

# Environmental Audit Committee

## Sub-Committee on Polar Research

### Oral evidence: The UK and the Arctic Environment, HC 1141

Wednesday 24 May 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 24 May 2023.

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Members present: James Gray (Chair); Philip Dunne; Clive Lewis; Caroline Lucas; Cherilyn Mackrory; Jerome Mayhew; Anna McMorrin; Cat Smith; Claudia Webbe.

Questions 49 - 98

#### Witnesses

**I:** Dr Duncan Depledge, Lecturer in Geopolitics and Security, Loughborough University; and Professor Basil Germond, Professor of International Security, Lancaster University.

**II:** The Lord Mountevans, Honorary President, Maritime London; Jane Sandell, CEO, UK Fisheries Ltd; and Gary Taylor, Fisheries Consultant, GT Fisheries Consultancy.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Professor Basil Germond \(Professor of International Security at Lancaster University\), and Professor Neeraj Suri \(Distinguished Professor & Chair in Cyber Security at Lancaster University\) \[ARC0003\]](#)



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Duncan Depledge and Professor Basil Germond.

Q49 **Chair:** Welcome, everybody, to this meeting of the Environmental Audit Committee Sub-Committee on Polar Research, looking into the whole of Britain's relationship with the Arctic, what we have to offer in the Arctic and what we can gain from it.

Before we start, I welcome our two witnesses in the first of our two panels: Dr Duncan Depledge, who is lecturer in geopolitics and security at Loughborough University, and Professor Basil Germond, professor of international security at Lancaster University. To begin, would you both like to say a few words to introduce yourselves and tell us your thoughts in general on Britain's relations with the Arctic?

**Dr Depledge:** Thank you, Chair, for the invitation to speak to the Committee today. My apologies for not being able to attend in person.

I have been working on Arctic issues for a little over a decade. I note that the Committee has already heard from scientific experts regarding the environmental changes that are unfolding in the Arctic, and their wide-ranging, dramatic and accelerating nature. We also know that the most important action any country or organisation or, indeed, individual can take to help to reduce global warming in the Arctic is to drastically slash greenhouse gas emissions.

When it comes to the UK—I imagine we will come on to this—what we should be thinking about is where and how the UK can lead in the Arctic, the extent to which it understands what is happening in the region, and the extent to which it understands the interests and motivations of the Arctic states as well as the people who live there.

**Professor Germond:** Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me today. I am professor of international security at Lancaster University and my area of expertise is sea power and maritime security.

The first thing I would like to say today is that for decades the Arctic has enjoyed a low level of tension and a relatively high level of peaceful co-operation. That is why we talk about Arctic exceptionalism. That is to say that environmental governance and science co-operation were not subordinated to security considerations, and the Arctic Council epitomised this pragmatic dialogue and co-operation.

However, because of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the level of tension in the Arctic has increased a lot and this has compromised Arctic exceptionalism. The tenets of co-operation with Russia are mostly shut down, there is also militarisation of the Arctic, and the Arctic region is strategically very important for Russia, in particular for its navy and nuclear forces. It is in the interests of Russia to control and limit who can access Arctic waters and especially the Kola bastion for proposed nuclear deterrence.



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For NATO it is also an increasingly important strategic region for the defence of the alliance's northern flank. It is even more important now that Finland is a member and there is the planned accession of Sweden. All that is about reducing this kind of Arctic exceptionalism and weakening the Arctic Council, so it is developing. We need to know that.

**Q50 Chair:** Thank you for that; you have led me very neatly into my first question. Many experts have concluded that, if it ever existed, Arctic exceptionalism is dead and the era of competition among the great states in the Arctic is now with us. That brings with it economic and commercial competition. It brings with it military stress of the kind that you describe and, therefore, the governance of the Arctic—we will come to the Arctic Council in a moment—must be a completely different matter to what it has been perhaps since the end of the Cold War. Am I exaggerating the end of exceptionalism? Or could it be reinvented?

**Dr Depledge:** The interesting thing that you said there was if Arctic exceptionalism ever actually existed, and I am certainly in the camp of those who are perhaps more cautious about that claim. I think there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the Arctic has always been affected by broader geopolitical currents, and we need to be careful about portraying the last 20 to 30 years as some special moment in the history of the Arctic where co-operation reigned and there was no competition at all.

What I think has changed is less to do with notions of exceptionalism and more to do with the breakdown of what I would call circumpolarity—that is just a way of saying the sense that the Arctic states are able to exert their primacy over the Arctic based on a shared vision of what the Arctic's future should be. Whether that shared vision ever fully existed we could debate, but what is happening, as this kind of circumpolarity breaks down, is that the dividing lines between the Arctic states are becoming increasingly apparent. I think that is what is making the geopolitics of the region look far more fractious than it has done for the past couple of decades.

**Q51 Chair:** To follow that up, Duncan, does that not mean a greater role for the UK? Up until now, whether there has been exceptionalism or circumpolarity—academics can have an interesting discussion about that—we have been excluded. Britain has not been engaged or involved in the geopolitics of the Arctic except in a rather peripheral way. Do you think that the ending of exceptionalism, or the ending of circumpolarity, means that we might have an opportunity to exert our demonstrable power, influence and authority, as well as our contributions? Is this an opportunity for Britain?

**Dr Depledge:** I think, cautiously, potentially, yes. In the absence of a clear future for the Arctic Council—we can discuss that in more detail—I think there is an opportunity for the UK to be leaning into the discussions taking place among Arctic partners about what alternatives to the Arctic Council could look like. This is something that I think people are finding quite difficult to talk about at the moment, but the point is that without a circumpolar consensus—without the eight Arctic states that are at the



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heart of everything—it doesn't quite make sense to maintain a clear distinction between Arctic or non-Arctic or near-Arctic states, as we have done before. So for the UK we might be thinking more about who are the coalitions that we want to work with in order to bring about a specific kind of Arctic future.

**Q52 Chair:** Professor Germond, can you expand on that a little bit? Do you think that the Foreign Office, or the British Government in general in that context, has engaged with the Arctic as much as we should do? Do you see an opportunity for us to do more in terms of exerting our influence in the post-circumpolar—I am not sure I like that word, Duncan, but anyhow—world?

**Professor Germond:** Just to come back to this question around the end of the Arctic exceptionalism, I think that another way to understand these dynamics is to think in terms of a strategy of acceleration in the Arctic, because there are two systemic changes there: climate change and the effects of climate change on the Arctic, and the geopolitical tensions resulting from Russia's behaviour on the world stage. It is the synergies between those two changes that create a strategic acceleration in the Arctic because, on the one hand, with the effects of climate change we would need more co-operation, but on the other hand, because of Russia's behaviour, we have less co-operation and a weakened Arctic Council.

What is the role of the UK there? I think the baseline is to understand two things. The first is that the UK is not an Arctic riparian state, so that will influence what we can do and what we want to do. The second baseline consideration is that the Arctic Council is probably not the ultimate solution to Arctic governance any more, regardless of Russia's participation. Why is that? Because currently it is not possible to disaggregate security considerations from climate science and environmental protection considerations. That is where the UK can play a role in future: by driving co-operation between science stakeholders and security stakeholders, and promoting private and public partnership. I can talk more about that later.

**Q53 Chair:** We will talk about the Arctic Council shortly, but you mentioned that of course we are not a riparian state—although the north of the Shetlands is only 400 miles away from the Arctic Circle, so we are pretty close by. After all, America is only a riparian state because they are in the Arctic, Denmark is only a riparian state because they are in Greenland, and Iceland has the tiniest uninhabited rock north of the Arctic Circle, so it is riparian but only just. I will now instantly have a rude letter from all three ambassadors to tell me I am talking nonsense.

You could argue: does it really matter if you are a riparian state or not? If you had a big interest in the Arctic, as we do with regard to science, commerce and defence, that makes us just as important as America, Denmark or Iceland. Is that a reasonable thesis?

