



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Environmental Audit Committee

Sub-Committee on Polar Research

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

Monday 17 July 2023

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Members present: James Gray (Chair); Philip Dunne; Barry Gardiner; Clive Lewis; Cherilyn Mackrory; Jerome Mayhew; Anna McMorrin; Dr Matthew Offord; Cat Smith.

Questions 181 - 247

Witness

I: Jane Rumble OBE, Head of the Polar Regions Department, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#)



Examination of witness

Witness: Jane Rumble OBE.

Q181 **Chair:** Welcome, Jane, to all on your own coming to give evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee. It looks quite a long way away down there. I remember when I chaired the Defence Committee inquiry into defence in the Arctic; I then left the Defence Committee and reappeared as a witness. Even though I thought I knew what I was talking about, I remember being quite nervous about it, so thank you very much for doing this. I have emphasised to the Committee that you have very nobly stepped in because we lost Lord Goldsmith when he stepped down a couple of weeks back, and the Science Minister, George Freeman, has today gone down with some awful illness. Therefore, you very nobly agreed to give evidence to us, which we very much appreciate.

I have also made it plain to the Committee that you are here as an official and, therefore, they may not quiz you on political or quasi-political matters, and they won't do that. If you find yourself entering into any areas where you either don't know the answer or feel uncomfortable because you have been tempted into areas you did not want to talk about, we will be perfectly content with that, so just say so. You might be kind enough to write to the Committee subsequently with whatever it was you did not know. We are much obliged to you, not least because had you not been here, there would have been no opportunity for us to discuss with His Majesty's Government the matters that concern us about the Arctic. It is very good that you are here and I hope we don't put you under too much stress with our questioning.

You will be given a printout of what has been said and if you don't agree with the verbatim report, just say so. Equally, if you think of things after you have left—"l'esprit de l'escalier" I remember someone calling it once: thoughts from the staircase—by all means please just say so and add to your evidence.

I will start by perhaps breaking my own rule, so you may well not wish to get involved in the following question. My understanding is that we have no Minister in the Foreign Office, right at this precise second, with responsibility for the polar regions. Is that correct?

Jane Rumble: No, Minister Rutley has been given the portfolio. He is travelling so he is not able to be here.

Q182 **Chair:** Excellent. Has that just happened recently?

Jane Rumble: Since Lord Goldsmith left.

Q183 **Chair:** That is very good news indeed. David Rutley was a special adviser and a very good bloke—a great mountaineer.

Jane Rumble: He has spoken about the Arctic in the House of Commons a few times recently.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q184 **Chair:** That is good news. He will have responsibility for the polar regions?

Jane Rumble: Yes.

Q185 **Chair:** That is an improvement because Lord Goldsmith was in the House of Lords and there was nobody really in the Commons. Having David Rutley in the Commons is rather good news.

Very briefly, following up on that, to what degree do you think that your own Department, the Polar Regions Department, is suitably supported by the Foreign Office as a whole? You probably won't answer this but there is no harm asking it. I sometimes get the impression that you are a sort of add-on, a forgotten bit in a dusty corner of the Foreign Office. Am I being unfair in my judgment there? In particular, I am thinking about whether there is anything in the work that we are doing in our report that could help with that? Is there a way in which the Polar Regions Department at the Foreign Office needs boosting?

Jane Rumble: Well, we are going to be boosted. We are a small Department, as you set out. We cover the Arctic and the Antarctic, and we are also delivering the blue belt of marine protection around the overseas territories. There are currently nine of us; we are going to be 10. As a result of increasing interest in the Arctic, I am going to get a new deputy, who will be the senior Arctic lead. He will be the same rank as the ambassador in Reykjavik. There has been a reflection that the work on the Arctic has increased and, therefore, we are hopefully no longer a backwater hiding in the cupboards.

Q186 **Chair:** When will that appointment be made?

Jane Rumble: It is going through HR processes. Soon, I hope.

Q187 **Chair:** It may take a long time.

Jane Rumble: Yes.

Q188 **Chair:** Will he or she be in place by the time of the Arctic Circle Conference in Reykjavik? The reason I am asking that question, while you ponder it, is that we are planning to launch this report at the Arctic Circle Conference and it would be very nice if such person were in post by that time.

Jane Rumble: I offered the job to a "he" some months ago, so I hope so.

Q189 **Chair:** I hope you have noticed I am wearing my—

Jane Rumble: I noticed.

Chair: Jane, among other things, runs the PolarPride organisation, which has these very smart badges, which is a polar bear and a penguin and the pride thing.

Leaving the structure on one side, could you very kindly delineate what



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you feel are the major structures of Britain's relationship with the Arctic? What are our strengths and our weaknesses? What do you feel that we ought to be looking at in the report that we are drafting shortly?

Jane Rumble: I think that the UK's engagement with the Arctic has been constant since the Arctic started to form as a region. You will know that in the 1990s it was more of a zone of confrontation in the cold war. The Arctic Council was formed in the mid-1990s and the UK was already engaged in Arctic affairs, and so became an observer to the Arctic Council. That has continued for the 30 years of the full functioning of the Arctic. The Arctic Council has now transitioned to Norwegian chairmanship and so we expect it to continue its work and the UK retains its observer status.

The benefit that we have is that we are geographically the nearest neighbour to the Arctic and, therefore, everything that happens on our border is Arctic-relevant. We have significant interests in the northern Atlantic region. That is the northern flank of the UK. We have security interests, energy security interests and we have a great deal of science. The UK is the largest producer of Arctic science of any non-Arctic state, fourth in the world after three Arctic states. The contribution that we make in technical expertise and science expertise has been warmly welcomed by the Arctic states. The UK, being a good neighbour, obviously wants to make sure that we have good relations with our northern region while keeping it safe and secure. I think they are are our big priorities.

Q190 **Chair:** Without being provocative in answering this, how do you react to the thought that Britain, or the Foreign Office in particular, has given an enormous amount of attention to Antarctica over the last 40 or 60 years, but has paid much less attention to the Arctic? Have we been slightly imbalanced in ignoring the Arctic to some limited degree?

Jane Rumble: In the history of my post as the polar expert, I am the fourth person to have it in almost 80 years, starting in the second world war in 1943. That was when the Antarctic became a real focus because the UK was concerned during the second world war that Argentina and Chile were making a counterclaim to British sovereign territory and, therefore, we had to start an Antarctic policy. As I say, the Arctic was not really looked at as a circumpolar region until the mid-1990s. It was very much a zone of cold war confrontation. Once Mikhail Gorbachev started to speak about having peaceful co-operation in the Arctic region, the Arctic Council started to be formed.

Interestingly, it was the Antarctic officials at the Foreign Office who were being questioned about, "Are you engaging on this emerging Arctic discussion?" and of course they did. What was the Antarctic desk in those days transitioned into Polar Regions. As soon as the Arctic became a region to have its own policy, the UK was there. It is just that that did not happen until a bit later.



I think the real difference with the Antarctic, though, is that the UK has sovereign claim in Antarctica. The British Antarctic Territory is an overseas territory. We made the first claim to Antarctica in 1908 and although there is an Antarctic treaty that sets aside sovereign claims, for the UK to maintain our interest the lawyers tell us we must have an administration, a judiciary, constant presence. The British Antarctic Survey provides that constant presence in Antarctica for the UK. We have the Royal Navy that goes down with an ice patrol vessel as a white ensign. We do not have any of those drivers in the Arctic because we are not an Arctic state and we are not trying to assert sovereignty.

