lord Hunt's question first. Then Lord Soley and Lord Hannay will ask questions.

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: I agree with my Norwegian colleague that the Arctic Council does not deal with military issues, and we do not see a military arms race going on in the Arctic. But there may be a bit of a variation on this theme, since we see for example the effects of the present crisis in Ukraine possibly affecting good co-operation with the Arctic Council. Still, the Russians are co-operating differently in the Arctic Council from the way you might say they are doing in the security field in central Europe.

Lord Soley: Wider than the defence issue, what the Arctic Council is doing is a form of governance of the Arctic, and I would very much like to know how you see that changing and evolving. With all these new observer states coming in, the region is changing very dramatically, if we are to believe some of the scientific evidence, so how do you see the evolution of the Arctic Council as a governance for the Arctic?

Else Berit Eikeland: Thank you for a very relevant question. We have seen a gradual strengthening of the Arctic Council. From 1996, the Council has worked mostly on environmental issues. From around 2005-06 it has gradually been more involved in climate change and adaption to climate change, and now that there is more interest in business development and more activity in the Arctic it has more focus on sustainable business development and trying to involve business. Two binding agreements between the Arctic States have been negotiated in the framework of the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council, as you know, is not a treaty-based organisation, so it cannot sign treaties, but the Arctic states have signed treaties on oil-spill prevention and search and rescue. We see gradually that the Arctic Council will discuss new areas of co-operation. Norway very much supports the Canadian priority to establish an Arctic Economic Council for business in order to have dialogue with business on sustainability and responsible resource development in the Arctic. We in Norway feel very much that we need to engage more strongly with all the observers in the Arctic Council. Norway and the UK have very good bilateral dialogue on Arctic issues, including cooperation within the Arctic Council. We have long historical connections with the UK in Antarctica, as you are all aware. We have a common history and we want to work even closer with the UK in the Arctic as well. We do not see the new Asian observers and China as making it more difficult for us to work with observers. On the contrary, we are much more focused now on the need to engage with observers to develop the Arctic Council further.

Q275 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Both of you mentioned fisheries, and I wonder whether your two Governments have taken any view on how best to handle a situation in which the polar ice cap reduces, fish stocks gradually move further north and there becomes an interest in fishing in the high seas, not in the EEZs, which we understand perfectly well are regulated by the states.

The Chairman: Lord Hannay, Viscount Hanworth is going to come on to that specific question later.

Lord Hannay: I am sorry. I had not realised that. I was going to ask it because there was a mention of fisheries.

The Chairman: It is an important area which we will come to later. Ambassador Eikeland, you mentioned a couple of times strengthening of the Arctic Council and I just want to be clear about that. Can you encapsulate what a strengthened Arctic Council would look like? You described the two legally binding agreements on the Arctic Council that already exist. When we asked the Canadian Chair of the SAOs where it goes from there, I do not think he was able to give a specific answer. I wonder whether you have an opinion on that.

Else Berit Eikeland: Thank you. I think that the Norwegian SAO is probably more outspoken. It is probably part of our political culture in Norway that there is a lot of consensus among all the political parties when it comes to the Arctic, so it makes us more outspoken. It is difficult to say whether there will be a new binding agreement next year or the year after. When it comes to looking at closer cooperation in the Arctic Council, I would like to mention a possible closer cooperation on science. It is not of deciding the priorities of science—because we want science not be decided by the Arctic Council but to be free, so to speak—but more of facilitating science as for example transferring of equipment and travel of our scientists. That would be a good way to move forward, especially when it comes to Russia,

which is a very legalistic society. It would also be important to do more on oil spill prevention.

The Chairman: Thank you. Yes, Ambassador.

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: I just want to comment on these particular issues. I think that the council is moving really fast now. Since the demands are increasing so fast, it needs to react must faster than it has done. We are seeing different issues exploding both in business co-operation and in environmental security and protection. Now, it must move more into policy-shaping and decision-making, but that might be difficult because it is getting even closer to the more sensitive issues all the time. So the future is in a sense unmarked on the question of how we strengthen the council.