**Professor Germond:** I do agree with you. What we can do is make a hierarchy of the elements of our involvement in the Arctic that have been



prioritised, given the fact that we are not a riparian state. For example, an opportunity created by climate change is the new sea routes. That is the most important, let's say positive, side effect of climate change on the Arctic for the UK because we are not a riparian state. Other riparian states might put more emphasis on new fishing zones or areas for seabed resources exploitation. It doesn't mean that for the UK those aspects are not important. We have stakeholders that will want to be involved in fishing operations in the—

**Q54 Chair:** If I can interrupt very rudely, we do have no less than the chairman of the Baltic Exchange and the head of the fishing industry speaking to us in the second panel, so we will not get into that.

You correctly pointed out our role in NATO and the United Nations and, indeed, that Sweden and Finland now both joining NATO. Do you think that because of what you describe—the greater importance of defence in the Arctic and the end of the Arctic Council in the way you describe, and the potential opening up because of the disappearing ice—NATO and/or the United Nations ought to have a more important role to play in the Arctic than they have done previously?

**Dr Depledge:** If I could just weigh in on your previous point, James, the other distinction that is important to make for the UK is thinking about which nations are Arctic capable. If we are thinking about which non-Arctic states around the world are capable of doing useful things in the Arctic, whether it is to do with science or defence—and I think the UK stands out quite strongly in that regard—in that sense, as we are looking at potential alternatives to the Arctic Council or a greater role for defence in the region, the UK is naturally going to be in a position to occupy a slightly bigger space in terms of charting out the future of the region. That is based on not so much its proximity but being one of the few countries outside the Arctic that actually has a capability to operate up there.

As to the question of NATO and the UN, I don't think there would be much appetite for a stronger governance role for the UN directly related to the Arctic, beyond the big global agreements that are negotiated at the UN that have a bearing on the Arctic. You can think of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, for instance, or negotiations around what happens beyond national jurisdictions, or ocean treaties, plastic treaties—these sorts of things.

As for NATO, I think that inevitably we will see more NATO in the Arctic, not least because Finland has just joined and because Sweden is likely to join in the not-too-distant future. That in itself means that more of the Arctic will be under the NATO umbrella, so to speak. It also means that NATO will have to rethink its defence plans and spend a lot more time thinking about how it is going to incorporate Sweden and Finland into its understanding of the wider north, essentially.

**Q55 Chair:** Finally, before we move on to talk about the Arctic Council, which we will do in a second, I have a final thought to get your views on. If the



governance of the Arctic, in the very loose sense, were to be opened up so that we in the UK could become more actively involved, is there not a risk that by doing that you also open up that governance to China? To what degree are people sensitive about the risks from China? In other words, if you have a little closed group, which is the Arctic Council, and just the riparian states, that is much easier to control, and America and Canada control that, but if you threw everything open and you bring in Britain, the EU and France and whoever else, do you not also invite in China? Are there not risks associated with that?

**Dr Depledge:** That is certainly a challenge, and I think this is why we should not throw out the Arctic Council. We should not condemn the Arctic Council and its existence yet. The value of the Arctic Council is that it establishes that clear primacy of the circumpolar states. What I was suggesting before is that if we start to think about alternatives to the Arctic Council, I am really thinking about the remaining Arctic Council states and countries like the UK, France, Germany, other natural allies and partners—and we might think about Japan and Korea in this context as well—coming together to try to provide some alternative way of co-operating together. I do not think that is to provide an alternative to the Arctic Council, in the sense of an alternative governance regime, but really just an alternative vehicle for those countries to pursue their interests in the region.

Of course, when that happens, what we may see—we have already heard noises coming out of Russia that they are potentially prepared to do this—is rival formations emerging, centred particularly on Russia, who we know have already been making overtures to China, to India, to the other BRIC countries, to the Gulf nations. So what we potentially end up with is different coalitions of actors jostling for influence in the region.

Q56 **Chair:** Professor Germond, do you have anything to add to all that on China and the geopolitical position in general?

**Professor Germond:** On China, I agree with my colleague. I would like to add that we cannot really grasp the developments around China without linking this to the situation with Russia, the participation or non-participation of Russia in the Arctic Council activities, and the overall geopolitical tensions between the West and Russia.

The CCP in China has made it clear they are interested in the Arctic for economic and security reasons. Up until the war in Ukraine, we could always put forward the argument that Russia was wary of China's willingness to be too involved in the Arctic because Russia wanted to remain the dominant power in the region, but today we have to be realistic about this relationship between China and Russia. Russia is the junior partner, so if China wants to do something in the Arctic, eventually they will manage to get their way there. It is really linked to Russia's position on the world stage and how the geopolitical situation will play out in the coming years.



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**Dr Depledge:** If I could add one more line to that. One of the interesting things here is that the West and Russia are going to be offering very competing and very different visions of what the Arctic should look like. They will essentially be making the case to other countries that their vision is the one that should be followed. I think the West has a lot to do in terms of bringing the rest of the world with it, and we could even include China in that. There is a very specific idea of the Arctic that we think we should be working towards, which may not be the same one that Russia is.

To explain that a bit more clearly, one of the things we have learned from the Ukraine conflict is, of course, that outside the usual allies and partners of the West, other countries have not been as ready as we might have hoped to come around to our view of the conflict. Similarly, we might imagine the same kind of circumstances arising in the Arctic: if Russia, together with China and others, managed to offer something more to the rest of the world than the West can we are, again, likely to have a problem there. I think there is a big diplomatic effort needed to think about how we bring the rest of the world along with us.

**Chair:** Thank you. We talked briefly about the Arctic Council; we now want to talk in more detail.

Q57 **Cat Smith:** Could you both give a historic assessment of how effective, pre its effective suspension, the Arctic Council was at addressing climate change issues in the Arctic? Perhaps we could start with Professor Germond.

**Professor Germond:** As my colleague mentioned before with regard to Arctic exceptionalism, we should perhaps not put too much emphasis on the fact that the Arctic Council was at the centre of everything, but it is clear that there have been lots of advances made, in terms of both polar research and environmental governance, thanks to the way the Arctic Council could operate.

It is very important to make the distinction between polar research on the one hand and environmental governance on the other hand, because now that co-operation with Russia is not appropriate any more, obviously it infringes a lot on the possibilities for climate science research. There are no high-level meetings and co-operation with Russia, but it is still possible to envisage scientist-to-scientist low-level co-operation.

That is for polar research, but when it comes to environmental governance, what we need to succeed in the Arctic is some level of institutional co-operation. Without a level of institutional co-operation it is not possible to succeed with environmental governance, because the ocean is free—liquid. Fish cross borders, as does the fishing industry; the maritime sector is a transnational economic sector. So we really need multilateralism and institutional co-operation if we want to achieve environmental governance successes in the Arctic. The Arctic Council was good at that and now, given the current situation, all that is at risk, which



is why we have to think about a potential alternative future for institutional governance.

**Dr Depledge:** My thoughts on this are that you have to be very clear about what the purpose of the Arctic Council is before you can judge whether it is a success. Of course, what the Arctic Council is not is a governing body for the Arctic, essentially. It is a forum for the Arctic states to talk about shared concerns and common interests in the Arctic, and to try to plot a way forward for working together in the region.

This is important because yes, of course, the Arctic Council represents the interests of the Arctic states, but there are parts of the Arctic, like the central Arctic ocean and so on, that lie beyond the jurisdiction of the Arctic states and are governed by global regimes—by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, for instance—so the Arctic Council isn't there to govern the Arctic in that sense.

However, to the extent that the Arctic Council helps to maintain the spirit of circumpolar co-operation and a collaborative atmosphere, through which the Arctic states can project their primacy in Arctic affairs and pursue matters of common interest, you would have to say that it was effective. This was evident in the way the Arctic Council managed the influx of new observers about 10 years ago, particularly from Asian countries that were coming to the table and expressing an interest in the region.