That explains the difference, but it does not necessarily mean that now we look at the poles as— We try to avoid the concept of trying to rob Peter to pay Paul, but the UK is one of the few countries that still looks at the polar regions together. Personally, I feel quite strongly that we should seek to continue to do that, even though they are both becoming quite complex and different in their own regard, because the main threats to them both are climate change, and hostile states and similar threats in both regions. Looking at both of them together gives the UK a unique perspective.

That said, the Committee can certainly be helpful. In my time in the role we struggled to get HMG to get enthusiastic for us to write an Arctic policy framework. We did get that enthusiasm in fact after a couple of Select Committee hearings, one from EAC and one from the Lords Committee. That galvanised it and we are now on the third edition of the UK's Arctic policy framework. Hopefully we have cemented the Arctic as being an important policy area for HMG, but to keep the profile on it is quite important. I spend quite a lot of my time trying to persuade people that the poles are important.

Q191 Chair: I won't go too far down this track but none the less let me tease that out a bit further. We spend an enormous amount of money in Antarctica on science and the base. We spend comparatively little in the Arctic. With tourism, fisheries, minerals and so much else we have a huge amount to gain from the Arctic but spend very little, whereas because of the geopolitical reasons that you describe, we have much more activity and involvement in Antarctica. I feel that there is an imbalance somewhere here. For the very reasons you described to do with the treaty, we somehow have managed to ignore an area that is 400 miles away from our north coast.

Jane Rumble: I suppose it depends on the objective of spending the money. The objective in Antarctica is to maintain a permanent presence and that is really expensive because we are a long way from Antarctica and we have to make sure that the people who provide that presence are safe and well looked after. We don't necessarily have that driver in the Arctic. The majority of the Antarctic expenditure is for the British Antarctic Survey's presence. The amount that they get for science is quite similar between the Arctic and the Antarctic. I don't know what the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

costings for deployments from the Navy and military in the Arctic are, but we deploy HMS Protector down in the Antarctic. I would be surprised, if we added it all up, whether it is significantly unbalanced.

Q192 **Chair:** You are convinced that we give due attention to the Arctic?

Jane Rumble: Yes.

Q193 **Chair:** Before we move on, can you characterise for us what you feel is happening with the environment in the Arctic? To what degree should we be concerned about the loss of sea ice by whatever it may be and all of that? What is happening environmentally in the Arctic? We will come later on to talk about what Britain can be doing about it.

Jane Rumble: You should really ask a scientist for the full readout but, yes, the Arctic is warming. The last time the Arctic Council talked about it it said that it was warming four times faster than the rest of the world. We know that receding sea ice has quite profound implications. We know that the Arctic drives the UK's weather, for example. We are experiencing now fairly pleasant conditions, in my view, whereas in Europe they have a terrible heatwave in the north Atlantic because the jet stream is a little bit lower and the winds of the jet stream are speeding up because of climate change, with the warming planet and the differential warming between the higher latitudes and the mid-latitudes.

The implications of Arctic change are quite profound for the UK. Interestingly, there was a report recently that suggested that the UK was among the top 10 places to be in a warming world—that the effects will be slightly less dramatic. Of course, the dramatic consequences that climate change will have on the rest of the planet mean that the UK is not isolated and we will see it from conflicts, migration, water stresses—all sorts of things. I think that changes in the Arctic are pretty sobering.

Q194 **Jerome Mayhew:** As a Committee, we have heard lots of evidence from scientists providing the answer that you suggest we should seek. You are quite right: we have talked about warming being 4 times that of the rest of the world due to Arctic amplification and the loss of reflective material is one example of that. We already have 30% less summer sea ice over the last decade than previously. Taking that scientific answer as having already been provided to the Committee, what assessment have the Government made of the likely effects of climate change in the Arctic for the UK? What impact do you think it will have on us?

Jane Rumble: We set out some of this in the written evidence. I think the main impact will be the sea level rise, which not only will be a normal sea level rise, but will be exacerbated by storm surges, tides and so on. There are coastal implications from changing ice cover. Changes to our weather are likely for the UK to see more extreme weather events and, therefore, planning for likely scenarios is very important. DEFRA maintains the national adaptation plan for the UK, which covers all the climate change global implications for the UK, and the Arctic is considered as part of that.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q195 **Jerome Mayhew:** I have to declare an interest now, since DEFRA has been mentioned, because I am a PPS at DEFRA, so I am not going to pursue any questions relating to that. I think that there will be an announcement tomorrow about the launch of the national adaptation plan.

If I can take one step back, you have mentioned in broad terms extreme weather and variations in sea levels. Are you able to flesh that out a bit, just to give an appreciation of what kind of impact rising sea levels are likely to have on the United Kingdom?

Jane Rumble: Again, I defer to DEFRA. I should probably get them to write to you, but my understanding is that things like the Thames Barrier, for example, will get more surges and the UK will have to make decisions about which part of its territory it seeks to defend with flood defences and management, and which areas it decides can be flooded to cope with the ingress of water. There will need to be various decisions, but those are for others, not the Foreign Office.

Q196 **Jerome Mayhew:** I am going to move away from storm surges, but sticking with extreme weather events and climate change more widely, they have an impact on the weather but also potentially on our biodiversity, don't they? If you look at not our domestic biodiversity but the shared biodiversity we have—I have in mind migratory pelagic fish stocks or migratory birds—what action are the Government taking to protect our shared biodiversity? Is there anything we can do and, if so, are we doing it?

Jane Rumble: I will start with seabirds. That is one of the areas where we have good co-operation with the Arctic Council. Over a long time the Joint Nature Conservation Council has been part of the CAFF working group, which is the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna, because of the migratory bird connection that we have with the Arctic, particularly Arctic geese, Arctic terns and so on. To an extent, a change will occur because of climate change, that is for sure.

Species that can move are likely to move to areas where they find conditions more favourable for their normal evolutionary cycle, but there is a lot of evidence that providing climate resilience to habitats and species by trying to protect them and to reduce any other additional stresses can be a positive benefit to prolonging the time that these species will have to adapt to the changing conditions that they find themselves in.

One of the big threats for birds at the moment is avian flu. That is a real challenge, and it is a big concern that that might also reach Antarctica now that it is down in South America. There are additional things that we need to try to prevent these species suffering from.

Q197 **Jerome Mayhew:** Sorry for butting in, but on the example of avian flu, and perhaps on all the other conditions that you have in mind, are we merely observers or can we take effective action to change the course of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

events? Perhaps with avian flu that is just not possible, given that it is endemic in the wild bird population.

Jane Rumble: Yes. Part of the assessment of any of these threats is to go through that process of: can we do something about this or is the main objective to reduce the additional stresses that you might place on that particular habitat or species?

Q198 **Jerome Mayhew:** Can you give an example of the kind of reduction in stresses that you have in mind?

Jane Rumble: Declaring marine protected areas, routing shipping away from particularly known breeding sites of whales or foraging sites, and trying to keep tourists away from particularly sensitive bird colonies are sorts of management measures to try to assess the situation. It is a million dollar question as to what will happen to fish stocks. We have seen the haddock, the mackerel and the cod move further north. There will come a point in the Arctic where you can't get any cooler, but what exactly the mix of an ice-free Arctic Ocean will look like is unclear. That is one of the objectives of the central Arctic Ocean fisheries agreement that has a moratorium for 16 years, or 16 years from when it came into force in 2021, to try to reduce the threat of uncontrolled, unregulated and unmanaged fishing, because that would have an enormous threat on an already transitory and changing stock. There is a lot of work going on to try to work out what the changes are likely to be.