Also, we need more clarity on the observer standards—how we engage with the observers, how we might benefit from their expertise and how they might benefit from us. This is also a big agenda issue for the coming years. Engagement with the observers is getting quite demanding, so there has to be more of an outlet for substantive discussion between these two categories of partners.

The Chairman: What I gather from both of you is that there is no cast-in-stone blueprint, if I may mix my metaphors, for the direction in which the Arctic Council should go.

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: I would say no, because the Arctic Council has developed under rather benign conditions from being a scientific body to being a decision-making body. The two agreements that my colleague referred to are very recent and they need an implementation phase to a large extent.

Else Berit Eikeland: Let me just add from the Norwegian perspective that we feel that, when history is written maybe in 20 or 30 years' time, the Arctic Council will be one of the most successful diplomatic establishments from the 1990s and as a result of the Cold War. The

Arctic Council established a secretariat in Tromsø. I believe that the Committee visited the secretariat. We see very much that we need continuity in the Arctic Council. The different Arctic states will be in charge of the chairmanship, but, with the American chairmanship, we are now seeing signals of strengthening the secretariat in Tromsø and of having more continuity when it comes to working groups and engagement. I think that we need to take one step at a time with the establishment of the secretariat, but strengthening the organisation would be important.

Q276 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Have you given any thought to what the European Union has done over the years in trying to achieve greater continuity? That is to say, have you given any thought to having a kind of troika of presidencies so that you do not have individual presidency priorities developed just by one country but priorities that span a much longer timescale, which in some cases would seem to me to be very suited for Arctic conditions?

Else Berit Eikeland: Thank you. Yes, we have looked at the European Union's way of organising things. Of course, the European Union consists of many more countries than the Arctic states. But we are looking in that direction so that the country with the chairmanship can have some priorities but also so that the continuity of what the Arctic Council is doing is really reflected in the working groups and is not dependent on the different priorities of the chairmanship.

Viscount Hanworth: But are the Arctic nations happy that the secretariat of the Arctic Council has been established in Tromsø, or is there some rivalry as to where it should be located? Indeed, are there any ideas that it should be peripatetic?

Else Berit Eikeland: The Ministers decided to establish the secretariat in Tromsø and I do not see that there are any disputes about that.

The Chairman: Ambassador Óskarsson, did you wish to comment on this?

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: I totally agree with my colleague. The secretariat is well established in Tromsø. Of course it is weak for such a huge plethora of activities but I am sure that it will be strengthened in the near future. As in any organisation, there is hesitation about establishing a secretariat, but I think that it has come through with flying colours.

Q277 Lord Oxburgh: We have touched on the role of observers. It seems that the main way that they can be involved in the work of the council is through the working groups. Can you tell us a bit more about the working groups? How is their membership set up? Can members of the working groups contribute money to the budgets? It would be very helpful to hear more about that.

Else Berit Eikeland: Absolutely. That is a very important question when it comes to the Arctic Council, since the working groups are fundamental to the council. The working groups and the task forces, which are expert groups on specific topics, are open to all observers. As you know, the Arctic Council is very much a bottom-up forum. The working groups and what comes up from the groups to the ministerial meeting are very important. The working groups are not doing research; they are co-ordinating and carrying out peer reviews of research and science that has already been done. That is why observer states such as the UK with a lot of experience in Arctic research can really contribute in the working groups. Observers can contribute to funding projects in the working groups and work with Arctic states on specific priorities.

Lord Oxburgh: So when one of these working groups is meeting, are all observers and members of the Arctic Council advised that there is going to be a meeting, and can anyone send anyone they wish?

Else Berit Eikeland: Yes, in principle, but there are six working groups. There are very many meetings held very far away and they are very costly. I think that most observer states—even the bigger ones such as China—will have priorities when it comes to participating in working groups. What areas are we specifically interested in? Is it biodiversity or other issues?

Lord Oxburgh: So the priorities are set by the observers and not by the Arctic Council itself, or not by the working group itself. People who are interested and are prepared to pay can come.

Else Berit Eikeland: Yes.

Lord Oxburgh: Good. Now, are the task forces set up by the council or by the working groups?