You see this in the way that the Arctic Council has overseen the negotiation of several treaties between the Arctic states on things like scientific co-operation, on oil-spill response and preparedness and so on, and through the way that the Arctic Council's working groups, through the scientific assessment strategies, have made impactful contributions to global debate. One example, which is emblematic of that, was the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment that was published in 2004. That really helped to accelerate a lot of the debate about climate change and the need for mitigation.

Up until last year, it is fair to say that the Arctic Council was pretty successful in keeping defence and security concerns at bay. Indeed, one might argue that it is precisely because of the co-operation within the Arctic Council over the past 20 to 30 years that, when we look back about a decade ago, other forums were springing up to tackle issues that lay outside the mandate of the Arctic Council, including security and defence, with the creation of things like the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable.

A lot of that activity has since stalled or Russia has been excluded from it, but the point is that when the Arctic Council was working well there was a spillover effect that encouraged co-operation in those areas beyond the Arctic Council. I think it had a very important role and it was doing that role quite effectively, but we cannot expect it to do everything.

Q58 **Cat Smith:** If I could just push you on the effect of the suspension of the Arctic Council—what implications has that had for environmental science





and environmental protection?

**Dr Depledge:** I think the impacts were well rehearsed by the previous witnesses to this inquiry, by essentially talking about disruption to certain scientific co-operation, which affects everything from collecting data to moving scientists but also samples and equipment across borders, to joint publications. What this loss of access for western scientists to the Russian Arctic, and to the Russian scientific community, really means is that it has lost access to roughly about half of the Arctic. This will have all kinds of implications for where science can be done and how science can be done.

Crucially, as well, it is the data gaps that are being created as a result of it. So many of the observations of what is happening in the Arctic are dependent on regularly being able to insert the latest data and observations, but potentially gaps are going to emerge from the Russian Arctic now on that.

Q59 **Cat Smith:** Professor Germond, do you have anything to add to that about the pause of the Arctic Council and the implications for science and environmental protection?

**Professor Germond:** Yes. To begin with, to come back to your question about effectiveness, it is also important to think about: what are the challenges that we need to address in the Arctic resulting from climate change? One of the challenges is the impact of climate change on local communities and indigenous peoples in the High North. They suffer greatly, mostly from the impact of climate change on their livelihood and, also, the potential risk of dispossession, ocean grabbing and so on.

The Arctic Council was very important for them because there was a good system of representation for the indigenous people. That is also something we have to take into account if we think of alternative forums for co-operation, because if there is one thing the Arctic Council was good at it was to give a voice to indigenous peoples. That is one thing we must not forget.

In terms of science co-operation, I think in a sense it is less important to link that to the Arctic Council itself and whether the Arctic Council is working or going to work well in the coming years or not. The other thing is what we as western states can realistically do in terms of co-operation with Russia, because that is the core of the problem. Science co-operation is usually an instrument for peace, but science can also be an instrument of state power.

There are often questions of national security linked to science co-operation. That is why we need strategic export control regulations. Not all data are benign just because they are about the climate. For example, sea ice thickness data have obvious military applications, and data regarding the effects of climate change can impact on navigation. It can help with the exploitation of resources. So it is not possible to really think that all climate science data can be open source in the current context.



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That is one thing that has been acknowledged by scientists and Governments, but there is another aspect that is rarely discussed and I want to emphasise it: the fact that there are diplomatic and political reasons why we cannot really co-operate, or it is not adequate to co-operate, with Russia. Politically speaking, the West needs to show this image of unity. Russia can also produce scientific co-operation to demonstrate that it is not a pariah state and that it is respectable to work with Russia, but that is not something we can really afford on the diplomatic front. Russia would like to push this image of a respectable nation.

There are a lot of softer diplomatic and political factors at play here to explain why, despite the fact that climate science is crucial, we cannot do everything. We have to do a cost-benefit analysis. We need climate science, we need co-operation in the Arctic, but what is the cost that we are happy to pay here in the UK in terms of political and diplomatic factors?

**Chair:** We have our second panel starting at 3 pm, so my colleagues around the table and perhaps our learned witnesses might like to be as concise as they can be.

**Dr Depledge:** To add to that very briefly, there are also the long-term impacts of the policy, which were captured well by the US Ambassador for the Arctic, Mike Sfraga, just the other day. He was pointing out that if the war stopped tomorrow, things do not just turn back on in the Arctic. We do not just suddenly resume the Arctic Council and all the scientific co-operation and things. I think my colleague captured this nicely. There is now this trust deficit with Russia and that is going to make it much harder to do things with Russia in the future, even when the war ends.

Q60 **Cat Smith:** Very succinctly, what is Britain's influence as an observer? Does it give us opportunities to contribute to the co-operation on scientific research in the region? It is a "throwing it out there" question. Duncan, do you want to go first?

**Dr Depledge:** Yes. My impression is that when it comes to the Arctic Council the UK's influence is relatively modest, but that is probably no more so than any other monarchic state. That is to do with the way the Arctic Council is structured. It affords primacy to the Arctic states. It is the Arctic states that chair the working groups. It is the Arctic states that sit at the table, whereas the observers are sat at the back. At a political level, this has meant that the UK has had to be a bit restrained in what it can say. It has to work in the corridors and in the background rather than by making bold political statements about the region. I think that sense of restraint has been evident in a lot of the statements that have come out in UK Arctic policy frameworks and so on over the years.

At the operational level, I think it is evident that the UK has made some important contributions to Arctic science. It has been mentioned that the UK is the fourth largest producer of Arctic research, and it has also been



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involved in important initiatives like the Arctic Shipping Best Practice Information Forum.

I am not so sure about the extent to which the UK is able to exert influence over the Arctic Council agenda through, for instance, bilateral engagement with whichever country is currently in the chair. In my own experience talking to scientists from key allies like Norway, the impression I have always got is that the UK is seen as an important and valued contributor to the region. However, a lot of that comes through the individual scientists and the research networks that are maintained, rather than from the Government per se.

**Professor Germond:** I agree. Very succinctly, I would say that because we lack data—and we are going to lack more data because of the lack of co-operation with Russia—the western states need to intensify research programmes in regard to the Arctic. That means having an ambitious funding strategy. The integrated review 2023 and the other UK documents emphasise our science power, so it is time to harness this science power and put money there in the Arctic. Yes, we are a good contributor, and I think if we want to do more in the Arctic, and if we want to contribute to stability and security of the Arctic, it is important to invest even more in Arctic science. I have not talked about it yet, but we also have to increase our operational presence in the Arctic. There is also military investment needed, but science power is crucial here.

Q61 **Cat Smith:** I have one final, short question, which suggests the answer will be complicated, but could we keep it short? Do you believe that the Arctic Council's model of governance is going to be fit for meeting the environmental challenges in the region? I suppose I am asking for your assessment of whether the Arctic Council is going to be fit for the future; if not, do you have an idea about anything that would be better?

**Professor Germond:** Very quickly on that one, I will just say that the Arctic Council cannot function effectively without Russia's participation. It is obvious that there is not going to be a normalisation of our relationship with Russia any time soon, especially not as long as there is the war of aggression in Ukraine. In the short term, no; mid-term, probably not; long term, we shall see.

Q62 **Anna McMorris:** I want to go into a bit more detail on Russia and the Arctic, and the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the research capacity—particularly the UK's research capacity—in the Arctic. You have gone into quite a lot of detail on that, but the Russian foreign ministry has suggested that Russia may withdraw from the Arctic Council completely if activities do not align with its national interests. You have just spoken about the need for Russia to be there for the Arctic Council to continue in a diplomatic sense. How do you see that in its role in protecting the Arctic environment and the impact on science?