Q199 **Anna McMorris:** We have heard that the UK produces world-class, leading science with over 70 universities and research centres that carry out many different types of science in the Arctic, biological and geographical. We saw some of that in our visit to Ny-Ålesund, but what do the Government consider to be the strengths of that science?

Jane Rumble: From a Foreign Office perspective, the biggest strength is the fact that the UK has this volume and impact, so there is a macro effect of having a good Arctic science portfolio. A lot of the science priority more recently has been on climate change and the implications that that will have, particularly for the central Arctic Ocean and for the UK. That is a particular strength. Equally, we have lots of strengths. The UK, of course, discovered the ozone hole in Antarctica in the 1980s and we retain a lot of interest and expertise on ozone, and that is an issue in the Arctic also. I hesitate to pick one over the other. That is probably a question for the UK science community.

Q200 **Anna McMorris:** Okay, thank you. How do you think the UK's contribution can be improved? What can the Government do to enhance the science and the collaboration that take place?

Jane Rumble: There are probably many and some of them will be political decisions, for example how much funding is put into science. The UK certainly has the talent and we also have a lot of good networks. For example, the science and innovation network of the Foreign Office supports UK researchers to make connections. The questions that you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

need to answer for the Arctic are so vast that it would be difficult for any one country to look at them on their own, so helping to make those networks is—

Q201 Anna McMorrin: How do you identify the weak spots within that Government and UK scientific research? Where are the weak spots in what the UK Government need to do more of to ensure that the science and collaboration takes place?

Jane Rumble: That is probably a question I don't want to necessarily speculate on. From our perspective, the challenge for the UK science community is making sure that they have access to study the things that they want to study. Of course, one of the big challenges right now is that we have an intransigent Russia that we can't co-operate with and get the data out of. It is trying to facilitate researchers to get the connections for getting the science done that they want to engage with and ideally having that resourced logistically.

Q202 Anna McMorrin: Do you think that there is adequate long-term research being carried out, or is research and research funding all very short term?

Jane Rumble: Again, you will probably have to ask the scientists that. The Arctic has become more of a focus. Going back more than a decade ago there were not big research grants particularly targeted at the Arctic. Since then we have had the central Arctic Ocean science programme. There has been a number of calls that specifically pertain to the Arctic. It seems that that will continue. The UK research funding is led by the researchers. It is not necessarily led by HMG saying, "Thou must go and study this."

Anna McMorrin: BAS can.

Jane Rumble: Yes, that is different for the Antarctic because it has to provide world-class science and continual presence. It will determine what it will study in Antarctica. We don't necessarily drive what the science is, but there will be this permanent presence. There is a slightly different driver in the Arctic, but it is clear that the Arctic will continue to be a big priority for UK science.

Q203 Anna McMorrin: Wouldn't you say that it is the Government's role to create the environment whereby world-class researchers can apply for funding that is long term and look at the right things that you want them to be looking at, such as social or scientific, regarding the changes in climate?

Jane Rumble: I mostly agree, other than the point that it is for the UK science community to determine their science priorities, based on what they think are the scientific requirements to study, as opposed to us saying, "You must go and study this." There are different funding mechanisms for specific targeted research, but I agree that there needs to be the platform for them to be able to thrive.



Q204 **Anna McMorris:** Do you think that there is enough support for the international collaboration and research?

Jane Rumble: It would be hard for me not to say that more would be welcome, but we do what we can with the resources that the Government allocate to us.

Q205 **Chair:** I can't remember if I mentioned it, but we intend to write to George Freeman to ask him the questions we would have asked him if he were here in person, so we will get the answers officially from the Department in good time.

One thing that some people have mentioned to us is the notion that at the moment there is absolutely no co-ordination at all for Arctic science. There could be two scientists in the same university or neighbouring universities competing or repeating each other's research. Do you think that there might be a role in the future for some kind of British Arctic scientific panel or organisation or tribunal or body that would try to co-ordinate Arctic science better than is currently the case?

Jane Rumble: We have different mechanisms. We have the Arctic science office, which has been bolstered since the last Committee report, identifying that we needed to do better to prioritise and to champion the UK science. That led to the report that you have cited already that the Foreign Office did in conjunction with the Department of Energy and Climate Change, which probably indicates the age of it. We looked at who is doing Arctic science. One of the challenges we had was that some Arctic researchers who worked in the Arctic did not necessarily identify as an Arctic researcher. They identified as an atmospheric physicist or something. It is just that they always worked in Greenland. It depends how you characterise it.

The Arctic Office had a role of trying to provide a central place where people could get advice and ask these sorts of questions in addition to giving us something that we could be clear about what the whole of the UK Arctic contribution was, which gives us quite a good basis for diplomatic engagement. We had an interest in looking at it as well.

There is also an Arctic and Antarctic partnership committee that has been set up by the community. One of its roles is to look across the polar science community and identify some of the priorities—some of the things that they would like to tell to the Government or the funding agencies. I think that role is covered in some ways already.

Q206 **Philip Dunne:** I am going to pursue this a little bit further because the Chairman has asked one of my questions about co-ordination.

Chair: Sorry, I beg your pardon.

Philip Dunne: That is absolutely fine. As you know, we visited Ny-Ålesund with representatives of BAS, and I am pleased to see that Henry Burgess has joined us for this session. Clearly there is a lot of co-



ordination within BAS between the Antarctic and the Arctic. Is it fair to say that outside of that structure we are not really co-ordinating, as a nation, our research effort between one polar region and the other? Is that right? Shouldn't we be looking at both together and allocating resource one to the other with a bit more equity, not least given that the Arctic is somewhat closer to the impact on our meteorology than the Antarctic?

Jane Rumble: Given that you have mentioned that Henry is behind me, I can tell you that he has helpfully advised me that the Arctic Office is developing a database of Arctic science that will be launched quite soon, so that will help to identify what research is going on across the community. One of the roles of the Arctic and Antarctic partnership committee is to ensure that there is some read-across between the science that is happening in the Arctic and the science happening in the Antarctic. The way the science is funded is that some grants will be very Arctic-specific, some will be Antarctic-specific, some will be global, and some will be bipolar. It will depend what the science question is as to where the funding is allocated, but overall on average the amount of money that is identified as being purely for scientific purposes between the Arctic and the Antarctic is relatively comparable just by the community's requests for funding.

Q207 **Philip Dunne:** Comparable in what sense? Not in cash terms but in output terms you mean?

Jane Rumble: No, I believe in cash terms. If you take out the logistics funding that BAS gets for maintaining a presence in the Antarctic, the actual science grant money seems to be relatively similar.

Q208 **Philip Dunne:** It would be helpful if you could perhaps provide evidence of that to us. I am not sure that that has been picked up.

Jane Rumble: Yes.

Q209 **Philip Dunne:** Thank you. We did visit in Tromsø the Fram Centre, which co-ordinates Norwegian research efforts across six main plans. That seemed to be a grown-up way of doing it. Do you think it may now be time for us to try to provide greater co-ordination of research efforts in the Arctic with the Antarctic? Maybe you have already answered that question.

Jane Rumble: Yes. Sorry.

