

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: The Changing Arctic, HC 842

Thursday 19 July 2018

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Mary Creagh (Chair); Mr Philip Dunne; Mr Robert Goodwill; James Gray; Caroline Lucas; Kerry McCarthy; Alex Sobel.

Questions 201-275

Witnesses

I: Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Sir Alan Duncan MP, Minister for Europe and the Americas, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Jane Rumble, Head of Polar Regions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Dominic Pattinson, Head of International Marine Policy, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Foreign and Commonwealth Office - written evidence](#) | [PDF version](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, Sir Alan Duncan MP, Jane Rumble and Dominic Pattinson.

Q201 Chair: I begin by welcoming our witnesses and visitors to this, our third and final public hearing of the inquiry into the changing Arctic. I pay particular welcome to Dr Coffey, who is returned to us after a period of absence; it is very good to see you back in your place where you belong. Thank you, Minister, for coming today. Can I ask you to introduce yourselves from my left to right for the record please?

Dominic Pattinson: My name is Dominic Pattinson and I work in DEFRA as the Head of International Marine Policy.

Dr Coffey: Thérèse Coffey, Minister for the Environment.

Sir Alan Duncan: Alan Duncan, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, and on my left is Jane Rumble, the Head of the Polar Regions Department. I am introducing her because I think we should congratulate her on her OBE in the Birthday Honours, which was for work in this very area.

Q202 Chair: Many congratulations. Jane and I spent rather a long time together at one point last year.

Sir Alan Duncan: Chilling.

Q203 Chair: We will talk about that afterwards; it was not through design.

We have heard that the Arctic is “ground zero” for climate change, and that huge environmental changes are having significant implications for the people living there and beyond. We have Arctic fires today in Sweden; we have had this unseasonably long period of warm weather and unseasonably cold weather in March. Is this a picture of the Arctic that you recognise?

Sir Alan Duncan: Perhaps I should explain my official portfolio role in this, if I may, Chair, because I know some of the questions coming are very technical and I may for that reason have to turn to officials on my left or right. As the Minister for the Polar Regions in the Foreign Office, my role is to oversee the co-ordination of UK Arctic policy in the UK’s engagement with the Arctic Council. The UK has a whole wide range of interests in the Arctic and we take a whole-of-Government approach, but there are different departmental equities in this, leading on different areas. Of course I will endeavour to reply to all your questions, but I ask you to appreciate that the questions of a more technical nature are not ones that I will necessarily be fully equipped to answer. I will endeavour.

I think we have made great strides policy-wise over the last year. Even yesterday, a report we commissioned on the State of the Polar Regions by UK and Norwegian scientists highlighted the dramatic effects taking place, which are the content of the very question you have just asked me. That



shows how we are working with our partners on this. I am fully aware of the high temperatures in the Arctic at the moment, which we will have to compare with the past; quite what the scientific significance of that is has not been made clear to me, but it may well be that Jane, who lives and breathes this every single day, wants to make some observations.

Jane Rumble: You have set out the warming trend that is very evident in the Arctic. You would struggle to get a scientist to say that it is definitely as a result of climate change, but it is definitely on the pathway that is predicted by a warming globe, and the temperatures around the Arctic now, with a sea surface temperature of 5 °C in parts of the Arctic—I think it was 28 °C at midnight last night in parts of Norway—the temperatures are abnormally high, in the same way that we are having an abnormally warm summer in the UK.

Q204 **Chair:** Does the UK see itself as having a role to play in helping Arctic communities to adapt to the environmental changes taking place? We have heard of all sorts of problems with indigenous peoples not having access to traditional hunting grounds and traditional ways of life, and different types of changes taking place at great speed around them.

Sir Alan Duncan: This is essentially a reference to the indigenous communities and the extent to which they are deleteriously affected by this. I think they are very vulnerable, and I am particularly grateful to our colleague, James Gray, not only for his chairmanship of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions, but for hosting an event in, I think, December that allowed us to hear directly from different Arctic indigenous groups. Hearing directly from them is really the best evidence. We do not get directly involved with local communities ourselves, because none of that territory belongs to the UK as such, but in our co-ordinating role we are very focused on co-ordinating with the people affected, businesses, scientists and environmentalists, to ensure that we know exactly what is going on, so that we can make and encourage the policy decisions that can best address the challenges that are definitely arising on the back of this.

Q205 **Chair:** Do you think there would be a place in the future for direct funding to help displaced communities or communities having to adapt to climate change? That is something we do in Bangladesh, for example, by building homes on stilts.

Sir Alan Duncan: You are talking to the Minister who, when in DFID, was directly responsible for a lot of our expenditure on Bangladesh on such things, but they are ODA-eligible countries and therefore they come within ODA expenditure in DFID. This would be non-ODA, and therefore, if it were coming from UK sources, it would be more difficult to fund. There are policy questions on the principle of whether or not we are sufficiently directly responsible to want to spend money on this when they might be Norwegian or whatever.

Chair: Other rich countries, essentially.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, exactly, though they are not UK citizens. We



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sometimes do come out of that box, as it were, and help where we think it is needed to champion a cause, probably not directly to fund the livelihoods of people, but certainly for policy formation and other expert advice which can help.

Q206 **Chair:** What research has the UK conducted on the impact of climate change on Arctic indigenous peoples?

Dr Coffey: I suspect if anyone would know that it would be BEIS.

Chair: We had NERC here last week and we did do a bit on that. But yes, we will chase that up with UKRI.

Q207 **James Gray:** A brief plea on a diplomatic level. Can we do something with the Canadians? It is disturbing what happened not very long ago to the Inuit in Nunavut in the north of Canada and northern Greenland. That is not our business—it clearly the business of the Government of Greenland—but some of the things happening to the Inuit because of the retreating ice are really appalling. For example, the community in the village of Grise Fjord start hunting when the ice arrives, which is normally in about September or October, but this year it arrived in February and disappeared in July, which means they cannot hunt. I take your point that it is not our job, Minister, but none the less perhaps we could raise the matter with the Canadian Government when we see a moment.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think wherever we have a strong bilateral relationship and identify an area of interest and importance we will use our diplomatic engagement to try to influence that country that work with them wherever possible. This may be a perfect such example. For instance, we fully support the role of the permanent participants of the Arctic Council, who represent the views of indigenous people, so we are absolutely in the mix there, and the Arctic Council is quite unique in providing an opportunity for local communities to express their views on the development and implementation of policies.

So there is a structure of which we are an integral part. There is no partisan national difference that causes difficulty; it is all about people working together to try to find the right outcome. It is a benign and productive climate in which we can all work together in all areas like this.

Dr Coffey: I met Catherine McKenna earlier this year—

Chair: Who is Catherine McKenna?

Dr Coffey: Sorry—she is the Minister of Environment and Climate Change in Canada. She is fully aware and passionate about helping and protecting the Inuit. I assure you that it is not that they are out of mind in any way. We were there to talk about climate change possibilities for the G7 later this year.

Q208 **Alex Sobel:** The Government's 25-year plan states that they will complete our ecologically coherent network of well managed marine protected areas while allowing marine industry to thrive. How have you



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accounted for the effects of ocean acidification in the food chain in your designation of marine protected areas?