**Dr Depledge:** If I have understood your question correctly, Russia is clearly signalling now that if it is excluded or ignored or not involved—

**Anna McMorris:** It is going to withdraw.



**Dr Depledge:** Yes, it is going to pull out. It has also dropped several hints, I think, that if that were to happen it will find other countries to work with. It will look to countries like China, India and some of the others that I have mentioned, to come up with whatever it needs to secure the future of primarily the Russian Arctic. Given the size of the Russian Arctic, that is why we see such a focus on the Russian Arctic zone.

What does that do to the ability to protect the environment? Well, to the extent that the Arctic Council plays a convening role and manages to oversee the treaties I mentioned before between the circumpolar states, clearly that will not be possible any more. Does that mean we will not see any more of these circumpolar agreements? Potentially.

Beyond that, other aspects of environmental protection are still going to be governed at the global level. In that sense, it is really issue-specific. For those issues that are negotiated at the global level, that will carry on, but for those which are done under the auspices of the Arctic Council there will be far less progress. What we lose is that review and assessment work that the Arctic Council does through the working groups, trying to bring together and understand what the science is telling us about what is happening in the region.

**Professor Germond:** It is difficult to say what Russia will do because it is extremely unpredictable compared to, let's say, the Soviet Union. There is this old saying, "If you are not at the table, you are on the menu," so they will think twice before pulling out. They have the example of Khrushchev boycotting the Security Council with all that that entailed during the Korean war and so on, so that remains to be seen.

As I said before, we have to do a cost-benefit analysis. We need Russia to some extent, but we do not want to pay too high a political or diplomatic price and, because we need to isolate Putin's regime and because it is not politically or morally correct to work at an institutional level with any organisation or institution that is supported by Putin's regime or that supports Putin's regime, we have to be careful.

That said, there is always a way to find ad hoc arrangements with Russia for specific collaboration. After all, if you look at the Black sea grain deal, that is a huge concession we made to Russia but we made it because it is for the greater good of humankind because of the food crisis and food security issues in the south. We could always argue that it is possible to say the same about climate change and its effects, and the fact that it is crucial for the future of humankind, and that there might be room for manoeuvre in terms of finding ad hoc arrangements when co-operation is needed. The way it should work will depend a lot on political and diplomatic security cost-benefit analysis.

Q63 **Anna McMorris:** Getting to the crux of the scientific co-operation, we had Professor Terry Callaghan, who is Professor of Ecology at the University of Sheffield, give evidence. He told us that if we do not understand what is happening in Siberia, which is a great area of climate



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impacts, and the science going on there, that is going to be catastrophic for science itself. How do you get around the great geopolitical conflict and diplomacy issues? You are quite right that we are not able to work with Russia and we should not be working with Russia while Putin is illegally invading Ukraine. How do we get around that in terms of collaboration for science?

**Professor Germond:** We have to do more with the western allies.

**Anna McMorrin:** It is just a quick, simple question.

**Professor Germond:** We are left to that. We have to do more with western allies.

**Dr Depledge:** This goes back to the point I was making about reaching out beyond the West—beyond the western allies—because the more countries that you can bring round to this position that we need good data from across the Arctic to understand climate change and all these other global challenges that we are confronted with, then those countries will put more pressure on Russia as a result. If Russia does not feel isolated—if Russia feels that it can go off with the other countries and do what it likes—that is going to be more problematic. My understanding is that at the moment Russia is purely concerned about what happens in the Russian Arctic zone rather than the Arctic more generally.

Q64 **Chair:** I have one final question on the Arctic Council. I was rather struck when we visited them in Tromsø. They did not seem to me to have realised that the game was up. They gave us a very fine briefing and a very good afternoon there, and they told us all about the work of the subcommittees, but it was as if the Arctic Council is continuing as normal. Do you think they have twigged that the game is up and they have to find something new? Or are they desperately clinging on to the wreckage of what was there before?

**Dr Depledge:** I think that no one has come up with a viable alternative yet and until they do they will cling on.

Q65 **Philip Dunne:** Not to pursue the clinging-on analogy, nor to try to drive an either/or wedge between British policy and interests in the north versus the south, but do you think the British attitude and priorities in respect of how we manage research in the Arctic is commensurate with our relative proximity to the Arctic compared to the Antarctic?

**Dr Depledge:** It is a good question but I think it is important to distinguish between the very different scenarios that we are dealing with here in terms of the UK's relative status in the Arctic compared to its sovereign status down in the Antarctic. The relative remoteness of the Antarctic compared to the Arctic as well requires a slightly different approach in terms of how scientific infrastructure is used, how it is deployed and how you manage people moving into and out of the region for the purpose of science and all the various regulations that scientists have to adhere to down in Antarctica. From that perspective, I can see why there is a skewing of Government resource towards Antarctica rather



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than the Arctic. We should probably be looking at them as two separate problems and looking at the needs of each independently rather than comparing them.

**Professor Germond:** I would answer that question in a rather different way by taking an example in my field of expertise, security and defence. If you think of the Indo-Pacific and the AUKUS partnership, what has the UK managed to do? The UK has cleverly outsourced British security in the Indo-Pacific to a trusted ally, Australia, with the support of a powerful player, the US. I think that closer to home, in the Arctic, it would be much better for the UK to admit that we need to become a net security provider in the Arctic. One of the reasons is the proximity that the Chair mentioned with Scotland, the Shetlands and so on.

I think that there is a rationale for more investment in Arctic security and that also translates into Arctic science because, as I said before, one of the comparative advantages of the UK on the world stage now is to combine innovation and science power on the one hand with our power to influence the maritime domain on the other hand. That is something we can be very good at in the Arctic.

Q66 **Philip Dunne:** That is extremely helpful and takes me on to my next question about the nature of our military interests in the Arctic. Are you able to characterise what you think are our military interests in relation to the Arctic and what our relative capability is—it is clearly in the maritime domain—compared to other countries?

**Professor Germond:** Unlike Antarctica, the Arctic is not a continent, so it is governed by international law. International law regulates freedom of navigation, environmental protection, and the delimitation of the rules such as the exclusive economic zones. It means for the UK that it is important to uphold the international law of the sea and to maintain freedom of navigation.

The problem is that now in the current context of tension there is going to be more and more assertive naval diplomacy by Russia and the contesting of freedom of navigation and innocent passage, so there is going to be more and more shadowing patrols, intelligence gathering and threats to undersea infrastructure, communication infrastructure and energy infrastructure. It is clearly important for the UK to develop defence co-operation because the militarisation of the Arctic requires long-term planning and the ability to co-operate with the High North in defence of NATO's northern flank.

As I said before, the region is strategically extremely important for Russia, its navy and, in particular, its nuclear forces, and it is a zone of potential confrontation or friction between NATO and Russia. The miserable performance of the Russian navy in the Black sea should not in a sense give the false impression that NATO's northern flank in the Arctic is totally safe. We need to invest in the defence of the Arctic and NATO's interests there.



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Q67 **Philip Dunne:** Without getting too much into the weeds of this, do we see evidence of Russian activity in Arctic waters that suggests an increase in its presence and capability and potential threat?

**Professor Germond:** There has been a report of increase of shadowing patrols and intelligence gathering by the Russians, including regarding undersea infrastructure. That should be enough to worry us.

Q68 **Philip Dunne:** Can I come back to Dr Depledge for a moment? In relation to our physical assets and presence and capacity in the Arctic, we have heard evidence that the David Attenborough vessel is going to have very limited capacity to be in the Arctic supporting scientific endeavour just because of the nature of its roulement through the Antarctic. Is your view that its short-duration stays will be sufficient? Or is it not realistic to expect it to be able to support scientific endeavour in the Arctic as well as the Antarctic?

**Dr Depledge:** I think there will be episodic appearances of the Attenborough up in the Arctic, but I suspect it will be primarily geared towards working down in Antarctica. How much does that matter? I think we need a clearer steer on exactly what it is that the UK is hoping to achieve. From that steer you then decide whether you have the resources to achieve those things or whether you need to invest in more capability. If there was a clear demand that we needed a scientific research vessel up in the Arctic for six months of the year every year and not being diverted down into Antarctica, I would say that we certainly would need to think about investing in another ship.