Q210 **Philip Dunne:** I will try another one then. Our predecessor Committee looked at the Arctic—maybe Barry was a member of the Committee at the time—and made a suggestion that we should perhaps have some Government representative whose job it was to help argue the British cause within the Arctic different fora that exist. We met the Arctic Council administrators when we were in Tromsø and it was fairly clear at that point that the British representation is there, but it is not embodied in an envoy or a person at a high level. Do you think that we should consider



that now?

Jane Rumble: We have considered this quite a lot as it has come up fairly regularly. At the time of the last Committee report, we tried to break down what the objectives would be and we broke it down that there was a clear desire for the UK to promote its science credentials more overtly and that led to Henry's position in the Arctic Office. Of course, he was my deputy in the Foreign Office. We had somebody who could speak on behalf of the whole of the science community without being specifically engaged in one particular project, which is what we had before, and a more senior, outward approach. Henry is now the president of the International Arctic Science Committee, so we have that profile. That ticked the science process.

We then looked at the next issue, potentially around the UK's business engagement with the Arctic states. We already had a trade envoy for the Nordic Baltic and it was deemed that the North America process was already well established and there was no real desire to have a trade envoy for Russia, so there was not necessarily a gap there.

Then we looked at the policy side of things and, the Arctic being a big region of the world, it is not like a specific issue. It sits very clearly with a Minister and so we made it much more clearly at that point—and we still maintain that now—that we have a Minister for the Arctic, we have a Minister for the polar regions, so we tried to be clearer about that. He is supported by senior officials. We have always had the challenge that some states have officials who have the title of ambassador. That is because other states give you a title of ambassador once you reach a certain level. The UK does not do that, so we have often been perceived not to be at that level whereas actually we are comparable. The UK has done it slightly differently.

As I mentioned, I am the fourth person to have the polar portfolio since 1943, so I first went to the Arctic Council in 2003. There are several people who are experts on the indigenous population representatives and the other expert observers who are still there. I don't think I know of any other Government representation who has had that kind of longevity. That has been the way that the UK has represented itself on policy rather than having a specific appointed, rotating envoy.

That is currently, as I understand it, the view—I obviously have not had much chance to discuss this with the new Minister but repeatedly we have discussed this with each incoming Minister, because it is a live issue: "Do you wish to change this approach?" So far, we have not identified that we want to have the approach the French have, for example. They have a particular polar envoy; they have a political appointed or a political connected polar envoy. That is the only model like that of the non-Arctic states. The Arctic states have different obligations, so they have a different regime.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It is something that we keep under review but, as I say, I am getting a senior ambassadorial rank deputy who will be the UK senior Arctic lead and will have more capacity than sometimes I have. For example, the Arctic Circle meeting that James mentioned at the beginning is always the weekend that I have to go to Australia for the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, where we must argue our case for UK fishing rights, including around South Georgia. It is very important for the UK, so that has always taken priority. We will now have somebody senior who is able to go to events where we have not been able to attend every one.

Q211 Anna McMorris: Very briefly on that, although there is no polar envoy, we did have a climate envoy in the FCDO who has gone and not been replaced. Do you have a comment on that? That role would have brought all of these things together as a senior figure across government but particularly within the FCDO and particularly on this agenda.

Jane Rumble: That is a question for others, I guess. We worked very closely, as you know, with the Foreign Secretary's representative on climate change. In fact, he went to the Arctic Circle because there was a particular request that the UK would talk about how we had laid on the COP in Glasgow from the climate change perspective. It was very helpful. That role has changed because we are no longer in the presidency of COP, so there is a different formulation for the way that the Foreign Office—

Q212 Anna McMorris: That role has always been there, even when we were not in the presidency.

Jane Rumble: Yes. I will have to get somebody else to write to you about that.

Chair: We have not had a chance to do this since we had our very successful trip to Tromsø. I will take a moment formally to say that NERC, and Henry Burgess in particular, were enormously helpful in making that visit possible and we are extremely grateful to him in particular and the office in general for doing so. Thank you for that.

Q213 Dr Offord: To respond to the previous question, I put down a written question to ask about the special representative and the Minister said, "An immediate successor to the special representative has not been appointed. Our resource and senior representation within the FCDO on climate and environment has grown significantly since the creation of the FCDO." That was the response.

While we were on our visit, we visited Svalbard and we saw the ability of UK researchers to be able to engage in research. Would your Department consider additional support for stations so that they can stay open for up to 12 months and greater research could be undertaken?

Jane Rumble: The station in principle can be accessed for 12 months of the year. The UK takes the approach that we only open the station when



there is meaningful science to be undertaken and, therefore, it will have periods of opening when it is supporting scientific activity. Having been to Svalbard myself, there are some other countries who take the view that they should be there permanently. I went to one station where there was one chap wandering about in his slippers simply to say that they were there all year round. That has not been the UK's approach because what would be the value of that? The value of the station is to facilitate science, so it is clearly a Norwegian station, and there is no requirement for us to be providing a continual presence in the same way as the Antarctic. It is a science-driven opening, not necessarily just providing funding to have somebody to be there to turn on the lights.

Q214 **Dr Offord:** To expand on that and taking it a bit further, the RRS Sir David Attenborough will probably spend less than 50% of her time in the Arctic. What consideration have you given to having another platform for Arctic researchers?

Jane Rumble: This is a question for the Science Minister. The Foreign Office did not pay for the RRS Sir David Attenborough but we supported the business case for that, which was primarily to respond to the requirement for the continual presence. If you have people in the Antarctic for 12 months of the year, you need to have a vessel that is potentially capable of supporting them and the equipment and resources to respond to that. The Sir David Attenborough is flagged in the Falkland Islands specifically to provide the UK's presence in the south-west Atlantic. It has a particular role around Antarctica and the justification for buying a ship and having it flagged in such a way was very clearly because of our Antarctic science interest and long-term interest in the Antarctic region.

The equation for the Arctic is, of course, slightly different. The deployment of logistics and ships into the Arctic will be dependent on what science issues need to be done and that could be by asking for a UK science platform, which could be the RRS Sir David Attenborough if it is into heavy ice, but there are other UK research ships that have gone reasonably far north where there is not such an ice challenge. It is the same with the British Antarctic Survey aircraft, which are also all flagged to the Falklands but come back to Canada where they are maintained. They have done some flying activity in the Arctic where there has been a science requirement for them to do that, but the UK also has access to other planes that could do it. The UK is involved in a lot of international co-operative science. The UK was engaged, for example, on the recent Mosaic visit to the Arctic, which was a German ship that was left in the Arctic over the winter. We had some UK scientists on that, utilising that platform.

It is very much a question of where does the science lead you and what is the most cost-effective way of doing it, rather than having the requirement, as you say, that you will send a vessel and it will be there constantly.



Q215 **Dr Offord:** To pursue that—I understand that you say that you can only answer from a scientific point of view—we heard that researchers in the Antarctic can use the Sir David Attenborough for free, but researchers in the Arctic need to use their grant to pay for access to the ship. Why is the ship not free to use in those parts of the southern and northern hemispheres?

Jane Rumble: Again, that is a question for the Science Minister on the way that that has been sorted out. The vast majority of British science that goes to Antarctica will be done through the British Antarctic Survey's logistics platform as part of the UK national Antarctic science programme. Through the treaty we have an obligation to ensure that the UK controls its nationals, so everybody who goes needs a permit from the Foreign Office. We have that kind of oversight.

In the Arctic, you don't have to have any special permission. You can simply buy a ticket. For a UK researcher who is setting out what they want to do in their science, they would be looking for the most cost-effective way of doing it and that may be to do it with different countries or in a different way, whereas the Sir David Attenborough will always have to go to the Antarctic. It has to provide the resupply to the station and has obligations to keep the lights on. It is all funded in a different way but they would need to set out the rationale for the way they do it.