Dr Coffey: We have been aware of ocean acidification for some time. I suggest that we have some of the leading scientists globally working in this country alongside other nations. We are looking into what we can do further. Our chief scientist has undertaken a review of what we can do next, so we will look at that carefully.

Q209 **Alex Sobel:** Because of “Blue Planet II” everybody knows about the great Pacific garbage patch, but we have a new one forming in the Barents sea. The Grantham Institute, which came to give evidence, has found that plastic from the UK reaches the Arctic Circle within two years, so our plastic is forming that garbage patch. Are we doing anything to support work against that plastic pollution, such as coastal clean-ups?

Dr Coffey: I am aware from preparing for this session of the emergence of that new plastic island or iceberg floating in the Barents sea. We are working with other countries around the world to try to do more about marine litter. We announced at the Commonwealth Summit recently more programmes, working with CEFAS, our agency, and what we can do more about Commonwealth countries and reduce the amount of litter getting into the marine environment. At the G7 this year, Premier Trudeau highlighted the plastics charter and challenged—asked—the G7 Environment Ministers to develop more with the work that we had already been doing over the last two years as the group of G7 nations. Dominic, do you want to add a bit more about whether we are particularly targeting any areas that might be relevant to what is happening in the Arctic Circle?

Dominic Pattinson: The main thing is to tackle the sources of plastic coming from the UK, and as the Minister has rightly said, we are doing that. Other than that, we are working with the International Maritime Organisation to make sure that plastics that come from shipping sources are addressed. We were encouraging them to include plastics in their Marine Environment Protection Committee earlier this year, and we will be working with them at their committee meeting next year to try to take some of the actions that we have put forward through the Commonwealth work that we are doing on plastics. So yes, we are working with Arctic States to try to address the problem.

Sir Alan Duncan: We have also worked closely with the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators, and actually we have recently commended them for their work in relation to UN Environment’s Clean Seas campaign. They have borne down on the use of single-use plastics and have also encouraged beach clean-up campaigns, so they are increasingly focused on this issue and I think that is to be welcomed.

Chair: I should hope they would be, but we have some concerns about that, which we are going to come to later in the questioning.

Q210 **Alex Sobel:** I was on the Ivory Bill Committee and I spoke in the debate—I’ll spare you my singing the narwhal song again. Although an ivory ban in relation to walruses and narwhals is not on the face of the



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Bill, David Rutley was clear that the Government would act on that. But the hunting of walrus and narwhal in particular is a source of income for indigenous people in the polar regions, so has any thought been given to work around sustainable development when that ban comes forward, and what do the Arctic Council think of the UK's consultation on expanding the Ivory Bill to animals in the polar regions?

Dr Coffey: I have no idea what the Arctic Council think; I am not aware that they have expressed any interest in that regard. In the Arctic Council, Canada, I think, is the only country that allows the commercial export of polar bear parts and products, but that is provided, intended, for Inuit subsistence hunting. I recognise that they are listed in appendix II, which means that Canada have to work on how they are going to get polar bears into a favourable conservation status.

Q211 **Chair:** Is that appendix II of CITES?

Dr Coffey: Yes. They are not in CITES appendix I, but that is where we would expect, whether it's in Canada, Alaska or parts of Russia, that action would need to be taken where it was deemed that their populations were falling significantly.

Q212 **Alex Sobel:** As the seal ban was critical to the Arctic Council's refusal to grant the EU observer status, do you anticipate pressure from Arctic countries to change the UK's seal regulation after we leave the EU?

Dr Coffey: They may try, but they won't succeed.

Q213 **Mr Goodwill:** Obviously, a lot of the media coverage of and interest in the Arctic has to do with some of the long-term climate-change-linked effects, but we have also heard there can be catastrophic shifts in the Arctic environment that can affect the UK. For example, 8,000 years ago—a relatively recent occurrence—there were undersea landslides in the Arctic that affected the UK. Will risks such as submarine landslides be included in the national risk register?

Dr Coffey: That has been considered, but because the risk is deemed to be exceptionally low, it was not deemed necessary to include it. I think the last UK slip that happened was in about 6,000 BC. Admittedly, that led to the formation of this country, when Dogger Island was done, but—

Chair: Quite a big moment.

Dr Coffey: That was a big moment, but it was some time ago. I recognise what you are saying about the challenge on climate change. It has been considered, but it has been ruled out as being unnecessary to add to the risk register.

Q214 **Mr Goodwill:** Environmental change in the Arctic is likely to cause rising sea levels and also extreme weather patterns in the UK. We have heard that roughly half the sea level rise of about 3.2 mm per year is down to land ice ending up in the sea. The other half is down to thermal expansion. Do the temperature rises happening in the arctic reflect what the UK should be preparing for in the near future, and what opportunities



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does this present for the UK to learn how it can adapt to climate change?

Dr Coffey: The Arctic has been the dominant source of global sea rises, mostly due to the meltwater from the ice sheet, particularly in Greenland, although there have been other meltwater happenings and thermal expansion. It will absolutely contribute to sea level rises along the UK coast by the end of this century. That is what the Government suggested about eight or nine years ago. At the moment, my understanding of the reports that we will publish later this year is that there is no reason why that has changed.

One thing that we do is the adaptation programme. A lot of that will involve activities to improve the UK's resilience to climate change, including continuing to defend aspects of the coastline. However, we have to be specific and do that where it is sustainable and affordable to do so. The Government have not had a policy of defending every bit of the coastline for some time. That will not change. However, we will have to continue to want to do that.

We recognise that coastal assets are normally designed at 100 to 200 year events, because while coastal surges may not be as economically bad overall as you might see with some fluvial flooding—such as in the centre of Leeds or somewhere similar—the impact on human life is considerably higher. That is one reason why we take a 100 to 200 year view on coastal assets.

Q215 **Mr Goodwill:** Specifically in terms of extreme weather events—we are probably in the middle of one at the moment in the UK, and we have had other situations when flooding has been particularly bad—to what extent are these phenomena that occur by chance every so many years, and to what extent is climate change likely to be having an impact? To what extent are changes in the Arctic, such to sea temperatures or currents and winds, relevant to what we are discussing at the moment?

Dr Coffey: I think they are relevant. That is why the last Labour Government introduced the Climate Change Act 2008. The coalition Government and now the Conservative Government have pursued that in trying to tackle, in many ways, the impact of climate change. Ultimately, that is what drives a lot of the big changes that we are seeing in these events. It might help if Dominic was to add some detail.

Mr Goodwill: Yes, particularly on Arctic amplification, in which temperature rises in the Arctic seem to be double those in the rest of the planet.

Dominic Pattinson: To be honest, I don't think there is much to add to what the Minister has already said. We are taking action to address climate change on a broader scale.

Dr Coffey: My friend Sir Alan has something to add.

Sir Alan Duncan: A lot of the answers to the questions you are asking are in "The State of the Polar Oceans 2018", which is a joint document

between us and Norway published yesterday. I confess that I have not read it all yet, but I think it covers exactly the sort of questions that you are understandably asking.

Mr Goodwill: We will certainly put that as part of the evidence package that comes in.