Q69 **Philip Dunne:** Are we seeing such demand from the scientific community?

**Dr Depledge:** I don't think I am best placed to answer that. I think you should speak to the scientists about that.

**Professor Germond:** Neither can I.

Q70 **Chair:** Before we go, can I have a final go on the military side of things? Perhaps on a scale of one to 10, what risk do you foresee there being of some form of military clash in the Arctic in the next 20 or 30 years? For example, I think there was a motion in front of the Duma recently proposing that all military ships should apply to the Duma or to the Russians for permission to transit the northern sea route and, of course, the Royal Navy would never do that. One thinks also perhaps of Svalbard; what risk is there of there being some form of military clash in Svalbard? I think that there was a military parade in Svalbard recently. The 8 May parade happened not only on Red Square but also in Svalbard. To what degree do you think there is a risk of a clash up there? Or is this all sabre rattling?

**Dr Depledge:** I am going to speak in slightly contradictory terms here, I know, but it is quite hard to pin down any one particular issue where there is a high threat of something occurring, like the Svalbard or northern sea route scenarios you suggested. They are certainly both on the table but I would not like to select which one was the most likely.



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I would say that the rising tension, the darkening of the rhetoric, if you will, the sabre rattling, the breakdown of communication and trust, all these things are lending themselves to a situation whereby if you did have incidents unfolding at sea, if you had suspicious activity, even the issues you mentioned with Svalbard, they are all being interpreted in a slightly different light now. I think that raises the risk of miscalculation and accident because everyone is more on edge. The chance of something going awry has increased and will remain high for the time being.

**Professor Germond:** I agree, and I will just add that military planning and strategic planning is about making the decision today to avoid those situations happening in 10, 20 or 30 years. When it comes to the Russians under the leadership of Putin, what is important is to have strong NATO posturing in the Arctic, because that is the way we can prepare and demonstrate to Russia that we are prepared to respond in case any of those issues start degenerating in the future. It is about investing today to avoid proper conflict between NATO and Russia in the future.

Q71 **Chair:** Finally, I want to get something on the record. We have not touched on the consequences of the end of the Arctic Council on search and rescue or on environmental protection—in other words, if there is an oil spill. I know this is a very big question to ask in a short space of time, but to what degree do we think there is an increased risk to our interests in the north if, indeed, there were to be a sinking of a tourist vessel or a huge oil spill? Does the end of the Arctic Council mean that those things would not be dealt with in the future in the way that they have been in the past? It is a brand new topic, I know, but is that not a risk that no one is really talking about? It may be that our next panel will have an interest in it, but I just wondered if you had any thoughts. Is the end of the Arctic Council not creating quite an environmental risk in terms of both search and rescue and dealing with an emergency?

**Dr Depledge:** The Arctic Council itself is not responsible for those things directly and we know that some of the coastal co-operation between Norway and Russia, for instance, has continued, and around fisheries as well, I believe. The Arctic Coast Guard Forum has stopped again. It has been paused because of the issues with Russia, and that is a problem. What is interesting in that regard, though, is the agreement signed between the Russians and the Chinese just a couple of weeks ago on potential coastguard co-operation and maritime security co-operation in the Russian Arctic. That is an interesting development to watch as to what that means.

In terms of the broader agreements and things, I don't know what the status of those will be, but I suspect that, as Basil suggested earlier, the arrangements will become more ad hoc and "as needs" rather than being progressively negotiated in advance. It will be a far more reactionary approach, I think, to dealing with these problems.





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**Professor Germond:** I would add that it is worrying me a bit because it seems there is a vicious circle at play. Climate change impacts mean economic opportunities, but because they are small commercial operations and traffic in the Arctic, there is risk of more accidents and safety issues. There is a need for more constabulary presence, as my colleague mentioned, and more infrastructure in the Arctic to deal with the potential safety risks. That then creates more pressure on an already fragile ecosystem. I think there is a vicious circle at play.

**Chair:** Thank you both very much for your evidence, Professor Germond particularly, but I also want to put on the record that Duncan Depledge has played a crucial role in Parliament's consideration of the Arctic over many years now: he founded the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions; he was then the learned adviser to the Defence Committee; and he gave evidence to the House of Lords Committee on the Arctic and, indeed, the House of Lords Committee that is currently considering these matters. Without diminishing you in any shape, size or form, Professor Germond, it is worth acknowledging that Dr Depledge really has made a gigantic contribution to Britain's understanding of the Arctic, and I salute him for it.

Thank you both very much for all your evidence. It has been a very helpful and useful session and we are most grateful to you.

**Dr Depledge:** Thank you very much.

**Professor Germond:** Thank you.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: The Lord Mountevans, Jane Sandell and Gary Taylor.

**Chair:** Without any further ado, we move on to this afternoon's second panel for the polar inquiry Sub-Committee of the Environmental Audit Committee, looking into Britain's relations with the Arctic.

I am delighted to welcome three witnesses. With us physically in the room we have Lord Mountevans, who is the honorary president of Maritime London, the chairman of the Baltic Exchange and a Younger Brother of Trinity House. He and I were shipbrokers together many years ago, and we have many other interests in common. With regard to the fisheries interests, which is an important thing that we are going to talk about, online we have Jane Sandell, who is the CEO of UK Fisheries, and Gary Taylor, who is a consultant at GT Fisheries Consultancy.

We want to spread the conversation more widely than just shipping and fisheries, but we will focus on those two areas in which the witnesses are particularly expert. With this second panel we will look at Britain's interests in the Arctic, and what we have to gain from the Arctic as opposed to the science and all those things where we are contributing to the Arctic. We now want to focus on the things that we as a nation have



to gain from the Arctic.

Q72 **Jerome Mayhew:** My series of questions are very much scene-setting to find out the current situation relation to the UK's commercial activities. We have been told that commercial activities in the Arctic generally coalesce around four themes: mineral resources, fisheries, logistics and tourism. Will you each set out for the Committee what commercial interests the UK currently has in the Arctic region? Lord Mountevans, you are in the room so perhaps you would like to kick off on shipping.

**Lord Mountevans:** Well, there are quite wide interests, actually. You mentioned a number there, but on minerals, for example, because we are involved in international mining the UK has an interest there. On the maritime—

**Jerome Mayhew:** Excuse me for butting in, but the question is about current interests. Are we currently involved in mining activities in the Arctic?

**Lord Mountevans:** Not that I am aware of, no. It is possible. There are mines in northern Canada that export by sea and I don't know enough to confirm to you that we are involved in the ownership of those.

**Jerome Mayhew:** I would like to start off with a precis of what we have now and then we can develop the conversation to talk about future opportunities.

**Lord Mountevans:** Primarily, it is in the area of expertise and in commercial expertise. Britain is a repository of maritime expertise and there is, therefore, professional business services and insurance. The vessels that trade up there are very valuable because of the ice-class requirements. Because of the risks, the hazards and the remoteness of the area, and the extreme weather conditions that can easily pertain, insurance is extremely important. Britain's leadership there, particularly with complicated and unusual risks, places us in quite an influential position. That is an important area for us.

From there, there is expertise in consultancy for the different challenges that people face. I would be very happy to go into the challenges faced by the maritime environment, but please tell me if you would like me to do that. Because of our expertise, we are able to advise on mitigating some of those risks. If you like, risk mitigation is another big thing related to insurance.

We also, of course, are significant players in maritime engineering and shipbuilding. The Government have big ambitions for shipbuilding. A year ago we started the national shipbuilding plan. So far I am not aware of any fruit out of that, but a lot of valuable preparation work has been done, particularly in export finance, which is a nut we have to crack before that can take off.