Dr Offord: That is very useful. Thank you very much.

Q216 **Chair:** Jane, can I push you very slightly further on Ny-Ålesund? I hope you don't mind my doing so. The impression I gained was that it is slightly part-time-ish. In other words, I understand that the very helpful, excellent station commander, for example, is on a temporary contract. He only goes there part-time. He is over there when there is a scientist demanding it and of course he is not there during the winter at all. My memory from years ago was that it was a very big active base, open all the time, and that that rather attracted scientists in. It attracted people in, but you have to make a complicated application to go there, you are disincentivised from doing it, and you might find at a particular time you want to go it is closed anyhow. Is that a reasonable point?

Jane Rumble: I am not sure. My understanding is that although it is a temporary contract at this time, the station leader would be available if there was science that was driving the station to be opened, and I think that has always been the case. Maybe we just had more science grants from the year that you recall, but I don't think there has been any big material change.

I should also clarify—my notes have come helpfully from the back again—that ships are free to use in the Arctic for science purposes. It is the aircraft that you need to use your grants for. Just to clarify that.

Q217 **Chair:** A final allied point from me on this. What change will the environmental Bill that is going through the Norwegian Parliament have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that may prevent scientists doing what they want to do in Ny-Ålesund? The Bill that is currently in front of the Norwegian Parliament might well be very difficult unless we handle it correctly.

Jane Rumble: I am not familiar with the full detail but obviously Norway has sovereignty over Svalbard. That is clear under the Svalbard treaty, so it is for Norway to determine how it wishes to run its territory. It must do so in a non-discriminatory way where it pertains to activities that are protected by the treaty. Sadly, research is not one of those, but it is clear that the Norwegians are very keen to have collaborative science at Ny-Ålesund so I hope that they take that into account in discussing the detail of the Bill that you mention.

Q218 **Chair:** The impression I get is that the Bill would, for very good reasons, seek to preserve the environment in Ny-Ålesund, but the perhaps unintended consequences of it might be that people would be prevented from doing what they wanted to do on the ground in Ny-Ålesund. We would obviously, as a country, have a big interest in that. I wondered whether we are making our views known to the Norwegian Parliament, for example.

Jane Rumble: We will look into that.

Q219 **Cat Smith:** I have a couple of questions on international collaboration on Arctic science. The first one is about Horizon Europe. We have heard from other witnesses that the departure from Horizon Europe and associated programmes like Copernicus Earth has been quite detrimental to our relationship with research and the region. What progress have the Government made on the agreement to rejoin Horizon Europe?

Jane Rumble: Again, I think you will need to ask the Science Minister that question, but my understanding is that discussions are ongoing.

Q220 **Cat Smith:** Okay. When it comes to research that involves indigenous communities, what are the Government doing to ensure that UK engagement with indigenous knowledge holders is ethical and equitable? Are you able to comment on that?

Jane Rumble: Yes. Certainly there has been a lot of movement to make sure that we are engaging appropriately with indigenous peoples of the Arctic. The recent Canadian grant that we agreed with them includes indigenous peoples and that is a very good model. It includes research from the Natural Environment Research Council as well as a number of other research councils. It is a UKRI initiative.

As we mentioned at the beginning, the pins that we wear are part of a broader diversity in polar science initiative that I have been working on with the British Antarctic Survey and the polar community much more broadly—it has a very wide membership, thankfully. We have agreed that we will develop a code of conduct for all the UK researchers going to the Arctic to ensure that they are aware of the need to ensure that everybody



is safe and environmentally responsible but also respectful. It takes into account some of the sensitivities of engaging with indigenous peoples.

Q221 **Cat Smith:** Earlier one of your responses to my colleague Anna McMorrin's question was about the loss of access to Russian data and the impact that has on research. Can you say what assessment the Government have made of the impact of Russia's war with Ukraine on the capacity of UK research in the Arctic? What role is there for diplomacy to ensure that climate data on the Russian Arctic is made available to UK researchers?

Jane Rumble: Following the beginning of the conflict, as you know there was a pause on all engagement with Russia. There was a review of all of the money that had been given to scientific activity that included the Russians. Some of that was paused but quite a lot of it restarted or was relocated, so there was no suspension of grant, as I understand it. Obviously there is much less openness. We don't have the people-to-people co-operation. The science innovation network representative in Moscow was brought back, so a lot of people-to-people links have been severed, which is very bad. Some data is coming out of Russia where it pertains to international treaties. The World Meteorological Organisation, for example, is still getting some climate data, so some data is available, but big innovative science activities working in the Russian Arctic are not currently possible, and that is challenging. The lack of data at a time when we need to understand what is happening in a rapidly changing Arctic is fairly challenging.

What we can do about it is a big question about the UK's engagement alongside its allies on Russia's continuing egregious activity. Yes, that is a question for others.

Q222 **Cat Smith:** I understand. We have also heard that the memoranda of understanding that the UK signed with Norway and with the ITK are beneficial to UK science. Do the Government see these agreements as beneficial? Should the UKRI be looking to replicate these kind of agreements with other countries? If so, which countries perhaps?

Jane Rumble: There are different types of MOU. They can be extremely useful. Some of them are more presentational, some of them are more specific and do specific things. You could have an MOU just for a particular science as to who would do what and how you work together and so on or you can have a government-to-government high level co-operation agreement, which we have with Norway and then we break it down.

I think in the one that you mentioned one of the agreements that we have is that researchers will be able to bid into the opposite country's research structure. We have an agreement with the Americans of avoiding what the scientists call double jeopardy whereby if you have a collaborative research activity and one country agrees to fund it, the other one will just agree so that you don't have this which partner—they



HOUSE OF COMMONS

can be hugely beneficial but they need to be for the right purpose for the right objective.

Again, sorry to keep saying this, but it will be for the Science Department to determine what is the right objective to pursue an MOU. The MOUs that we have tend to be the higher level, government-to-government co-operation. They are extremely useful, but with seven of the Arctic states we could have one with, we don't necessarily need one; we talk to them all the time anyway. They can be helpful to unlock particular issues but not necessarily—

Q223 **Cat Smith:** Not changing them necessarily for those seven nations because there are already good relationships?

Jane Rumble: At the foreign policy higher level, but if they do specific things, as I mentioned the Norwegian one, that can be hugely useful.

Q224 **Barry Gardiner:** The integrated review set out the Government's intention to maintain the Arctic as a region of high co-operation and low tension. How does the Foreign Office feel that is going?

Jane Rumble: It remains our long-term aspiration. Yes, high co-operation, not so much at this point. It would be our long-term objective because—

Q225 **Barry Gardiner:** This was only 2021 and you published the Looking North framework in 2023. This was the basis on which things were being talked about. It is not as if this is ancient history. How did the Foreign Office get this so wrong?

Jane Rumble: As I say, it remains the long-term objective and it does of all the Arctic states.

Q226 **Barry Gardiner:** Motherhood and apple pie remains the long-term objective, but if you are going to set out a policy framework that looks at how we will work in the years ahead, you would expect the Foreign Office to have taken on board some of the things that were happening in the international community and to have read the runes a little more carefully, would you not?