Dr Coffey: I understand that the second adaptation programme is due to be published today by our Department. My colleague, Lord Gardiner, is the lead Minister on that.

Q216 **Mr Goodwill:** Can I ask specifically about our shared biodiversity with the Arctic? What further steps can we take to contribute to the conservation of arctic flora and fauna—particularly migratory birds? The majority of migratory sea birds go up into Arctic reaches seasonally.

Dr Coffey: Protecting biodiversity in the Arctic area is absolutely key. An example of why that matters is that certain nutrients in the waters are key for about, I think, 17 species of whales. To be fair, the best way we feel we can help is by continuing to keep our involvement with international agreements—things like the International Whaling Commission. That is a good start—we continue to support strongly the global moratorium on commercial whaling—but there are also things like the conservation of migratory species, where we work on different activities to support the movement of such species.

We would like, through UNCLOS, to have a new implementing agreement to try to deliver universally accepted marine protected areas in the areas beyond national jurisdiction. There was big progress at the UN last year on agreeing that a new agreement would come into force, but that agreement is still being negotiated and will probably take two to three years to come forward.

Q217 **Mr Goodwill:** Is that for fishing and for oil and mineral exploration? Does it completely exclude any human activity in those areas?

Dr Coffey: No, I don't think it is about complete exclusion, but it is about having a common rulebook—that is perhaps a way of putting it.

Dominic Pattinson: The activities you would be able to do in a marine protected area would be negotiated with other countries. You tend to have certain management actions but allow certain activities where the threat to the environment is not considered to be that great.

Dr Coffey: Quite a lot of our biodiversity is also about migratory birds. The JNCC has been monitoring Arctic water bird populations for decades, as far as I am aware. We share a lot of our research and information with other countries and the international community to raise awareness, but that also helps to form policy.

Q218 **Mr Goodwill:** Would that include exceptions for indigenous populations who have traditionally engaged in some of the hunting activities that perhaps are not as socially acceptable in western Europe? And what



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about ice-breaking fleets? One of the concerns we have heard is that, with the northern sea passages being opened up, there is much more ice-breaking activity, which can have a real impact on some species. If that were not included, would that mean that many of the measures we try to put in place would not be as effective?

Dr Coffey: I don't know the answer to the latter question. I know that is causing great concern. I do not know whether Sir Alan wants to add anything from the Foreign Office Polar Regions perspective on what objectives they are seeking on things like shipping. That is not something I have been involved in.

Chair: We have a whole question on shipping.

Q219 **Mr Goodwill:** Well, perhaps we will come to that when we reach shipping. I suspect there are two different answers depending on whether we talk about north of Canada or north of Russia, which are completely different ballparks.

Dominic Pattinson: Under the convention on the conservation of migratory species, the idea is that where you identify a species that warrants protection, you introduce action plans. Those action plans apply along the migratory route of the species concerned, whether they are cetaceans or birds. There are examples of those that we already have in place. If there were new activities coming, those would need to be taken into account in setting out those actions plans.

Dr Coffey: But I expect if you wanted an agreement that every member of the Arctic circle—never mind beyond that—was going to support, there would still be protection for indigenous communities. I am giving you an honest assessment of what is likely to be the outcome.

Dominic Pattinson: The other international agreement we work through is OSPAR—the regional sea convention for the protection of the north-east Atlantic. Obviously, that has a big Arctic region, and we work very closely with the Arctic States that are members of OSPAR to put in place biodiversity measures and marine protected areas, in particular around Svalbard at the moment.

Q220 **Mr Goodwill:** Is the Russian Federation likely to be our biggest challenge in terms of getting these agreements? That is a leading question, isn't it?

Dominic Pattinson: Not within OSPAR, because they are not party to it, but elsewhere perhaps. I do not know.

Dr Coffey: After Helsinki, who knows what's possible?

Chair: Yes. They have said they would be a member now—I mean they wouldn't be a member now. We will move on to questions about Arctic governance.

James Gray: I am certain that everyone would agree that Britain has an enormous amount to gain from the Arctic, in a whole variety of ways, and an enormous amount to contribute to the Arctic. We will start from that



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presumption. These questions are really more for the Foreign Office than for DEFRA. First, may I ask you a cheeky and difficult question, Sir Alan? You have a very wide portfolio. How much of your time would you say you spend addressing Arctic issues, in percentage terms? If you can say, that is—it is a difficult question.

Sir Alan Duncan: I don't think I could ever answer that question in respect to any part of my portfolio and say that it is X per cent focused on it, because every working day involves darting around on many, many different issues. There is a difference between time and intensity of focus. You cannot measure it in those sort of quantitative ways.

James Gray: It is an unfair question, I agree.

Sir Alan Duncan: In terms of qualitative focus, I would say it has been very high. The former Foreign Secretary was interested in both the Arctic and Antarctic. With the latter, I am responsible for Argentina so there are obviously sensitivities that I have had to handle. For the former, it also geographically covers my area, because of Norway and Russia. The work that Jane and her team do is regularly brought to my attention. We are very conscious of public campaigns and public awareness of this issue. That has risen in the last two years, in a very welcome way in my view. This Committee is evidence of that, and James, you yourself are personally. I have to say it is far more than I might have expected when I first became a Foreign Office Minister.

Q221 **James Gray:** An equally cheeky question to my good friend Jane Rumble. How much of your time do you spend doing Antarctic stuff and how much do you spend doing Arctic stuff?

Jane Rumble: I might take the Minister's lead and say it kind of depends on the day and the season and what is going on. Generally speaking, as the Minister explained at the beginning, our role is more co-ordinating and representational in the Arctic, so we spend more time chairing cross-Government meetings, talking to other Government Departments and then talking to the Arctic States themselves.

In the Antarctic, we have full policy responsibility for absolutely everything. Anything that happens in Antarctica immediately comes to us, so I think by definition most of my team are gazing south. We also run the British Antarctic Territory. We oversee the South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. There are probably a smaller number of people who are put on the Arctic—

Q222 **James Gray:** That is the background. There are two excellent documents that the Foreign Office produced over the last five years on British policy towards the Arctic. To what degree do you think that our relatively quiet observer status in the Arctic Council comes from the fact that we are a bit modest about the things that we do in the Arctic? Could we not be more robust? We are a big player and we are the nearest country to the Arctic. Could we not beef up what we have said? They are both first-class reports—I am not knocking either of them—but they are a bit timid, aren't they? Could we not be a bit more robustly, fully engaged with the



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Arctic than we currently are?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think we are fully engaged, and I think the cleverness of our engagement is that it is not overly bossy and didactic. After all, we are not ourselves one of the eight Arctic States, so we don't have a territorial claim in the way that those eight states do. The governance rests primarily with them and is complemented by international agreements and treaties, in particular the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. I think the role we play is in being a very significant and, I think, highly respected participant in international organisations and fora that develop relevant policies.

It depends what you mean by robust. One does not want to be shouty and bossy, but you can be firm in defending the science and things like that. On the back of that, we have a broader international policy interest of wanting to keep the Arctic peaceful and stable, particularly as it potentially becomes more accessible and therefore faces new threats and challenges. I think that our role is highly respected. We base it on science and on the integrity of our diplomatic and foreign policy approach to the region.