Else Berit Eikeland: The task forces are directly set up by the ministerial meeting. So the Ministers will decide that this year, or over the next two-year period, we will focus specifically on oil spill prevention—I am co-chairing a task force on oil spill marine pollution with my Russian colleague—and then all the observers will be invited to participate.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: What proportion of these working groups have NGOs as opposed to national members? Are the NGOs about half the number of people involved in these working groups?

Else Berit Eikeland: It depends very much on the topic of the working group. For example, the working group CAFF is responsible for biodiversity, so some NGOs working specifically on biodiversity will participate. Some Arctic states will have that as a priority, as will some observer states with a keen interest. It depends a little on the topic, but Norway wants to work more with all observers. We would like to design projects with observers, not least with the UK as a close ally of Norway when it comes to research in Antarctica and the Arctic.

It depends a little on the interest that observer states have, but it is important that we do not demand too much of observers, because the Arctic Council is a complicated structure. It has many meetings and, as I said, you need to participate. But observers cannot come to only one meeting in a working group and then come back next year, and expect to have influence. You have to have continuity and you need commitment.

The Chairman: Perhaps I could bring in Lord Soley. Then I will ask Ambassador Óskarsson whether he would like to respond on any of those points.

Q278 Lord Soley: I am trying to understand how you translate the thoughts or ideas of a working group into practical governance. You might have very good working groups, such as the one on oil spills or the massively important one on search and rescue, and I can see how they function, but I am not sure how you translate that into governance of the area.

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: I work daily with these issues. I am not sure how it works out, but we have important products such as the human development reports that have been produced by these working groups. They are of course a sound basis for any further policy-making. Have I misunderstood you, sir?

Lord Soley: If the working groups put forward proposals and the Arctic Council then agrees them, you then go to all the Governments, because it will not just be a matter relating to Arctic Council governance. If you have ships coming through from China to Britain or whatever and the proposal is on search and rescue, for example, you will have a bit of major international governance.

Else Berit Eikeland: Thank you for a very difficult and relevant question. As you mentioned, a lot of the work in the Arctic Council may be difficult to understand because there are big reports and lots of information. Let me be very concrete. The working group CAFF is working on a huge project on migratory birds. A lot of the birds in the Arctic are declining rapidly,

because of disappearing on their flying routes to the south. So CAFF has established close co-operation with the relevant countries on the eastern flight route, such as China, Korea and Singapore, to map these birds. We are developing international co-operation to do something about it. So, when it comes to migratory birds, we are researching new regulations and new areas of co-operation.

When it comes to the task force on oil spill prevention, we are looking at new forms of co-operation among Arctic states, not least when it comes to those states with offshore oil and gas activities. Those are two examples of how more scientific general information is translated by the Arctic states into new ways of co-operating and new regulation.

Lord Soley: So the Arctic Council would see its role as persuading other states if not to follow a law, because it would not be like the law of the sea convention of the United Nations, then to follow the arrangements that it is putting in place, whether on oil spills, bird migration or search and rescue. Is that how you see it working internationally?

Else Berit Eikeland: No, sir, that is not how I see it. When it comes to migrating birds, China, Korea, Japan and Singapore say that they have the same interest as the Arctic states in keeping these birds, so it is more a question of co-operation than of forcing national regulations. The Arctic Council is not in that situation. As you are aware, the Arctic Council is not able to decide binding agreements or to have an international agreement mechanism. The Arctic Council, as I said, is more about soft power co-operation and engaging with other Arctic states and observers for the common good.

Q279 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: You have been very positive indeed about the co-operation between Norway and the UK. I wonder whether either of you could say anything about the areas in which you think the UK could most usefully work with the nations of the Arctic Council, what the strengths of the UK are as seen from the outside, and how active the UK is

in the Arctic Council. We know that it has observer status, but we find it slightly difficult to identify whether it actually uses that very much. Perhaps you, as two members of the Arctic Council countries, could say what your view of that is. Are there other areas outside the Arctic Council where the UK should be active with Arctic states?