Jane Rumble: I think our assessment is that the Arctic of itself is not likely to be the driver of tension and confrontation. That is likely to be—

Q227 **Barry Gardiner:** I am not so sure that is the case given that two Arctic units have already been down into Ukraine, suffered 1,000 losses. We have already seen the declaration of Russia on the northern sea route saying that any warship must only proceed one at a time, must display its flag, and that any submarines must surface to access that route, declaring it as part of their internal waters. I don't really see that you can say that it does not have major security implications.

Jane Rumble: Yes, I am not trying to say that. I am trying to say that in respect of the Arctic in a region of itself being our northern flank there is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a real driver to look at Arctic issues in a circumpolar way in so far as is possible. That completely changed obviously at the beginning of 2022 and, therefore—

Barry Gardiner: Obviously it changed in 2014.

Jane Rumble: Yes, you could say that. The more immediate evidence that you have been talking about has come more recently. What has been driving the change now is that seven of the Arctic states will be NATO members, big investment in the JEF, and huge interest from the Ministry of Defence. There has been a consequential response to what you are saying but from the Foreign Office's perspective we want to try to balance that the Arctic is not turned into a kind of no-go region. There is still a huge amount of co-operation, which is really important for science, environment, biodiversity, marine protection and we need to make sure we manage—

Q228 **Barry Gardiner:** Not for 53% of the Arctic coastline, which is contained in Russia, as you outlined to my colleague earlier when you were talking about the implications for basic science on permafrost and permafrost change. This is 53% of the Arctic coastline that has gone into a black hole. I think you said that key data is not coming out.

Jane Rumble: As I say, some is where it pertains to an international treaty but some of the co-operative science—direct science activity—obviously has been suspended.

Q229 **Barry Gardiner:** Indeed. What efforts are being made to create back channels? During the cold war, even at the height of something like the Cuban missile crisis, we created back channels of conversation. We had Rudolf Nureyev coming over and dancing with Margot Fonteyn in the 1960s. We had scientific co-operation that never stopped to the extent that it has now and those were ways—just look at the Chinese ping-pong initiative—in which the international order and the security of the world could hinge on things that were not security-related. It doesn't seem that there is an openness for those back channels to happen now. Please reassure me that the Foreign Office is considering how it may do that.

Jane Rumble: I think that I would have to write to you about that. That would get into Russia security policy that is not necessarily an Arctic direct lead.

Q230 **Barry Gardiner:** It would be helpful if you could perhaps write to the Committee about that. I am talking specifically as related to Arctic research, Arctic co-operation and the ways in which that might be able to facilitate some sort of channel for co-operation. Ultimately, we always have to talk to people.

Jane Rumble: Yes. In that regard, the Norwegians, of course, have taken the chairmanship of the Arctic Council and they have been looking, along with discussion with the other Arctic states, at how some of that engagement can happen. All of the Arctic states, including Russia, met on



11 May. They agreed to transfer the chairmanship to Norway. There was agreement for some of the projects to continue, so there is some kind of low-level engagement. The question now is the extent to which that will transform itself into actual working group discussions, whether that will be done by correspondence or in meetings and so on. That sort of discussion is happening.

Q231 **Barry Gardiner:** Let's look at UK Arctic research. What impact did that have on the development of the Looking North framework?

Jane Rumble: The Arctic policy framework is a policy framework, so it sets out what are the UK's overarching interests in the Arctic. It does not claim to be a strategy or to identify particular specific activity. Consequently, the discussion was more at the departmental level, including the input from the Natural Environment Research Council, Arctic Office, rather than necessarily specific research requirements, although we do have a lot of detail in there about exactly what is happening. It was not a science-into-policy strategy, if you see what I mean.

We did not have a consultation because it was not setting out new Government ways of doing things. It was an overarching policy framework of, "These are the UK's interests in the Arctic," and then from the Foreign Office perspective, we represent the UK at the Arctic Council. We write the policy framework and we co-ordinate across government. We don't necessarily drive individual policy issues, we engage with different Departments that get science advice direct where it is relevant to their policy.

Q232 **Barry Gardiner:** I want to be sure I am not misunderstanding you here, because earlier you said in response to one of my colleagues that we do not pick and choose research programmes—we do not have a policy that we need to do research in this area or in that area—but now you also seem to be telling me that the research that happens does not implement or does not affect the policy that we create. Are we just talking about two parallel lines here that are going along: policy on the one hand and research on the other, and never the twain shall meet?

Jane Rumble: No, sorry, I should clarify. There are different pots of funding for science. There is the science budget, which is controlled by DSIT, which goes through UK Research and Innovation. That is largely given out to grants and is competitive funding that is determined by the scientists. Different Departments have research budgets that can be specifically for science, just bespoke to their policy area, so they will get direct science input. For the wider community we get representation through the Natural Environment Research Council Arctic Office, as to what the issues are.

We also sit on the UK Arctic and Antarctic Partnership; we sit on other committees. We will go to the UK Arctic Science Conference to talk about science inter-policy, so we have other ways of trying to reach out to scientists to ensure that they tell us what we need to know from a policy



HOUSE OF COMMONS

perspective. Our role in the Polar Regions Department sometimes is to marry up different bits of science with the relevant bit of government that leads on the policy that the science pertains to.

Q233 Barry Gardiner: Let's talk specifics. If we are talking about our adaptation policy in a Department like DEFRA, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Government would be using the research that is going on in the Arctic to predict the levels of sea level rise—or indeed, if you believe the research from Delft, the actual drop in sea level that might take place—to set a programme for adaptation activities and policy; is that correct?

Jane Rumble: Yes. DEFRA will have its own research funding. Through its own research auspices it could gather up the relevant pure science and provide reports or receive reports that would distil into policy-relevant science some of the issues that you have been talking about.

Q234 Barry Gardiner: Give me an example of where it has happened. Give me a single example of research that is going on that has made an impact in DEFRA's policy.

Jane Rumble: I think the national adaptation plan should demonstrate some of that.

Barry Gardiner: You are relying on tomorrow. I am asking for an example from the past.

Jane Rumble: The comment that you made, for example, on climate change—the fact that the Arctic is warming four times as fast—came from the science community, which led to a kind of wake-up call. Certainly the Arctic Council started to take climate change in the Arctic very seriously in the early part of this century and has continued to basically promote the fact that these things are changing very quickly. We need to do more research, we need to understand what is happening—the importance of fire management, for example—and it is about some of the policy issues that I spoke to, looking at where we need to have marine protection, where we should have no-go shipping routes and so on.

All of that is under development. It does take some time, of course. Probably you are looking for an example like discovering the ozone hole and getting a treaty and suddenly there are no CFCs.

Q235 Barry Gardiner: You don't need to be that specific. Perhaps you could write to us with some key examples. That would be helpful.

One of the things that researchers sometimes tell us—it is not exclusive to Arctic researchers—is that it is difficult for them to know how they should be communicating their findings to policymakers in government. How have you sought to address that bottleneck in the way in which science is translated into policy?

Jane Rumble: I suppose we have a number of different ways of doing that. The first is to try to be present at relevant science conferences and



offer to speak. The Arctic Office, which I have mentioned, has a big role to play in ensuring that the Arctic community is aware of some of the policy interests and is engaging in lots of policy discussions. There was a seminar that was arranged at the Royal Society where we spoke about what the policy drivers are. That was specifically related to the Arctic.

Personally, I did a science and policy fellowship to understand this kind of interface, to try to look at how we can engage better with scientists. There is a range of things that can be done. There is a lot and they are quite resource intensive. As I say, because the Arctic community is spread out across so many different organisations, quite a lot of it is trying to promote the fact that we have this co-ordinating Arctic Office. It will develop the database of different science activities so we can all get better at identifying what is happening and how best we can use it.