Q223 **James Gray:** That is true, but all sorts of people suddenly have become observers to the Arctic Council. We have China and the Asian states. All kinds of people have suddenly declared themselves to be near-Arctic nations, largely because of the possibility of the opening up of the sea route. Are we really competing with Singapore in our influence on the Arctic Council? Surely we are a bigger player than most other observers.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think our roots are much deeper than those of many who have come a bit later. We are one of the original observer states to the Arctic Council, but we welcome the recent inclusiveness and shared working among Arctic Council members, observers and sub-groups. The more people who take a direct interest and are well intentioned in what they do—that is the key—the better. Other people's involvement can strengthen evidence-based policy making, and it enables observers to make important contributions to the work of the council.

I will just say something purely off the top of my head and speculatively. If ever there were a real issue that threatened them and became, say, a UN resolution sort of issue, the more countries that have awareness and experience and a co-operative track record on this, the better for the likes of the UN being able to protect something if ever there were a problem.

Q224 **James Gray:** All right. Does that include the Scottish Government and Parliament? They seem to be taking an extraordinarily high interest in Arctic matters. What does the Foreign Office feel about the Scots? Mightn't they take the lead in our relationship with the Arctic in the future?

Sir Alan Duncan: It is a reserved matter, but Scotland will obviously feel closer to it than Cornwall. The document "Beyond the Ice" reflects the Arctic interests of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. UK Government Departments with policy responsibility consulted the respective officials in the devolved Administrations during the development of the document.



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We recognise that Scotland enjoys a long history of shared interests, but this is primarily a UK policy area. Officials from the FCO meet officials from the Scottish Government—they have done it twice in the last 18 months—to discuss their Arctic interests. They also attended the Arctic Circle Forum, so we do involve them. There is no point in us trying to get co-operation on the Arctic among countries if we are arguing among ourselves within our own country. We will of course include Scotland in this, but it is a UK matter and a matter of central Government policy.

Q225 James Gray: My final question is on a similar matter. Should the EU become observers to the Arctic Council or not?

Sir Alan Duncan: I don't have a firm view on this. They already make an important contribution to the Arctic through large science and regional funding programmes. We want to continue to collaborate with the EU on science, research and technology. The White Paper on our departure calls for the establishment of co-operative accords on science and innovation, culture, education, development, international action, defence, research and development, and space—that sort of stuff. I have no doubt that we will want to see similar such co-operation on the Arctic. I don't think our departure will or should diminish our co-operation with the EU on this matter.

Q226 Kerry McCarthy: Apologies for not being here earlier in the session. If we are going over old ground, just tell me. We took evidence from Henry Burgess from Arctic Office of the Natural Environment Research Council. Can you say a bit about its role in developing UK Arctic policy? How do you see it from an FCO point of view?

Sir Alan Duncan: As I was saying, Ms McCarthy, some of these issues are the responsibility of BEIS, who are not here today, I am sorry to say. I will endeavour to do my best, but apologies in advance if anything is a bit scanty. The Arctic Office is funded by NERC—the Natural Environment Research Council—which is part of UK Research and Innovation, which is funded by BEIS. In that sense, it is their responsibility. The main focus of the NERC Arctic Office is supporting UK-based natural environment researchers, but a lot of the solutions to the complex problems of the Arctic are going to come through linking different disciplines, so there are increasingly developing connections with social sciences, engineering, arts and humanities, and beyond. That is the broad picture. More than that about NERC, I am not really—

Q227 Kerry McCarthy: It sounds as though it does not really feed into FCO Arctic policy.

Sir Alan Duncan: Jane can answer this. It is at the heart of everything we do, but the funding flow comes from BEIS. Perhaps Jane can add something from her experience—she may be able to improve my answer.

Jane Rumble: The Arctic Office is exceptionally well managed by Henry Burgess, who used to be my deputy, so we work very closely together.

Q228 Kerry McCarthy: But he has only half a person to support him. My next



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question was going to be whether there is scope to expand that. One and a half people is not an awful lot of people to do a pretty important job—but carry on, sorry.

Jane Rumble: We have about that level of resource, too, but he is not on his own. He co-ordinates a huge number of people across the UK academic network, including within NERC and the British Antarctic Survey—he is supported by those organisations—in the same way that we co-ordinate all the embassies across the Arctic States and across Government. His work in respect of identifying who is engaging on Arctic science and identifying some of the big projects the UK can be involved in is very much fed into “Beyond the Ice”, which has a lot of examples of science work. We do work very closely together.

Q229 **Kerry McCarthy:** But do you think expanding the office would help us do more in terms of widening Arctic research, or do you feel that it is sufficient? I appreciate you are saying it is a BEIS responsibility, but from an FCO point of view, do you feel there is scope to expand the Arctic Office?

Jane Rumble: This is a question for BEIS, really. I am sure Henry would be delighted to have a little more resource. In a broader sense, though, my personal concern is that we are very well serviced by the natural environment science side of things but we are less good at identifying the breadth of social and geopolitical science in the UK. I suppose if I was being optimistic, I would like to see the Arctic Office expand its remit, which I think it is beginning to do, but of course that comes with resource constraint. The research councils are now all within the UK Research and Innovation organisation, which brings multidisciplinary science together, and I think the Arctic will benefit from those structures coming together.

Q230 **Kerry McCarthy:** It has been suggested to us that the Arctic programme ought to be expanded to include some things that have not been researched very much, such as carbon balance, permafrost thaw and vegetation change. It sounds from what you are saying that if you were looking to expand the role of the Arctic Office, you would look outside the natural environment. I do not want to put words in your mouth, but what do you think of the suggestion that we should be looking at some of those issues, such as carbon balance, vegetation and permafrost? Do you think there would be other priorities if the office were to expand?

Jane Rumble: There are two slightly different strands here. The first is about what the UK funds in respect of science. Again, that is a question for BEIS, but under the principles of the science budget, the scientists determine what the priorities will be. The Arctic Office is not a funder; its role is to identify what science is happening. It would not be for them to determine what the priorities were. To an extent, that would be for the science community. I guess my point is more about capturing the very good social and geopolitical science that is already going on in our institutions. We do have quite a big network of people who talk to us, but I am conscious that we do not have the whole picture, whereas the Arctic



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science office does have the whole picture of the natural environment science contribution of the UK.

Q231 **Kerry McCarthy:** So you are saying more could be done in terms of feeding the social science work that is being done into informing foreign policy?

Jane Rumble: That is what I would like, but obviously it is a decision for BEIS on the basis of its priorities.

Q232 **Kerry McCarthy:** NERC did tell us that they are working with BEIS to consider almost any scenario for Arctic research funding after we leave the EU. Obviously, there is an issue about Horizon 2020—we get a lot of money from that. Is that something that you have been involved in, in terms of trying to ensure that Arctic policy remains science-driven?

Sir Alan Duncan: Sorry, I thought Jane was still going. She is the expert on this—abstruse lines of funding do not really come across my desk in this detailed way.

Jane Rumble: Basically, the answer to your question is that BEIS are very much leading on the future of science funding after we leave the EU.