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: Perhaps I may start. We see basically three areas where the UK should come in stronger than it does, in particular the scientific work. You have heard that UK representatives have been attending the scientific working group to some extent but not very visibly. The second thing is the search and rescue aspect of Arctic co-operation, which is a critical issue for the future. The UK has great capacity and experience to contribute to that work. The third area is resource development. The UK has a lot of experience in different aspects of resource development in difficult places, so we believe that the UK could raise its profile individually much more than it does today.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: But do you not notice some contradiction in search and rescue, because the UK's capacity to operate search and rescue in the Arctic area is, I think I am correct in saying, being reduced?

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: It is the UK's decision to reduce it. In the case of the Arctic, every additional hand with search and rescue experience in this huge area is welcome. But we also have experience from Canada, where the build-up of search and rescue capacities is not following the politics of the issues. I can say even as an Icelander and an Icelandic representative that we are struggling with developing and keeping up our own capacity in the face of political issues.

The Chairman: How specifically should the UK help in search and rescue? This is an area where the Committee has shown a lot of interest, and I would be interested in your comments, Ambassador, on what practical assistance the UK could give in this area.

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: I believe that we are still on the basics in terms of identifying resources for operational help in the north, so we are at the beginning of identifying any possible capacity to contribute to and just to co-ordinate activities. Since the UK belongs to a near-Arctic group of countries, this is an issue that we are planning to take up in the bilateral consultations between Iceland and the United Kingdom.

Q280 Viscount Hanworth: We have lost our capacity for long-range aerial surveillance. Would the Ambassador be prepared to say something to encourage us to restore that capacity?

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: Of course, we have facilities in Iceland. We are centrally located and so have the search capacity to work out of Iceland. That is one of our dreams. One of our policy statements is to develop Iceland as a hub for such search and rescue capacity in the northern Atlantic.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: The fact is that a lot of the activity there is associated with oil and exploration. Are the companies that are operating in the Arctic contributing to this infrastructure? Is the tourist industry, with its big ships, also contributing to it? You could ask why an ordinary taxpayer who is living in England should be contributing when there are some very large companies making a lot of money. Why are they not contributing? Is the Arctic Council addressing the real role of the contribution by business to this infrastructure?

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: I am not aware of it, but my colleague might have more details. Of course, our coastguards are working very closely on co-ordinating possible activities when it comes to accidents in the Arctic, and that is one thing that we can add to the co-operation. We have also increased tourism there. There has been an exponential increase in the number of cruise ships going north over the past few years. That is another risk that can affect even British interests.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: They could contribute their money to this infrastructure.

The Chairman: Ambassador Eikeland, did you wish to make a short contribution on this?

Else Berit Eikeland: Yes. Maybe the most important issue for me to underline here is that we would like to engage even more with the UK in the Arctic Council. I do not think that it is up to Norway to decide the priorities of the UK. The panel before us pointed out very important areas of co-operation. When it comes to search and rescue, for Norway it is partly for our coastguard and partly for us as a sovereign state to control these areas. It is a matter of principle and there is a bigger question to discuss. But the most important thing is that we feel that the British Arctic strategy was very well received in Norway. We know that the FCO participates at senior Arctic official meetings, and we know that there is a wish for the UK to participate more in working groups. But, to be blunt, if you are going to participate, you need more predictable funding.

The Chairman: Do we chair any of the working groups, Ambassador, do you know?

Else Berit Eikeland: No.

The Chairman: No we do not, or no you do not know?

Else Berit Eikeland: No, I do not think that you do¹.

The Chairman: Thank you. That is very useful.

Else Berit Eikeland: I think that the message from Norway would be: yes, we would like to work more with the UK. You have a lot of competence and you have experience in Antarctica and the Arctic. This synergy would be relevant to the Arctic Council.

The Chairman: I want to raise briefly something connected with this. We take an interest in the defence side. Clearly, Norway is a very important member of NATO. British Armed Forces have trained in the high north with Norwegian forces. Does Norway see the military area—

¹ Note from the witness: Observers do not chair the working groups of the Arctic Council.

having an Arctic capability—as important as well? I do not want to get into a long discussion about this, but Norway has a particular position here as a NATO member in the high north.

Else Berit Eikeland: Absolutely. Since the Second World War we have felt that we have a special relationship with the UK because of the war and because of the close links in NATO. We do not want security questions to be discussed in the Arctic Council. We want the Arctic Council to have a different focus with Russia.