I could also mention that several conventions have been agreed that particularly relate to Arctic challenges. For example, the amount of mercury that we see in the Arctic led to the Minamata Convention. The amount of POPs we see led to the Stockholm Convention. Now the UN is negotiating a new plastics treaty. A lot of that is because we can now see plastics in the Arctic and microplastics in the Antarctic. Being able to demonstrate this is now a global issue, it has a global reach and therefore you can get a global response to negotiate a treaty. Hopefully that has answered your question.

Barry Gardiner: It has. Thank you very much.

Q236 **Chair:** Very briefly on that, following up on the Arctic Council, is there an argument that the Arctic Council will never function again because it is unlikely that Russia will ever come back to the top table, and that therefore now is the time where we ought to be seeking some other organisation that will carry out the functions of the Arctic Council? Some of the things we mentioned—some of the international treaties we use in agreements—might usefully substitute for that, even NATO perhaps, or some of these international conferences like the Arctic Circle or the Arctic Frontiers conferences. Are these things that might substitute at some stage in the future for the Arctic Council or can you imagine any time in our lifetimes—and your lifetime will be much longer than mine—when the Arctic Council will ever again play the same role?

Jane Rumble: The Arctic Council has always existed alongside all of the other things that you have mentioned, so they all have a different niche. The benefit of the Arctic Council was that it brought together circumpolar assessment; it brought together, “What is the status of the entire circumpolar Arctic region?” It provided the incentive for the circumpolar Arctic states to agree co-operative action, including negotiating three treaties—under their auspices, of course—on oil spill prevention and response, search and rescue and science co-operation. That has been particularly useful.



There has always been a whole suite of treaties that pertain to the Arctic, some of which I just mentioned, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea being the most important one, and the recent agreement on biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction is a global high seas agreement, so it will cover the central Arctic Ocean in some way. We also have the central Arctic Ocean fisheries agreement. There is a whole layer of treaties that have already been established where Russia is and continues to participate in those sorts of discussions.

The Norwegians are very optimistic that they will be able to have a successful chairship that will maintain some of the co-operation on the core functions of the Arctic Council, which will be on the broader science assessment, the environmental assessment and the co-operation that is already in place. I suspect that whether that will manifest itself in political meetings as an Arctic Council will be very difficult until and unless Russia ceases unwarranted war in Ukraine. I would not necessarily suggest that the UK would be best placed in trying to think about some change. Our role at the moment is to be supportive of the Norwegian chairship and the process that they are going through. At the moment that is on a relatively healthy trajectory. They have put an awful lot of effort into making sure there is a smooth transition and setting out their priorities, which have been agreed now by all eight Arctic states, so I would not want to speculate on a—

Q237 Chair: Briefly and finally on this, what about search and rescue and indeed oil spill management? Surely those are functions of the Arctic Council that no longer exist. Therefore, who now has responsibility for search and rescue in the Arctic?

Jane Rumble: Search and rescue comes out of other international conventions. ICAO—I am not going to try to pretend I know what that stands for—the International Civil Aviation Organisation, as well as the International Maritime Organisation, set out the global search and rescue, so that already still exists. The agreement that the eight Arctic states came to is a treaty signed by them all. It still functions, so they still have co-operation on search and rescue. In fact, the dialogue on search and rescue has not been suspended so there should not have been necessarily any great change in search and rescue.

Q238 Chair: Even the one for whom the treaty is no longer active, Russia?

Jane Rumble: It is still active in that treaty. The Arctic Council is of course not a treaty. It is a body that is held on the ministerial declaration, so there is no legal entity, whereas other treaties have a legal personality or there is a legal obligation to engage. As I say, Russia has been engaging in those treaties to which it is a signatory. It has not disassociated itself from those treaties, so the objectives are still being delivered.

Q239 Jerome Mayhew: We have a shipping route opening up and that brings a lot of opportunity, but also risk-hazard to the Arctic. We have heard



HOUSE OF COMMONS

evidence that the north-east passage, which is about 2,600 miles, can knock 10 to 12 days off a shipping route, about 40% of the cost, and that has environmental benefits, with less fuel being used and therefore fewer emissions. We see that with the opening up of the ice there are four sectors of economic activity that could be enhanced in the Arctic. We have heard about mineral exploitation, fisheries being extended, logistics—so the shipping route—and also tourism. All of those require increased shipping and the increased impact of shipping as a result. We have to deal with this. We have to address this.

At the moment we have the Polar Code, which has two parts: one on the design, construction and operation of polar vessels; and the second dealing with the environment impact, so things like invasive species and the discard of oil and sewage. Part of that is mandatory and part of it is recommendations. What can the Government do to push for more effective implementation of the code? Perhaps before you answer that question—I have slightly jumped ahead—you could give an assessment as to whether or not you think the Polar Code is working at the moment and is fit for this anticipated increase in shipping in the Arctic?

Jane Rumble: Yes. The UK has been very involved in the negotiation of the Polar Code through the International Maritime Organisation delegation and was very pleased that what were Arctic guidelines became mandatory requirements for the Arctic and then also cover the Antarctic into the Polar Code. Currently that covers cargo and tourist vessels. It doesn't cover all vessels, but the IMO is still working on stage 2 of the Polar Code, which would cover pleasure yachts, for example, and fishing vessels, so the UK would like to ensure that all shipping activity in the polar regions is covered by the Polar Code. I think, in so far as the Polar Code is a requirement, it can be quite effective. It has been broadly welcomed. There was a session at the recent Antarctic Treaty consultative meeting, which was in Finland, on the implementation of the Polar Code to try to ensure harmonisation, because it is a goals-based standard. Therefore it can be quite subjective as to how each different flag state interprets it, so it is trying to get commonality.

It has some limitations. It doesn't, for example, apply to domestic vessels, so if you took a vessel out of Murmansk and took it all the way to Vladivostok, you would not be covered by the Polar Code. You would only be covered if you were on an international voyage, which will be going from one state to the other. There are ships in the region on domestic voyages that are not covered, so I think ideally you would have a broader framework covering all shipping.

The UK only has one vessel that requires a Polar Code clearance and certificate, which is the Sir David Attenborough. We don't necessarily have the expertise in the implementation of the Polar Code beyond that vessel, but obviously we have a great interest in making sure there is a level playing field and that ships operating in the polar regions do so safely and are built accordingly for the environment.



Q240 **Jerome Mayhew:** We have heard that there is this opportunity. Well, is it an opportunity or is it a threat? This is the basis of my next question. We have heard there is this opportunity opening up in the Arctic potentially for economic exploitation, but how would you describe the Government's approach here? There is a balance between economic activity, which we are all in favour of in principle, and environmental harm or risk of harm, which we are against, and they are in obvious tension. Where do you think the centre of the Government's view lies? Is it, on balance, pro economic activity and the exploitation of resources with as much mitigation in place as is possible or is it a precautionary principle, we are nervous about economic exploitation of the Arctic and therefore we are trying to limit it to the least possible? Where do you think we sit at the moment?