Q233 **Kerry McCarthy:** But in terms of Arctic policy, obviously the scientific research that is going on in the Arctic is absolutely crucial to our foreign policy and our overall approach to the Arctic—probably more so than anywhere else in the world, I would say, because these issues of the natural environment, climate change and so on are so relevant. Do you have a role at all in terms of at least trying to make the case that this work should continue? It is pretty crucial to our role as an observer to the Arctic Council. We heard that one of the reasons that we are tolerated—“tolerated” is the wrong word, but one of the reasons we have earned our status as an observer is that we do so much scientific research that we are seen as having real input and real value. Have you made that case at all when you have spoken to BEIS about trying to continue funding such work? Or will you do so?

Jane Rumble: In terms of our personality within the Arctic, it is very clearly UK. We were one of the original observers to the Arctic Council. The EU has been coming to the Arctic Council since about 2008, I think—maybe a little bit before. If you look at the contribution of UK science, I think you’ll see that we are the fourth biggest contributor to Arctic science, in respect of volume and citations. That personality will not change. We will still have phenomenal Arctic expertise. The question comes back to where the funding will come from—

Q234 **Kerry McCarthy:** But the funding might change—that is the issue. What I am trying to say is that it is really important that the funding continues because, if not, this scientific research that we all appreciate may well be forced to drop off a little bit.

Jane Rumble: Yes. Where funding goes after we leave the EU is definitely something for the Treasury.

Sir Alan Duncan: And that affects a lot of areas, of course. In all areas of policy, so much ultimately depends on money.

Q235 **Kerry McCarthy:** So you haven't actually made representations that we should protect this funding and continue this sort of work.

Sir Alan Duncan: I have not been asked to make any such representations. Should your Committee say that we should, we will of course look very seriously at any recommendations that you make, and that may well spark some conversations in the Foreign Office, particularly as we leave the EU and some of these funding flows have to be redesigned.

Q236 **Kerry McCarthy:** Last question. We have heard that membership of the European Polar Board is critical. Will we remain a member once we leave the EU?

Sir Alan Duncan: Once again—a little caveat—this is BEIS, but the UK will continue to be a full member of the European Polar Board, as I understand it. We are represented by the British Antarctic Survey and by the Natural Environment Research Council. The European Polar Board is a voice for the European polar research community and a very high-level facilitator of co-operation between European national funding agencies and national polar institutions and research organisations. You have 19 countries represented on it, including Switzerland and Norway, so we would expect to remain a full part of it.

Q237 **Kerry McCarthy:** I thought that there were 27 members, according to my notes, but we can sort that out later.

Sir Alan Duncan: If 19 is wrong and 27 is right, or it is somewhere in between, we will of course correct it and write to you.¹

Q238 **Kerry McCarthy:** So you are saying that we will remain.

Sir Alan Duncan: My understanding is that that is the full intention, yes. That is what I am advised.

Q239 **Chair:** Can I just return to James's question about the observer status of the Arctic Council? Can you just explain why India and Switzerland have observer statuses? It seems a bit weird. You didn't want to argue about it. You said, "It's much better for it to have lots of people in." Well then why doesn't everyone just be an observer? If India can be an observer, why can't Australia?

Jane Rumble: Well, the applications for observer status are in fact higher than the number of current state observers that have been granted to the Arctic Council. I think what the Arctic Council is looking for is a significant contribution to the kind of issues that it is worrying about—for example, very large polar programmes. Switzerland has a new Swiss institution that has been doing quite a lot of work around Greenland that contributes to

¹ *Note from the witness:* '27 individuals from 19 countries, including the UK, are members of the European Polar Board'



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some of the things that the Arctic Council is looking at. India has a very active science programme, both in the north and in the south.

It is those countries that are demonstrating significant interest in the Arctic. It really comes down to those countries that recognise the importance of the polar regions, in terms of driving the whole global systems. We were talking earlier about the sea ice melting in the north. Bizarrely, due to physics that I don't want to explain, although you can sort of explain it with a balloon, what happens in the north will disproportionately affect the south, and what happens in the south will disproportionately affect the north.

Chair: We have had that explained to us by physicists, so you don't need to.

Jane Rumble: Great. That explains why countries a very long way from the Arctic are sitting up and taking notice of the changes there.

Sir Alan Duncan: The common thread in these memberships is perhaps covered by the word "science". I think that is the fair answer to your question.

Q240 **Chair:** Can I take you back to your self-criticism of not perhaps really looking at the geopolitical issues? Russia closed most of its 64 bases in the Arctic at the end of the cold war and is now steadily reopening them. I went on a NATO Parliamentary Assembly visit to the Arctic, where we heard that it is now building a year-round airstrip and sees the defence of the bastion, which is the northern Atlantic region, as absolutely critical to its national security. It is increasing its northern fleet. The UK is having a joint alpine Arctic exercises in Norway for the first time in 15 years. Are you in contact with the MoD on these big, geostrategic, geopolitical aspects, or do you operate in a kind of silo?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think across Whitehall there is awareness of this. It might be helpful if I wrote to you. I could give you quite a comprehensive answer now, but it would be quite long. This is of increasing importance because it is quite clear that Russia is investing heavily in both long and short-term Arctic operations. It has new military logistics being built in Arkhangelsk. There are going to be 500 people there and it is a 140-hectare plot. Those little facts perhaps give you a flavour of the detail to which we have been drilling down in order to understand what Russian activity is, qualitatively and quantitatively.

The Minister for the Armed Forces gave quite detailed evidence on this to the Defence Sub-Committee in January, as part of its inquiry on defence in the Arctic. In the same way that we co-ordinate, I am sure that parliamentary Committees will want to look at those overlapping areas of interest to compare notes.

Yes is the answer. We are very aware. We have got detailed understanding and are watching it very closely.

Q241 **James Gray:** The Defence Sub-Committee report on defence in the Arctic



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was signed off this morning, shortly before this meeting, and will be published on 14 August.

Sir Alan Duncan: There we have it.

Chair: I shall get a copy of that before we go. Thank you.

Sir Alan Duncan: You can publish yours on 13 August.

Chair: We are good, but I don't think we are that good. We are going to be publishing in September or October, because the Committee will be visiting at the end of August, over the bank holiday. We never sleep on this Committee.

Q242 **Caroline Lucas:** A key difference between the two strategy reports, "Adapting To Change" and "Beyond the Ice", is a shift from responsible development before to using the phrase "sustainable development". What has the different formulation made different in practice? What is done differently now?

Sir Alan Duncan: I have not personally gone into the specificity of the definitions as such. I turn to be rescued by Jane, who I am sure will help with the answer.

Jane Rumble: In the original report, we probably put the focus a bit more on responsible development. It was feedback from NGOs that said we should say "sustainable". We had a long discussion on what is the difference between "responsible" and "sustainable". Of course, there is a clear difference. We wanted to bring out that actually under responsible we sort of meant to include the whole umbrella of looking at these things from the pillars of sustainable development, so in the second report we just made that much more explicit.

Q243 **Caroline Lucas:** But what are you doing differently as a result of changing the language? Changing "responsible" to "sustainable" is one thing, but presumably the NGOs were asking you to do that with a view not just to grammatical accuracy but to changing what happens practically. What practical difference has it made?