In marine equipment, these ships built for ice conditions have very special requirements and these are the bespoke pieces of equipment that



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we can contribute to. The Finns are very big players in that space, as are the Norwegians to a lesser extent, but we can certainly compete for certain pieces of engineering hardware there.

There is a company called James Fisher that has specific solutions for ice-breaking vessels and can assist with, for example, ice measurement, which is a very important thing up there. The old ice can get up to 3 metres thick, so it is very important for ships to know when assessing the risks how thick the sea ice is.

There is a wide range of technical consulting. I will not go into all the aspects of that. There is also an organisation called SEDNA. I think its management is done through a leading firm of consultants called BMT, which is British. I think it is primarily EU money but it advises on a lot of aspects of the weather and coping with the conditions up there—a major initiative.

Green shipping is a major opportunity for us. There is an awareness of the fragility and the importance of the whole environment up there. There is a move away from heavy fuel oil, which in the event of an accident or catastrophe is very hard to eradicate, particularly at low temperatures. The water temperature is presumably not a great deal varying from zero, but the air temperature can be up to minus 40 or even lower than that.

**Q73 Jerome Mayhew:** Other questions will seek to explore what the opportunities are. Thank you for that opening gambit. Jane Sandell, we have not mentioned fishing; tell us what the current state of play is before we move on to what the opportunities are.

**Jane Sandell:** Thank you very much to the Committee for inviting us along. Currently, we are the last fishing operators in the Arctic. As many of you will know, there was once a great industry mainly centred in Hull, Grimsby, Fleetwood and Aberdeen. We are based in Hull and we fish in Svalbard and to a far lesser extent in Norway. We also once upon a time had fishing opportunities in Greenland. We are quite established in the northern external waters' fisheries.

We are now down to one vessel. We operate a vessel called Kirkella and she is ice class, clearly, and built to work in exactly these conditions. As many of you will be aware—if not all of you—previously our fishing opportunities were negotiated by the EU on our behalf, but now we have left we are negotiating our own opportunities. Unfortunately, these opportunities have reduced by more than 50%. In terms of what we have at the moment, we have just over 6,000 tonnes, which has gone down from 13,500 tonnes in 2019. To put that in context, in 2019 we supplied somewhere around 10% of the fish that you get in your fish suppers from your fish shop down the road, and that all goes into the UK economy.

As to where we are currently, there is interest in the Arctic for fishing opportunities. It is sustainable and one of the best managed fisheries in the world. To put some context on that, this year the quota is just under



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600,000 tonnes in the Arctic. In the North sea it is less than 22,000 tonnes. It really is a significant number there and there is definitely interest going forward. I think there is huge potential for the UK to negotiate far better fisheries deals, which give other people opportunities to catch this. We are adapted to working in this way, but certainly other companies would also be interested. It is a sizeable investment that we have made. We want to be there in 30 years' time.

There is a huge interest in science. We are involved in several scientific projects trying to improve the science and trying to add our data in, because sometimes we are working in different areas for other vessels. We want to be here in 30 years so it is in our interests to do this and to operate sustainably.

**Q74 Jerome Mayhew:** Can I just clarify? Are you right in saying that there is a single UK-registered vessel operating fishing in the Arctic at the moment?

**Jane Sandell:** That is absolutely correct. In 2019 we had three vessels operating there, but because of the contraction in fishing opportunities we are now down to one. Unfortunately, we have lost 72 fishermen, which is heart-breaking.

**Q75 Chair:** Can I just leap in very briefly, Jerome, and get this on the record? The Kirkella is a magnificent ship. I came to her launch or her naming. She is like a huge factory. She is not a small fishing boat; she is magnificent. How much does the Kirkella do that the three ships used to do, if you see what I mean?

**Jane Sandell:** The three ships had access to about 13,500 tonnes and we have had to rationalise the fleet. The other two were not nearly as big or specialised as Kirkella. What we do in the fishing industry is we try to maximise the economic return for the least impact on the environment. When we have rationalised, we have just gone down to the one boat, which is more fuel efficient and, of course, as you say, she is a large factory. We process at sea and we bring it directly into Hull and it goes out to the British fish and chip shops. I hope that you enjoyed your trip to Kirkella. It was great to see you there.

**Q76 Chair:** What is the tonnage and cost? I know she is big.

**Jane Sandell:** She cost £42 million to build and she is 82 metres long and 3,500 tonnes.

**Jerome Mayhew:** Gary Taylor, you have been very patient. Do you have anything to add to what we have heard already about the existing opportunities?

**Gary Taylor:** No.

**Q77 Jerome Mayhew:** Okay; that is a nice brief answer. Back to you, Jane. You said that UK access to Arctic fish stocks has reduced; can you clarify the degree of importance for the national catch? How important is the Arctic catch for UK fishing?



**Jane Sandell:** As I said, the Arctic catch in 2019 constituted around 10% of the fish that went into British fish and chip shops, which sounds quite small but is actually massive. The context is that we need to look at food security. It is something that is really tangible in the Arctic. We are operational there and we have an interest there. We have had long-term relationships in the area and it is important to the economy and to our cultural heritage, particularly for somewhere like Hull and particularly when we need high-quality jobs in the area.

Q78 **Jerome Mayhew:** Are the opportunities for growth dependent on international agreements as opposed to a lack of ambition from the industry?

**Jane Sandell:** Absolutely. The reduction in opportunities is purely due to negotiations that have not been as successful as one would have hoped. You always have peaks and troughs in the fishing industry because, of course, it has to be sustainable and it is based on the best possible science and on quotas, so we expect that. However, the huge reduction has been purely down to negotiations that haven't worked out.

**Jerome Mayhew:** I understand.

**Gary Taylor:** Can I add something? As the opportunities the UK has in Arctic waters have decreased, we have seen a corresponding increase in imports of cod and haddock, in particular from Norway, Iceland and Russia. As a result, we have seen at the same time prices increasing dramatically on the market, which has an impact for retailers, processors, and fish and chip shops, which have come under increasing pressure, and ultimately for the consumer as well. This impact is seen immediately on our domestic market. To put it into some context, the quota that UK Fisheries had in 2019 was approximately half of what was caught within UK waters by UK vessels.

Q79 **Jerome Mayhew:** I am going to move back to shipping. Lord Mountevans, earlier on I restrained you to talking about the current opportunity; now I am going to unleash you. How might the increase in Arctic shipping benefit the UK? What are the implications for our commercial interests? How can we make this a real success?

**Lord Mountevans:** Of course, the party that has a great interest in growing Arctic shipping is Russia because it has considerable mineral resources along its north coast. It also charges levies, rather like the Suez Canal, for the different sections. It sees this rather like overflying—this is a revenue source for it, so it is tremendously important to it.

I do not at this moment see a great potential for us to be involved in the ship-owning side—of delivering that; of the trade movement—because they are highly specialised ships and extremely expensive. As was pointed out by our earlier panel—I forget the expression they used—there is the question of the reliability of the Russians in that channel. To make a very big investment, I think that we are all slightly more cautious now about the longevity of trades or arrangements and we move to a shorter-term appraisal. I think that ship owning is not a very likely starter. It may



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be that in shipbuilding, and particularly marine equipment, engineering and manufacturing, I can see a potential to benefit there, and I would certainly hope for professional business services. At the centre of so much dispute resolution in the world lie the courts and arbitration system here. In maritime, arbitration in London is almost 100% of the world requirement. It is very trusted. It is very successful, and long may it be so.

Green shipping is something that interests us very much and we are very committed to that. There is a great deal of work going into it, encouraged partly by the Government and also by industry. For example, I touched very briefly on fuel oil. There is a movement across the industry to move from heavy fuel oil to diesel or gas or something similar, which reduces the sulphur emissions from 0.5 to 0.1. That is a dramatic improvement. We are also concerned about black carbon when it comes out in emissions from the stack of a ship. If it lands on sand or on snow it encourages more rapid melting and, therefore, it opens up the sea faster. That has a bad effect on global warming generally because then there is greater absorption of the sun in the ice.