The Chairman: I was not really asking that within an Arctic Council context. We are looking not just at the Arctic Council but at broader Arctic issues.

Else Berit Eikeland: Yes, the partnership between Norway and the UK in NATO is very important.

Q281 Lord Addington: How will dialogue and debate on the Arctic be influenced by the Arctic Circle conference? I was there just over a week ago in Reykjavik. Does the Arctic Circle conference present an alternative forum to the Arctic Council for seeking influence in the region? In many of your previous answers we heard that Norway regards the Arctic Council as something of a soft power. Surely this complements it, or does it possibly rival it? Could both of you clarify that?

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: That is a very valid question as we had the Arctic Circle meeting in Iceland only a week ago, where we had the pleasure of receiving a very robust Arctic UK delegation with a good mixture of business, academia and politicians. To see the Arctic Circle as anything but a dialogue forum is wrong, because it will always be a forum in which to raise important issues regarding the Arctic, in whatever area it is. As was clearly shown at the last Arctic Circle meeting, the issues that were addressed were very broad and detailed. It was an amazing experience for me to be there and to see how complicated the issues

facing and relating to the Arctic are. The main proponents of this forum insist that it is a forum for raising issues for future policy-making or policy decisions.

Else Berit Eikeland: Maybe I can add some comments. I agree very much that the Arctic Circle conferences and other conferences—I must mention the Arctic Frontiers conference in Tromsø—are all kinds of this soft power, this dialogue on Arctic issues. Of course, Norway welcomes all types of forums and conferences on Arctic issues. The Arctic Council is very different - it is about long-term co-operation among Arctic states and Permanent Participants. UK participation in the Arctic Council would be very different from UK participation in a conference. But I agree very much that all this is part of this new map of soft security policy discussions in an Arctic framework.

The Chairman: Thank you. Perhaps we can move back to fisheries with a question from Viscount Hanworth.

Q282 Viscount Hanworth: My question concerns an issue that has already been raised. What consideration have Norway and Iceland given to the need to conserve and manage fisheries in Arctic marine areas?

Else Berit Eikeland: Thank you so much for raising what is a very important question for Norway. When it comes to fisheries management, Norwegian policy is very much ecosystem-based and science-based. We have dual use of our resources and our coastal areas. We have a system of integrated management plans for all our big ocean areas. For example, there is close science-based co-operation with Russia in the management of fisheries resources in the Barents Sea. It is science-based. Even though there is offshore petroleum activity in this area as well as shipping, the cod quota last year was four times bigger than 25 years ago. These integrated ocean management plans for the Barents Sea, the Lofoten western area and the Norwegian Sea involve detailed science-based mapping of

the sea bed and of fish spawning, identifying sensitive areas where offshore oil and gas are not allowed and where there will be only fisheries. To sum up, a science-based approach to fisheries is key for Norway.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Can I just follow that up and ask how you approach the possible regulation of fisheries in the area that is not covered by the EEZs of the Arctic Council states?

Else Berit Eikeland: Thank you. We have a precautionary principle in non-regulated areas. That implies that Norwegian fishermen are not allowed to fish in those areas. As you are aware, a process has been initiated by the United States to have a precautionary principle agreement among the coastal states. We very much support this.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: But presumably you do not believe that the coastal states alone can regulate fishing or the high seas outside the EEZs. That is not something that the coastal states have any legal rights over.

Else Berit Eikeland: What I tried to express—I am sorry that I was not clear—is that we do not currently look at regulations; we look at the precautionary principle not to allow fishing in these areas because there is almost no science and, as I mentioned, the Norwegian approach to fisheries is science-based.

The Chairman: Can I just get something clear in relation to what Lord Hannay said? Is it the Norwegian position that in the high seas outside the EEZs there should be a moratorium in fisheries in the Arctic? Is that what we are saying?

Else Berit Eikeland: I am saying that we want a precautionary approach to fisheries in these seas.

The Chairman: Does that mean a moratorium in the medium term because we do not have the scientific information?

Else Berit Eikeland: A moratorium in the legal sense is very different from a precautionary approach.