Jane Rumble: Since the original report came out, the Arctic Council has moved on quite a lot with the focus on sustainable development. It has also set up an Arctic Economic Council. We have been trying to communicate to UK businesses that work in the Arctic the possibility of engaging with the Arctic economic forum. I have to say we have not had a lot of pick-up, but we have made it clear that that forum exists and that the focus on sustainability in the Arctic is now much clearer; all the different countries that are involved in the Arctic speak about it in a stronger way. It has manifested itself in the way that some companies have behaved, which has been widely reported—those who have moved away from Arctic activity.

Q244 **Caroline Lucas:** You have included the UN sustainable development goals specifically in "Beyond the Ice". How do you monitor the UK's performance in delivering the SDGs in an Arctic context?



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Sir Alan Duncan: That begs the question of how they apply in principle to an Arctic context. We have seen upgraded development goals over the last couple of years, compared with when I was in DfID when there were only eight, many focused on poverty. The ownership is primarily with DfID but also DEFRA. In terms of the Arctic, different Departments lead so it gets slightly complicated. In terms of monitoring actual compliance, which I suppose you are saying—

Q245 **Caroline Lucas:** Yes. Presumably, the sustainable development goals were put into “Beyond the Ice” because you had or hoped to have some leverage in promoting those goals in the context of the Arctic. In terms of measuring the success of that, I would be interested to know the criteria you would use to measure what performance is being achieved against them.

Sir Alan Duncan: We certainly start by measuring them against the rules of the relevant Arctic States and international rules. In terms of the SDGs in that mix—

Q246 **Caroline Lucas:** Would it be fair to say that not much thought has been put into this aspect of it? It feels like you are struggling slightly, if that is not too rude.

Jane Rumble: As the Minister said, the sustainable development goals are owned by the different Departments. The reason they are in there is because those Departments have highlighted—

Caroline Lucas: The sustainable development goals are absolutely meant to be mainstreamed across Government. That was supposed to be the whole thing about the SDGs—they were not owned just by DEFRA but by everyone.

Chair: The Cabinet Office has responsibility for domestic implementation.

Jane Rumble: We have highlighted probably three key ones for the Arctic: on climate change, on ocean protection and on biodiversity. We have worked very closely with DEFRA and BEIS on those.

Sir Alan Duncan: The question is how these global SDGs apply in the specific context of the Arctic. The fact is that when you ask what is done differently on the ground, the entire policy we have is essentially inspired by and consistent with the SDGs, because it is our broader climate change policy; it is biodiversity and making sure that any development does not undermine the environmental quality of the Arctic. The reason I was slightly puzzled is that they are absolutely inherent and embedded in the structure of our entire policy and everything we are doing in this area. In terms of what they actually add and change, it is slightly more difficult to say, “We built this in this way but not that in that way.”

Q247 **Caroline Lucas:** Perhaps I can move on to my next question to give an example of how it might be nice if it were to change. Looking through the “Beyond the Ice” report, page 27 says, “Even as it moves to decarbonise its economy, projections show the world will continue to rely on oil and



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gas for decades to come.” I am a little concerned about “decades” to come, but anyway, it goes on to say, “Supplying this demand will require exploration of new potential resources, with the Arctic.”

That concerns me, not least because we have heard evidence from Dr Yumashev from Cambridge that Arctic oil drilling is quite simply incompatible with the Paris Agreement and would result in “stranded assets”. That being the case, why has the UK not committed to stop exploration for oil in the Arctic, particularly given the actions of countries such as Canada and Ireland?

Jane Rumble: This is also a question for BEIS, without wanting to repeat myself too much.

Caroline Lucas: Surely, something like this must have a geopolitical broader context than simply the commercial calculation of whether to drill in this area.

Jane Rumble: We have had a lot of discussion about the climate change target and the direction on hydrocarbons, which is then balanced by the commitments that the UK and the EU have made with the extent to which the UK wishes to tell other sovereign states the extent to which they can exploit their hydrocarbon industry, and the extent to which a diversification of the accessibility of hydrocarbons feeds into things like energy security. There is a balance to be taken about explicitly stating, “You may not exploit that particular hydrocarbon,” versus bearing in mind in all decision making the commitments that we have made on climate change internationally.

Q248 **Caroline Lucas:** But there are particular dangers, as you know, about drilling in the Arctic. I was on the Environmental Audit Committee in 2012 when we did a Report called “Protecting the Arctic”. In that our cross-party Committee called for a moratorium on drilling, because there were just so many dangers in exploiting oil in that area. Although it is not likely to happen, if it were to happen the impacts are massive.

Given that there is pressure from Parliament, NGOs and others to say that, particularly now you have got sustainable development in “Beyond the Ice” and the SDGs in “Beyond the Ice” and you have cited climate change as one of the SDGs that are in “Beyond the Ice” with a particular focus, I am still not clear how you can justify—not you, but the Department—continuing to drill for oil as a principle that the UK wants to do.

Sir Alan Duncan: I fully understand and appreciate the validity of your question.

Caroline Lucas: Marvellous; how about an answer?

Sir Alan Duncan: Because as a specific issue it has never come across my desk to be put in that sort of way. That is the answer.

Caroline Lucas: That is shocking.



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Q249 **Chair:** Norway is a country whose wealth comes from oil and gas—a bit like our own; but they did a sovereign wealth fund. They have now recommended to the Norwegian Ministry of Finance that oil stocks should be removed from the benchmark index of their pension fund; so they are not going to carry oil and gas stocks, despite the money that they are investing actually coming from oil and gas. Isn't that a massive moment, when the sovereign wealth fund's pension fund is simply not investing in oil and gas, despite the fact that it has got untold, huge reserves in the Barents sea?

Sir Alan Duncan: We can go into great philosophical questions about whether anyone should invest in fossil fuels. You are talking to a former oil trader. The issue is what are the alternatives—easy alternatives. This is not really, I think, a properly targeted question for the purposes of our policy answers at the moment on this, whereas Ms Lucas's one I quite understand is.

I do not know what discussions have been held across Government about policy formation on this—what our view is. Primarily it would be an opinion. We do not own the ability to give permissions, because we are not an Arctic state.

Q250 **Caroline Lucas:** But we are on the Council, presumably—

Sir Alan Duncan: Of course. As I say, it is a perfectly legitimate question about whether we should be putting pressure on no take for oil in this region. I think in response to this I will go back and ask the questions and—

Q251 **Caroline Lucas:** Will you write to us?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes. You are not going to get an answer straight away. I can't write to you instantly as if we have had an answer overnight, because this requires a process of policy discussion which, in response to this, I am perfectly happy to take the initiative to provoke within Government.

Q252 **Caroline Lucas:** I had one last question, because you were talking about what are the alternatives. The UK is very well placed in terms of its expertise in renewable energy—particularly off-grid renewable energy. My question was how are we using that expertise in supporting the development of renewable energy capacity in the Arctic?

Dr Coffey: I think you need a BEIS Minister to answer that.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, I do not know the answer to that.

Q253 **Mr Dunne:** I have a couple of questions about shipping. We heard about the significant increase in shipping using the Arctic route over the last five years and we had some somewhat alarming evidence that some of this shipping may not be properly or adequately insured, from a financial risk point of view—but there are obviously other elements of risk that shipping brings into the waters. What assessment have either of your Departments made about uninsurable risks in the Arctic?