**Q80 Jerome Mayhew:** That brings me on to somewhere I was intending to go later, but the segue is quite interesting. Given that the growth in shipping in the Arctic brings with it environmental challenges, particularly with heavy fuel oil, what influence does British industry have in promoting sustainable Arctic commercial activities? How can our role be leveraged to make sure that the increasing commercial activity that is likely to come with the opening up of the seaways is more sustainable than would otherwise be the case?

**Lord Mountevans:** I do not think in this case it will be through the manufacture of marine engines, where we are not significant players any more. In terms of technology, where we are strong and very innovative, I can certainly see a potential for us to contribute to that, which can benefit our specialists, universities and so on. I think that is a clear path.

Otherwise I think that principally the short-term thing is green shipping and professional business services, where I think the world hopefully would come to London for advice and the services that are required as ancillary, such as insurance.

**Q81 Jerome Mayhew:** There has been a suggestion that there may be an opportunity for logistics as well—for the creation of a container port or station up in the Northern Isles. Do you know about that and, if so, do you think that is a credible opportunity?

**Lord Mountevans:** I don't know about that. I am tending to think about the northern sea route and the route north of Canada. I do not think containers really lend themselves to that trade because container ships are quite high out of the water and they have windage. You can have very strong winds, and very variable climates up there, so I would not see us as natural winners in that area. If it can be of service to the



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players, then that is entirely possible, but it may well be that people operating that service will have their own logistical support in mind.

**Q82 Chair:** Before I forget, I ought to declare a non-pecuniary interest. I am an honorary life member of the Baltic Exchange and I am told that in a couple of years' time, when I have completed 50 years' membership, I will get a free lunch. However, I get no money for it.

To focus a little bit on the northern sea route, I think this affects the fisheries as well to some degree. There has been an awful lot of talk about all this and people are talking as if somehow or other the water north of Russia and, indeed, the water north of Canada is suddenly going to become wide open and we are going to have an ocean much like the Mediterranean—it is going to become a hotbed of fishing and shipping. Is that vision realistic in your view? Are we really facing a revolution in shipping and/or fishing in the northern sea route? Or is this an imagined or hoped-for vision?

**Lord Mountevans:** It is a very good question and it is very much a matter for debate. The Russians have enormous ambitions for this and I think the rest of the world is watching very carefully. It looks like an opportunity, but in view of what has happened in Ukraine, that has obviously dampened the optimism outside Russia. It has had an effect there. It is going to take some time to restore trust, if indeed that does happen in the medium term.

We also do not know the extent to which the waters are going to open up. You are quite right that people imagine that the whole place is going to open up. It has been speculated that that could be by the end of this century, but we don't know what the rate is. It depends a bit how successful we are in mitigating some of the other effects of climate change. It is a fact that the polar regions unfortunately are warming up faster than other regions, so we are very much at risk there.

Where there is an opportunity is that it is estimated that a vessel going across the northern sea route to Russia can save 11 to 14 days, which is a significant saving in time and fuel. Of course, it is not a straightforward route because the conditions can change so tremendously. Fog is a factor, whereby you almost have to stop. Navigation even is difficult because the cover from satellites is far from perfect. We do not know what is going to be offered from the shore side from Russia, but this is an enormously long coastline. So far I do not think there is any great evidence of any—there is talk of investment but investment on the coast there has slowed down.

**Q83 Chair:** Let me try to pin you down a little bit on figures. You said 11 to 14 days less steaming. I should know this but I have forgotten. What would a, let's say, 100,000 tonne ore carrier currently be trading at, let's say, carrying ore from America to Japan or wherever?

**Lord Mountevans:** Daily rate?

**Chair:** Roughly, yes.



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**Lord Muntevans:** Gosh, some weeks I look and I have not looked for a couple of weeks.

**Chair:** Are we talking £10,000 a day or are we talking \$10,000 a day or are we talking \$100,000 a day?

**Lord Muntevans:** No, I am going to say off the top of my head something like \$60,000 a day, or \$50,000.

**Chair:** Okay, plus bunkers?

**Lord Muntevans:** No, much less than that—sorry. I am trying to think now. I am going to say \$20,000 a day.

Q84 **Chair:** Okay, plus bunkers, but times 14. I cannot do 14 times. You would be saving a significant number of millions of dollars—

**Lord Muntevans:** You would if it works like clockwork, but you get held up. You get held up, of course, because of the weather. You have to follow icebreakers and an icebreaker has to be in attendance. An icebreaker may not be available. At the moment the Russians have I think over 30, but it is a very long coastline, so it is not just to whistle up an Uber cab. As it expands, it is going to be quite a challenge. The Russians typically get the ships built in Finland and then take them down I think to the Black sea to fit the reactors and so on, and I have heard that the facility in the Black sea has been damaged in the war. Its ability even to maintain its current rate has very likely been slowed.

Q85 **Chair:** All right. There are currently tens of thousands of ships going through Suez and/or Panama, but you would not anticipate anything like that quality in the foreseeable future going through the northern sea route.

**Lord Muntevans:** No, I wouldn't. It is very hazardous. There are draft factors. The hydrographers have not been allowed to properly map it underwater. The word I would use repeatedly is hazardous. This is a hazardous part of the world.

Q86 **Chair:** On the fishing side of things, do you see the retreating ice opening up as a real opportunity in the foreseeable future?

**Jane Sandell:** As has just been said, we do not know to what extent it is going to open up, but I would be incredibly cautious with that. If we do not know what is there, we cannot avoid it. You have vulnerable marine ecosystems in those areas. I think there needs to be thorough mapping and significant scientific input before that can even be considered. At the moment we will not operate outside of the fishing footprint. We won't. That is the company policy, as it is for most European companies.

There is also a need to increase the capacity of what is called the regional fisheries management organisations. These are the organisations that manage waters in international waters—to a varying degree of success, I will put my hand up to that. Significant capacity would need to be increased there in order for us as a fishing industry to know that we were





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safe and we were not damaging anything. Going outside of the normal fishing footprint at the moment is just not even on the horizon.

Q87 **Chair:** You simply would not do it—it is too big a risk.

**Lord Mountevans:** The whole search and rescue is very much an unknown quantity. In the event of an accident, you can be a thousand kilometres from the nearest rescue facility. We do not know what the repair facilities are if a vessel gets holed. This is frontier territory and I think it is a very long way before this becomes a regularly traded route.

Q88 **Chair:** Can you tell us briefly what the polar code is and what it does? What did it not do before, as it were? If the shipping and/or fishing usage of the ice is as limited as you describe, what is the purpose of the polar code?

**Lord Mountevans:** It is about best practice and making sure that the vessels are suitably designed, that the crews are properly trained and that there is a familiarity with and an awareness of the hazards that the venture faces. Britain, in fact, was quite involved in the formation of it and it has been a very valuable step forward.

Q89 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** Before I start, I am going to declare an interest in that I am a fishwife, but my husband's under-10 boat is unlikely to make it from Falmouth to the Arctic, so hopefully there is no conflict there.

How many weeks a year is the Kirkella at sea for to catch the amount that you are catching?

**Jane Sandell:** At the moment, we are doing five trips, which are approximately six weeks, but as you will know fishing is a variable thing. Sometimes you can catch more, sometimes you can catch less. We try to make sure that we stick to six-week trips because we want to give the crews some quality of life. We also try to stick to dates so that they can go to that wedding, they can go on that holiday. In the olden days, that did not happen at all.

Q90 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** That is five six-week trips for the vessel per year. How many vessels of a similar size—obviously not British ones but other ones—are fishing in the same area?