Jane Rumble: We are probably trying to strike the exact balance that you are talking about. The economic activity in the Arctic region is almost exclusively happening within an Arctic state or the jurisdiction of an Arctic state. The only area that would be outside of national jurisdiction would be the central Arctic Ocean, which is covered by the central Arctic Ocean fisheries agreement, which sets a moratorium on commercial activity for a period of time until we understand the fish stocks. There are probably only a couple of areas of the seabed that are not covered by national jurisdiction. Those areas would come under the purview of the International Seabed Authority, which is currently negotiating a regulatory framework on deep sea mining, where I think we would be very cautious in respect of such an environmentally sensitive part of the Arctic.

Q241 **Jerome Mayhew:** Where are the UK's economic interests in the Arctic, if there are any?

Jane Rumble: As we understand it, our main interest seems to be from the insurance and financial markets of London.

Jerome Mayhew: Services?

Jane Rumble: Yes, providing investment rather than having particularly British operators in the Arctic region. Often the companies will be multinational and the subsidiary based in the Arctic state will undertake the activity, so wouldn't necessarily consider itself to be a British company, as we understand it. Yes, more on the services side than on the actual doing it. I think we have one fishing vessel that operates around Svalbard, but as far as I know, I don't think we have any current hydrocarbon companies exploiting in the Arctic at this stage, although we do have interests in others that operate in the region.

Q242 **Jerome Mayhew:** We have heard about tourism and I think you have substantially answered this question to the Chair. Search and rescue comes under SOLAS and so there is a global approach to this—I am assuming that answer—but what other challenges does the rise of tourism have? In your answer, perhaps you could differentiate between



mass tourism, by which I mean large cruise liners, albeit suitable for the Arctic, and then the surprising increase of personal adventure sailing coming up into Arctic areas, which is growing very significantly. High latitude sailing is becoming much more popular at both ends. Does that raise additional concerns about oil spills or other contamination? I mentioned briefly invasive species. Perhaps you could expand on what your concerns are about that and what we might be able to do to address them.

Jane Rumble: Yes. In respect of tourism, I think the Foreign Office takes the stance that pretty much any cruise ship, wherever it is in the world, is likely to have a British national on board, but cruise ships in the Arctic are visiting Arctic states. Once they have gone into port or made a landing, they are under the jurisdiction of the Arctic state, so their rules apply. This is quite different from the Antarctic, where we authorise cruise ships to go to the Antarctic and we can set specific rules. For example, British ships need to have a buddy, they need to clearly set out what their contingencies are, which means that they need to be operating as a fleet. They need to know who to call on if they get into trouble. These requirements are not made for a ship necessarily visiting the Arctic.

There is the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators, AECO, which co-operate as a fleet, but that only really includes the expedition cruise ships. Those are the kind of smaller ones that are making landings in remote regions, as opposed to the very large cruise ships that are only going into extremely big ports that can handle them. There is a concern to ensure that the search and rescue responsibilities are as robust as they can be and that the advisory is correct. If you are going to visit Greenland, for example, you wouldn't necessarily expect that you would be immediately transported to a hospital if you had a problem, so the cruise ships themselves need to be able to handle quite a lot of their own medical emergencies, which many of them do.

The challenges of tourism in the numbers, how they visit the Arctic and the responsibilities of overwhelming indigenous peoples has to be balanced with the Arctic states would like to encourage tourism. There are pros and cons to the tourism and it is for the Arctic states to determine who they give licences to visit them.

Q243 **Jerome Mayhew:** Finally, wrapping that up, is it a case that we should back off—it is not our responsibility or even our business and we should recognise the sovereignty of the Arctic states—or should we, while recognising their sovereignty, still be at liberty to have a view and that our view is very much educated by our experience in the Antarctic, where we have, for good reasons, taken the decisions that more needs to be done and at pace?

Jane Rumble: Yes, so we definitely—

Jerome Mayhew: Sorry, just finishing off: if that is the case, what



HOUSE OF COMMONS

function do we have to persuade, encourage and so on Arctic states to go further than they currently are?

Jane Rumble: Yes, we have specific foreign office advice for Arctic visitation that we draft and feed into. It gives advice as to, “Whereabouts in the Arctic are you going? You can’t expect that you will be in proximity to hospital facilities” and so on. I think it is right that we give advice to British nationals, including those who might wish to go on single yachting trips, so they understand what they might be taking on. I think that would be reasonable for us to have a view on. Sorry, I have forgotten the second part of your question.

Q244 **Jerome Mayhew:** It is the balance between national sovereignty in Arctic countries, making their own minds up as to what their requirements should be, and us having a wider view and seeking to improve or encourage them to change those requirements.

Jane Rumble: Yes, sorry. As you say, we provide advice to British nationals. Of course there is a consular network across the Arctic, which would have to be called upon if there were British nationals in trouble, as they were with the Norwegian cruise ship, for example.

Jerome Mayhew: Or state to state.

Jane Rumble: Yes, state to state. We engaged before things changed dramatically in respect of the Arctic Council. The UK was leading a report with Iceland and Canada on the status of Arctic tourism activity and trying to map where the ships were going and where the kind of crunch points were and so on. We were using that to try to make decisions about or try to influence the kind of management of tourism. We certainly would see ourselves as having a view on it, basically.

Q245 **Barry Gardiner:** Two very brief points. First, you glossed over the International Seabed Authority, which of course has been meeting last week. You talked about a future treaty, but of course the deadline passed on Sunday 9 July. You said to my colleague that we are trying to steer a middle course between those countries who want to take the precautionary principle and respect the environment and those who want to look at economic exploitation. The truth is that Britain is one of only 14 countries in the international community that is supporting exploitation—experimental at this stage—of the seabed, isn’t it? That is hardly a middle course, would you say?

Jane Rumble: I can say from an Arctic perspective that we discuss that a lot.

Q246 **Barry Gardiner:** That was a quick response, which the Chair will be very grateful for. The other question I wanted to raise with you was you mentioned UNCLOS, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Of course UNCLOS gives the right of free passage, which we have lately seen asserted between China and Taiwan in the Taiwan Strait, and the risks associated with that and the diplomatic incident associated with that. Of



course the same question is now arising with the northern sea route and the question of whether it is to be regarded as an internal sea or, as the international community would look at it, as the high seas. What assessment has the Foreign Office done of the risks associated with asserting the right to free passage across the northern sea route?

Jane Rumble: There has been a lot of discussion about that, some of which I probably shouldn't comment on at this level. The view of the international community is that it is not necessarily high seas, but there is a right to a strait of freedom of navigation. It is slightly more complicated in the Arctic because UNCLOS has a provision in it that says that if you have ice-covered waters you are allowed to have coastal state controls. Both Canada and Russia have been asserting that, so there is a balance about the extent to where that inhibits the right of passage, but—

Q247 **Barry Gardiner:** Perhaps you could do a note to the Committee on what you can tell us about the discussions that you have been having.

Jane Rumble: Yes.

Barry Gardiner: That would be great. Thank you very much.

Chair: Ms Rumble, I think you will be pleased to hear that that is it. Thank you very much indeed. You have been hugely useful and we have covered an enormous amount of the country, some of which is only peripherally under your responsibility, so it is most kind of you not to have done less. We really are grateful; you have done a huge amount. Also, informally and outside this Committee, you are very helpful indeed to our inquiry, so thank you very much.

If you think of other things that you would have liked to have said, please do write to us and add it. We would be delighted to have that, informally or formally. The more help you can provide, the better it will be, because we want the report, when we produce it over the summer or by autumn, to be a heavyweight and widely accepted document, which I hope the polar community in general will believe to be helpful towards our cause rather than in any way difficult or harmful to it. But for now, thank you very much indeed for so kindly giving up your afternoon.