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Sir Alan Duncan: Again, this is not necessarily a Foreign Office responsibility as such. It is a question for the insurance industry, of course, but also the complicated law of the sea, in terms of the flagging of ships and that kind of stuff. One of the challenges for insurers is to understand and quantify the risk. Officials have engaged on this directly with the insurance sector, including giving a presentation at Lloyd's at a seminar hosted by Michael Kingston, who gave evidence to the Committee last week. I think this was in October 2016. This followed a Lloyd's of London report. So frankly it is an issue that applies absolutely to anywhere on the high seas, that you should be properly insured.

In my experience of the shipping industry, certainly for larger ships, the idea that they would not be insured was unthought of. Any contract included carriage, insurance, freight—everything. If this is a specific problem in the Arctic, which I imagine might affect small and medium-sized vessels, clearly it needs to be looked at. It is not a Foreign Office lead, but those are the elements of the question that have come across my desk.

Q254 Mr Dunne: We have heard evidence that there are increased risks to the environment from increased shipping traffic, in particular from unprotected discharges into the ocean from smaller vessels that are not covered by the Polar Code. I do not know whether DEFRA has looked at the risks from invasive species and so on.

Dr Coffey: I am not aware of work that we may have done on invasive species. The DfT is the link with the IMO. They have their anti-pollution convention, MARPOL, which is supposed to tackle a variety of issues to do with pollution generated by ships. Thanks to being the MP for Suffolk Coastal, which has the port of Felixstowe in it, I happened to meet the secretary-general of the IMO, and then we were able to meet formally to link up on this. DEFRA is now more actively engaged on their environment committee. It is very convenient, because it is just across the Thames. We do work with them to try to reduce illegal dumping of litter, and Dominic is actively involved in this, so I suggest he says some more.

Dominic Pattinson: My team is actually involved in this. This is a point I was making earlier: we have tried to raise these issues through the IMO's relevant environment committee to try to get them discussed more frequently. We recognise the increased risk of invasive species.

Dr Coffey: We were not in time for this year's big annual meeting, but we are confident it will be next year.

Q255 Mr Dunne: Are there any moves to tighten up some of the gaps in the Polar Code, such as the size of the vessels to which it applies? I think it does not apply to anything below 500 tonnes. Is there a move to have a "Polar Code 2" to pick up those holes?

Dr Coffey: I really have no idea. Transport leads on the shipping element at that level of detail.



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Sir Alan Duncan: There are gaps in it, because the Polar Code does not cover fishing vessels, yachts, super-yachts or things like that. There are undoubtedly gaps in it.

Q256 **Mr Dunne:** Is that something that we are going to try to address through our membership of the Arctic Council?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, we are supporting the development of phase 2, or something, of the Polar Code. That is an opening to raise issues exactly of this sort.

Mr Dunne: Hopefully, we will be making some recommendations.

Q257 **James Gray:** Am I right in thinking that yachts, fishing vessels and things in the Antarctic are indeed registered and controlled, in a way they presumably could be in the Arctic as well? Is my understanding correct?

Sir Alan Duncan: Jane can correct me, but my hunch is that we have far more control in the Antarctic because most of it is our sovereign waters. None of the Arctic is our sovereign waters—it is the sovereign waters of the eight Arctic States, so it is covered by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. We do have some jurisdiction over, or responsibility for, vessels if they are operated by British operators, and I imagine over British-flagged vessels. In that sense, we have some sway, but it is limited to those categories—otherwise, it is for the Arctic States. That is the difference between the Arctic and the Antarctic. With the Antarctic, so much of it is ours; with the Arctic, none of it is.

Q258 **James Gray:** Yes. What I meant, though, was that the sorts of things that happen in the Antarctic might be the sorts of things that we can bring pressure to bear on so that they come into phase 2 of the Polar Code. It does happen elsewhere in the world, and therefore—

Sir Alan Duncan: Let lessons from one feed into improvement in the other—certainly.

Q259 **Mr Dunne:** “Beyond the Ice” says that the UK is in discussions with the IMO on reducing environmental risk from things like heavy fuel oils used by ships. Will we be pushing to ban heavy fuel oils being used by ships in the Arctic, for example?

Dr Coffey: I know that we are trying to get this globally. I am not aware of specific action on the polar angle, whether Arctic or Antarctic. You will be aware that there are rules within the European Union. We have got some of the regions where there is a significantly reduced amount of sulphur, with the impact that has, but you do see boats stopping and refuelling, in effect, with higher sulphur activity. That has led a lot of our desire to see a reduction in sulphur in shipping fuel more generally around the world, not just in areas close to where people live.

Sir Alan Duncan: Sorry to butt in, but yes, from my shipping experience over the years the larger oil tankers, for instance are powered by high sulphur fuel oil—the fuel oil bunkers. In as much as vessels can be fuelled by lighter products of less danger when spilled, it is better, and obviously



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one wants to avoid any kind of large cargos of fuel oil—or crude oil, of course—because if there were a spillage it would be very, very damaging indeed. So lighter distilled or distillate products are much better for fuelling, because they present less, though still a high degree of, environmental risk.

In the Antarctic's no-fishing zones and equivalent such areas we say no heavy fuel oil, and there is a specification that defines what that means.

Q260 **Mr Dunne:** If it is 40% cheaper to travel via the north than around normal shipping routes and Russia is a major exporter of heavy fuels, there will be considerable commercial pressure on at least one of the Arctic nations to use this route increasingly if it is more accessible to them. Are we concerned about that, for the reasons you just described? Are we going to do anything about it?

Sir Alan Duncan: If this were Russian exports I imagine it would be very difficult to persuade them not to use the most efficient commercial route, but looking at the polluting risk of any cargo or any fuel has to be a very high priority for the Arctic, as it already has been for the Antarctic.

Q261 **Chair:** We have concerns about cruise ships. How are the Government ensuring that best practice standards are adhered to for tourist cruises in the Arctic, to avoid a maritime emergency?

Sir Alan Duncan: What sort of emergency are you contemplating?

Chair: A sinking ship and mass loss of life. Costa Concordia's sister ship was in Svalbard when I was in the Arctic two months ago. What could possibly go wrong?

Sir Alan Duncan: I suppose quite a lot could go wrong. I chair a cross-Whitehall committee for maritime security, although that looks more at things such as terrorist incidents rather than a ship collision or something like that. The Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators is the main trade body for this purpose, which includes engagement by what is admittedly a small number of UK tour operators, and they are obliged to act in accordance with national and international laws and regulations.

Q262 **Chair:** Are all UK operators of Arctic cruises AECO members?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes. Well, to which I would say "good". Additionally—

Q263 **Chair:** So everyone in the UK who operates a tour to the Arctic is a member of AECO. No?

Jane Rumble: If I can clarify, AECO is the organisation that brings together expedition cruise ships. That is only a tiny part of Arctic tourism—they take only about 80,000 a year, whereas we estimate that about 1 million people go to the Arctic as tourists every year.