**Jane Sandell:** Of a similar size, between Norway and Svalbard—because by fishing quota it is two different areas, which is why I am saying that—I would say that there are somewhere around 12. Sorry, I didn't clarify that that is EU vessels. There are also Norwegian vessels fishing there.

**Cherilyn Mackrory:** Are there Russian vessels as well in the same area?

**Jane Sandell:** Yes.

Q91 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** That is quite a lot. If you are providing 10% of all the fish and chip shop fish and then you times that by however many, that gives some context of the amount of fish that is coming out of there.

We have talked a little bit about how climate change is changing the



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distribution of fish species. What plans have you made or can you make at this stage as to how that might change your fishing practices and that of your competitors?

**Jane Sandell:** Interestingly enough, I will be attending a session tomorrow on climate change in the Arctic that has been organised by the Long Distance Fisheries Advisory Council, which is a European organisation of which the UK is now an observer. The fishermen that have asked for this. It is an industry-led conference. I wish that had been yesterday because I would have been far more informed on this.

Again, fishing is variable. We just have to see what happens. As I say, we would not plan to be working outside of the fishing footprint and we would clearly be trying to support any movements towards making sure that our actions and the actions of our colleagues out there are not adversely impacting the Arctic, be it where we are fishing at the moment or be it further north in 30 or 40 years' time, if and when the ice moves and we know it is safe.

**Gary Taylor:** I also think it is crucial that all the fishing in the area—in the Barents sea and the Arctic—is undertaken in line with the best available scientific evidence, which currently comes from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, or ICES. This is why it is so important for the UK to still have a presence there and still take an active role within ICES to formulate this advice and then stick with it. There is some threat to that currently because Russia is also threatening to withdraw from ICES and it takes probably half the catch of all the cod taken in the Barents sea. If Russia is not taking part, there is a real threat to the quality of the science that is available, and also in respect of whether people—namely the Russians—will stick to that science.

Q92 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** Let me just clarify that. Did you just say that Russia takes half the cod and then everybody else makes up the other half of what goes out? Is that what you just said?

**Gary Taylor:** I know that Russia takes more than Norway and then what is left over from Norway and Russia goes to the EU and other interested coastal states.

Q93 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** If we were able to still have a seat at the table for that scientific exploration and various standards that we wanted all the fleet to stick to—I do not want to put words in your mouth, but is your assumption that Russia would stick to those standards, or not?

**Gary Taylor:** It is difficult to say what Russia will do in any circumstance at the moment, but the more presence we have in the area and taking part in both the fishery and the science, the better that science will be. The less participation we have, our influence becomes diminished. That is just the way it is. We have some of the best and most respected fisheries and marine scientists in the world in CEFAS and in our universities.

Q94 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** Before I hand over to colleagues, can I ask you directly what you would like to see Government policy or the Government



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doing to help to assist with all that?

**Gary Taylor:** To make the best possible arrangements year on year with Norway and the other coastal states, and the other places where we have traditionally fished, like Greenland and NAFO—the coast of Canada—so that we are at the table, we are taking part and we are contributing to making the fisheries the best they can be and as sustainable as they can be.

**Jane Sandell:** I agree with what Gary said. I think it goes further than just sitting at the table for the science. Politically, we have something here that is tangible. We have fish that come into the UK, into British fish and chip shops. It is tangible and that must increase our influence. Now is the ideal opportunity to be trying to do that because we are a newly independent coastal state. Clearly, the blue growth issues and the marine environment have come to the fore, so I think that now is exactly the right time to do it, both scientifically and politically.

Q95 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** I have one more sneaky question because I am fascinated by this, because it is such a huge catch. Speaking from how we manage the waters locally inshore in Cornwall, fishermen know that if they overfish in a certain place every single year there will not be a catch any more. With such a huge vessel and all the other competitors with equally huge vessels, how do you know between you that if you keep going back year after year and getting such a huge amount, the fish will still be there year on year?

**Jane Sandell:** With the numbers it does seem to be a huge amount but, as I said earlier, the quota there this year is 600,000 tonnes and that has been recommended by ICES. ICES makes the recommendations and it then goes to the commission, which is made up of Norway and Russia. They decide on the overall catch there, but normally it goes right by the scientific advice. As Gary said, that is the best possible scientific advice.

In the areas that we are working we are within the fishing footprint and it is a case of going to a place just to see what is there. If you have 12 other boats there, while you may know that there is some good fishing there, it is not necessarily a place you want to go. There are only so many physical things that can fit in the area, but there are also only so many fish to be caught. It is like any other kind of fishing: it is experience and a bit of luck. We have some very good crewmen on board. I trust the skippers and our first mates to know exactly what they are doing.

**Chair:** Finally, you will be relieved to hear, and on a more general point, we come to Caroline Lucas.

Q96 **Caroline Lucas:** I just wondered if you could say a little bit more. I appreciate you have already touched on this and I know that we did in the earlier session. In the absence of an operational Arctic Council just now, what are the impacts when it comes to overexploitation in this area? You have made a very good case about how responsible your own operations are, but what does it mean for others operating in the area?



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How worried should we be?

**Jane Sandell:** In terms of fishing opportunities, I think that generally the management is very good. The whole thing is run by quota and the electronic monitoring there is now means that there is no overfishing for the responsible nations. Clearly, we do not know what Russia will do, but in terms of Europe, the UK and Norway, certainly the monitoring is amazing. Any illegality is immediately pointed out, if there is any.

Q97 **Caroline Lucas:** And going forward you do not expect that to change among the countries you can account for in some way.

**Jane Sandell:** Absolutely not. The way that the UK is dealing with fisheries regulation now is very much based on what we had within the EU, with changes, and the changes are for the better, to make sure that the fisheries are more sustainable. Norway—absolutely not. It is managing this fishery at the moment and it is known to be one of the most well-managed fisheries in the world.

Q98 **Caroline Lucas:** On shipping more generally—we are not talking about fishing now but more generally—can you say anything about the risks associated with moving into areas that are more remote and the environmental impacts of that?

**Lord Mountevans:** The risks of trading in remote areas?

**Caroline Lucas:** Yes, and of being able to get to places that you could not get to before as the ice melts. You were talking earlier about being able to get to those places quicker. On the one hand that sounds very convenient, but on the other hand presumably that comes with quite a big cost to the wider environment.

**Lord Mountevans:** I think there are great risks. There are risks of groundings and the fact that the ocean bed is not very—there aren't good charts, to put it in nautical parlance. That is a major hazard. Then you have the extreme volatility of the weather. The waves can go to 40 feet. The spray can land on the ship and then ice and then you can get a problem of stability with weight building up.

The remoteness is a very real factor. If there is a collision or an accident involving the escape of fuel, that would be very serious indeed because very low temperatures make it very hard to get the hydrocarbons to disperse, if at all—hopefully at some stage, but it is very difficult. There are no facilities there for clean-up. Around the east coast in Europe there are marvellous organisations that would deal with such an unwanted event, but up there in these very remote places that it is hard to get to there is nothing on offer anyway. The potential for a major ecological impact is very considerable.

Even opening up the seaways I understand can affect the indigenous people. The changing shoreline or the ice edge brings issues for them. It tends to go more into—I am trying to think what the right word is—wrinkles, which is difficult for them to navigate around on foot or whatever. For marine mammals it is also difficult for them to get out and



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so on. The effect just on nature means there are risks that we are concerned about.

**Chair:** On the question of the indigenous peoples, we are planning a joint session with the House of Lords defence and overseas committee on 29 June, if I am right—it is not confirmed yet—to look particularly into the question of indigenous peoples and the consequences for them of some of these changes.

I thank all three of you very much for your evidence. Britain has an enormous amount to gain from the Arctic, but all three of you have said that we have to be extremely careful about the means by which we achieve that. It is, of course, an area that we must make use of, but none the less we must be very aware of the environmental consequences of doing so. We are very grateful to you, Lord Muntevans, Jane Sandell and Gary Taylor. Thank you very much for your evidence.