The Chairman: But a precautionary principle is not a practical outcome, is it? A policy is driven by whether you allow fishing or not.

Else Berit Eikeland: In the Norwegian setting, when it comes to science-based management of fisheries, a precautionary approach is key.

The Chairman: I understand.

Viscount Hanworth: My question concerns whether there is a need for an international approach to the conservation of fish stocks. The economists who speak of the tragedy of the commons assert that the problem of fish stocks is the absence of specific national ownership. There is a history of British-Icelandic relationships that informs this particular question, is there not?

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: There is, of course, particularly in the case of the cod wars—we have a very strict view on that. Fisheries need to be managed. On the other hand, we have a different issue with the five coastal states. We regard Iceland as a coastal state in this sense but we have been excluded from the consultations and from the work of these so-called five coastal states. We have demanded to be part of the group but so far that has not happened.

Viscount Hanworth: Has not the problem with the EU fish stocks been the commonality of ownership, which has meant that everybody has been trying to grab more than their fair share? Do you not see this problem arising in precisely the area that we are talking about?

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: I am pretty sure that we already have a sign of the problem in the form of the mackerel issue. The fish stocks are moving north, and Iceland now has a population of mackerel in its economic zone that feeds and spawns there.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: There is an international treaty about fisheries in this area, although I have forgotten its name. It concerns the regional fishing area and includes almost all of the Arctic area. I thought that that more or less had a controlling role.

Else Berit Eikeland: Absolutely.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: So that is how you work. What is the name of that treaty?

Else Berit Eikeland: NEAFC. It is a regional-based fisheries organisation.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: It is the body that applies the precautionary principle through its decision-making and regulations?

Else Berit Eikeland: Absolutely. You are correct.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: But surely that is not correct. It does not cover the high seas that may be uncovered by the melting of the ice cap. NEAFC, as it is currently constituted, does not do that, so there is a vacuum.

The Chairman: We need to finish within about four minutes, so perhaps we could move on to Lord Hunt's question. If we do not finish, perhaps we could do so through written evidence.

Q283 Lord Hunt of Chesterton: This is to do with economic and industrial development. You have told us about the Arctic Council and the Economic Council, but one of the other aspects that we have heard a lot about is shipping, gas and other mining. To what extent is your decision-making through the Arctic Council or others connected to the United Nations bodies? We have not heard from you about the International Maritime Organization, which is responsible for both safety and pollution. I think that some people are very worried about shipping in that area. They are worried that the current level of pollution regulation has not been as rigorous as it might have been. This is an area that will be contaminated. Does the Arctic Council have a particular way of working through the IMO, or is that done separately?

The Chairman: Perhaps I could ask both of you, Ambassadors, to answer Lord Hunt's question and the wider question that we gave you some notification of, and then, if something is not covered, you could come back to it in written evidence afterwards. Ambassador Eikeland, maybe you would like to start.

Else Berit Eikeland: Thank you. When it comes to the IMO, the Arctic Council supports the work in the IMO to develop a Polar Code. We are very much aware that the Arctic Council should not duplicate the work of, or work in parallel with, the IMO or other international bodies where the Arctic states are represented. We will discuss a Polar Code in more general terms and then representatives from the Arctic states will work together in the IMO to develop such a code. I think that we can find many examples of co-operation inside the UN.

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: I totally agree that we are seeing good progress on integrating the Polar Code into two relevant agreements in the IMO. Of course, the IMO has a legal basis that the Arctic Council does not have.

Viscount Hanworth: Might I encourage you to submit additional written evidence regarding your fish stock management?

Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson: With pleasure.

The Chairman: I am aware that we have not really gone through balancing oil, gas and mining, which is really important. We would be very keen to have some written evidence on that area from you if that is possible. I would like to bring the session to an end now. We have covered a large area. I am aware that we have questioned you both closely and I thank you very much for your considered responses. Your Excellencies, thank you very much for travelling and attending here. We will be producing our report in February. We look forward to the UK playing a full role in the Arctic and in the Arctic Council and the various other

bodies of which we are a member. Thank you very much indeed. I bring this public session to an end at this point.