Q264 **Chair:** I am talking about cruises, not tourism. It is about people on boats with inadequate life rafts sitting on 2° water and waiting 16 hours for a helicopter.



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Jane Rumble: The first part of the answer to that question would be the polar shipping code, which the UK has been very active in bringing forward. It provides much greater safety standards for new vessels. It requires all vessels now to have a polar water operations manual, and open lifeboats are now prohibited in polar regions. The polar shipping code is really the landmark agreement that improves the kinds of things you are talking about.

Q265 **Chair:** Would that cover the Costa Concordia sister ship in Svalbard?

Jane Rumble: Yes. That does not necessarily mean that it would be unable to operate, but the conditions that it would have to meet in order to do so would have to be signed off by its flag state. If it is going to Svalbard, it will come under Norwegian jurisdiction, so it would have to satisfy two major states.

Moving on to search and rescue, the Arctic States have agreed legally binding arrangements on search and rescue co-operation. The UK is on the border of that, so we have been supporting and engaging with that. We know that wherever a cruise ship is in the world, there is almost certainly a Brit on board, so we have also been working with our embassies in the region on the consular arrangements, ensuring that we educate people and that they know that the operator they are using is of a high standard.

AECO covers only expedition cruise ships—the ones that make landings—so we support them for their environmentally responsible approach to visiting the Arctic. But you also get big cruise ships that do not necessarily make landings in the region, and they would not necessarily be a member of AECO.

Q266 **Chair:** Only a quarter of cruise passengers to the Arctic travel with members of AECO, so the rest are not landing. How can you be confident about their sustainability practices? Is it just the Polar Code that we are relying on?

Jane Rumble: The Polar Code only really speaks to the operation of the vessel, so in a broader sense the sustainability of tourism is then a question for the Arctic States. As soon as the vessel lands its passengers or goes into port, it comes under the jurisdiction of that state, which will have its own rules for tourism.

AECO tries to bring all its vessels up to the highest standard, because these are the vessels that will go to Norway, Greenland and Canada, and they want consistency of approach. There is a whole range of different things that set out how they make a landing. Because in the Arctic you are visiting a sovereign state, they will decide where you are allowed to go, where they have their environmental restrictions, where they have national parks and so on. It is completely different from the Antarctic, where to an extent you rely on people to self-regulate.

Q267 **Chair:** When I asked the Minister whether all UK operators of Arctic cruises are AECO members—



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Sir Alan Duncan: I thought you were saying that they were, rather than asking me a question. That is why we had the misunderstanding—an interrogative needed at the end.

Q268 **Chair:** Well, there was an interrogative at the beginning, “Are all UK operators”, and so on. The answer to that is no, is it?

Jane Rumble: There are very few British operators in the Arctic. There are a lot of tour operators who sell trips to the Arctic, but maybe only one or two British companies operate those vessels.

Q269 **Chair:** We are members of the coastguard alliance, aren’t we, so our assets could be used in the event of an Arctic emergency? When I was with the coastguard, I saw how it would work, using NATO assets—such as F-16s—to locate, and then search and rescue helicopters. What was absolutely clear was that the time lag in these operations is huge, and that the adequacy of the lifeboats is simply not up to scratch. Once you get people off the ship, where are you taking them, if there is sea ice? Are those problems being thought about?

Jane Rumble: Yes. You are crossing over MoD and DfT territory, but there are resolutions under the International Maritime Organisation that recommend that vessels try to pair up with each other. As James has mentioned, in the Antarctic, where we have more control, we ask cruise ships to identify which other ships in the region they could rely on. In the Arctic that is only recommendatory, so it is up to the Arctic States, when they are welcoming these ships, whether they comply with that or not. In the vast majority of incidences, quite often it will be another cruise ship that is closest and can give an immediate rescue. The state assets, as you say, are predominantly located much further south.

Q270 **Chair:** There was actually an incident when I was there. A conscript had fallen overboard and about nine or 10 Russian fishing vessels came and helped in the search and rescue, but sadly he wasn’t found. Isn’t there a big insurance part of this, in that if military aeroplanes or oil and gas company helicopters are commandeered to come and rescue your ship, you are going to need the insurance to pay for the bill at the end of it? Are we confident that the insurance will be there and that every cruise operator has the insurance to do a mass evacuation of its 1,000 passengers?

Jane Rumble: Again, that would be a question to put to the DfT for the specifics, but it would be illegal for a vessel to travel without the right insurance. We speak quite regularly to the indemnity clubs that cover the vast majority of tonnage—they have been very involved in the polar shipping code. They had to pay, for example, for the Costa Concordia. You can ask them, but I think it runs into the billions. In terms of having insurance for ships, it is extremely high for that reason. That is part of what led Lloyd’s of London in 2012 to do its assessment of risk in the Arctic and to look at shipping-related insurance. So yes, they are cognisant of this.

Q271 **Chair:** We heard that lots of communities get all geared up when there is



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a cruise ship coming, and then suddenly the fog comes down, the seas change and the docking doesn't happen. It can be very disruptive for very small, very isolated communities who buy things in, expecting 1,000 people to come and see them, when suddenly it doesn't happen. Do you think that cruise operators in the Arctic should submit a kind of economic and social benefit report to their communities to say what they are going to bring, or is it just about the hard currency and if the weather goes bad, that is bad luck for the indigenous communities that are waiting to welcome them?

Sir Alan Duncan: To be fair, Chair, this strays so outside my ministerial responsibilities that I just do not feel equipped to answer, nor do I think it appropriate to do so as part of this inquiry.

Chair: We are talking about the people—

Sir Alan Duncan: I understand that fully. We answered an earlier question about indigenous people, but it does not quite relate to my ministerial responsibilities. I ask you, please, to appreciate that.

Q272 **James Gray:** I may be being dim, but what is the difference between AECO and IAATO? Those are Arctic shipping organisations, but can you explain briefly what they are? I think we are confusing AECO, which is about small expeditionary ships, with the organisation that looks after the big tourist ships. Is that not correct?

Jane Rumble: No. IAATO is the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators.

James Gray: What is the sister organisation?

Jane Rumble: The sister organisation is AECO, which is the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators.

James Gray: I see; so I am being dim.

Jane Rumble: Many are members of both, because the ships that operate in the Antarctic in the austral summer will come to the Arctic for the northern summer, so you get quite a lot of overlap.

James Gray: Sorry—stupid question.

Q273 **Chair:** Minister, your document "Beyond the Ice" does contain a section on safe and sustainable tourism. That is why we are asking you these questions.

Sir Alan Duncan: The document covers more than just Foreign Office responsibilities.

Jane Rumble: It is a Government document.

Q274 **Chair:** Okay. Well, we couldn't get five Ministers in the room, so we were hoping—



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Sir Alan Duncan: You have heard so much from us. We have tried to cover everything far more widely. We have done a lot of homework on this to try to satisfy what we knew would be broad-ranging questions. I apologise if we have not been able to answer them, but I stress that we have done our utmost to stray beyond our specific brief and be as helpful as we can.

Chair: We will follow up in writing with some of the issues you have said you will write to us about. We will also write to BEIS and perhaps the Department for Transport for more pointed answers to some of the questions we have not covered. Thank you very much. Have a happy recess.