



House of Commons
Environmental Audit Committee

**The UK and the
Arctic Environment:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Sixth Report of Session
2022–23**

**Second Special Report of Session
2023–24**

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Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by His Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

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Second Special Report

The Environmental Audit Committee published its Sixth Report of Session 2022–23, [The UK and the Arctic Environment](#) (HC 1141) on 13 October 2023. The Government response was received on 12 December 2023, and is appended to this report.

Appendix: Government response

1. The UK Government is grateful to the Environmental Audit Committee for their report, *The UK and the Arctic Environment*, published on 13 October 2023.

The effects of climate change on the Arctic

Recommendation 1: *We recommend that the Government acts to limit future climate change by strengthening its emissions targets and policies to meet its carbon budgets and reach net zero by 2050 at the latest, and uses its influence on a global stage to persuade other countries to implement the Paris Agreement fully.* (Paragraph 49)

Partially agree.

2. The Government is committed to delivering on net zero at home and to driving forward progress internationally to keep 1.5°C alive in this critical decade. Our 2030 target (Nationally Determined Contribution) to cut emissions by at least 68% to 1990 levels is the largest cut in emissions among major economies. We have also decarbonised faster than any major economy between 1990 and 2021 (cutting emissions by around 48%). We were the first major economy to set a net zero target in law (for 2050) and one of the few major economies to have a legally binding emissions reduction target (of 77%) for 2035 which goes some way beyond what many other countries have signed up to. We are confident in our ability to meet these targets.

3. A priority for the UK is to ensure that the climate conference, COP28, delivers an outcome that puts the world on track to keep temperature rise below 1.5°C, halving global emissions by 2030. We also need to build resilience to current and future climate impacts and halt and reverse global biodiversity loss by 2030. This year, countries must deliver on their commitments to mobilise finance for developing economies, to reach \$100bn in 2023. We welcome the OECD report 'Climate Finance Provided and Mobilised by developed countries in 2013–2021', published on 16 November, which sets out that \$89.6bn in climate finance was provided and mobilised in 2021, and that based on preliminary data the goal was likely met in 2022. COP28 comes at a crucial moment, involving the first ever Global Stocktake of progress against the Paris Agreement. It must galvanise a step change in action and ambition.

The geopolitics of a changing Arctic

Recommendation 2: *As international attention on the Arctic increases as a result of the increasing geopolitical tension due to Russia's actions and the urgency of climate change, the UK needs to be ready to bring its influence to bear in the region where appropriate. In order to do this, it is vital that there is sufficient Ministerial capacity to prioritise the UK's interests in the Arctic.* (Paragraph 80)

and

Recommendation 3: *We were concerned to hear that the Ministers with portfolios that concern the Arctic do not meet to coordinate an approach to the Arctic on a regular basis. We recommend that Ministers from the FCDO, MoD, DEFRA, DESNZ and DSIT meet at least quarterly to discuss Arctic issues and to ensure a coherent approach to the region.* (Paragraph 81)

Agree.

4. The Government's Arctic Policy Framework, Looking North, reaffirmed the UK's commitment to the Arctic region based on respect, cooperation, and appropriate leadership as the region's nearest neighbour. A Minister for the Polar Regions has been established within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to provide a clear point of focus for HMG engagement in the Arctic. This position, to which David Rutley is currently appointed, co-ordinates the engagement of relevant Ministers across government. The Minister is supported by the Head of Polar Regions Department, and a Senior Arctic Lead which is a newly established position. These officials oversee the development and implementation of the UK Government's policy towards the Arctic, including through chairing the cross-HMG Arctic network. This additional capacity serves to strengthen the UK's engagement with partners in the region and has been welcomed. The Government is looking to build on this by establishing a Ministerial group, comprising Ministers whose portfolios concern the Arctic, which would meet periodically to help further the co-ordination of Government policy.

Recommendation 4: *We ... recommend that the Government should consider recommendations that the UK should appoint a special representative or Envoy to the Arctic.* (Paragraph 82)

Disagree.

5. The UK's interests in the Arctic are long-term. We therefore consider that overall responsibility for these interests best sits with the UK's Minister for the Polar Regions within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, supported by officials from the Polar Regions Department.

Recommendation 5: *Notwithstanding the current difficulties at the Arctic Council, the FCDO should seek to increase the UK's involvement in the Arctic Council as projects begin to restart with Norway in the Chair, such as through more active participation in the working groups.* (Paragraph 123)

Agree.

6. The United Kingdom remains committed to the Arctic Council through our role as a State Observer, recognising that the Council has been the preminent intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation in the Arctic since its inception. The Government has recently committed new funding to further support our engagement with the Arctic Council through participation in its working groups.

UK research in the Arctic

Recommendation 6: *The Arctic is changing rapidly, and the UK could make a significant contribution to the world's understanding of these changes by stepping up its contribution to longer-term scientific observing systems. The Government must ensure that the UK is well positioned to contribute to these systems and commit to supporting them longterm by ensuring that there is adequate support for the UK research community to do so.* (Paragraph 150)

7. As recommendations 6 and 10 concern the matter of longer-term scientific observing systems we have responded to them together under recommendation 10, below.

Recommendation 7: *We recommend that UKRI should review how its funding structures for Arctic research can better incorporate interdisciplinary projects across the natural and social science, and use its findings from the Arctic as a case study model.* (Paragraph 159)

Partially agree.

8. UKRI is funding more inter and trans-disciplinary work across its portfolio including through, for example, the new cross research council responsive mode scheme and thematic investments such as the Building a Green Future cross-research council programme. That is a trend that is likely to increase as we better understand the importance of inter and trans-disciplinarity in solutions-orientated research.

Recommendation 8: *We support the Government's ambition to leverage additional funding sources for Arctic research. There should be more funding made available, through UKRI or other sources, to UK scientific research about the Arctic, but this should not come at the expense of the Antarctic, where equally important questions for the future of the world are being studied by scientists.* (Paragraph 176)

Partially agree.

9. UKRI/NERC balances investment in Arctic research in the same way that it does for any other geographic regions or thematic areas. Investment decisions are tensioned across the whole research portfolio to ensure that there is a balance of funding across disciplines and environmental science domains in its competitive and National Capability programmes. These decisions are influenced by a wide range of factors, including issues such as the immediacy of particular research areas, the likely impact of research, the strength of the research community, and others.

Recommendation 9: *In view of the evidence that we have heard about the rapidly intensifying changes that are occurring in the Arctic, and the potential impacts that those changes could have for the UK, we recommend that environmental change in the Arctic should feature more explicitly within UKRI's top priorities.* (Paragraph 177)

Partially agree.

10. As the UKRI lead council for environmental research, the Arctic is already a priority for NERC, and is an area which has received considerable strategic and open-call investment. UKRI/NERC is investing significantly in understanding the links between change in the Arctic and impacts in the UK. Recent major investments in the BIOPOLE and CANARI Programmes, through NERC's National Capability funding and led by the

British Antarctic Survey and the National Centre for Atmospheric Science, will focus in particular on the potential ecosystem and weather connections. According to recent analysis facilitated through the University of the Arctic, the UK currently ranks first in terms of citation impact for the largest Arctic research nations for research published between 2016–2021.

Recommendation 10: *The Government and UKRI should set out how longer-term scientific monitoring over periods of at least 10 years can be successfully supported with a longer-term funding strategy.* (Paragraph 178) (Response incorporates recommendation 6).

Partially Agree.

11. We recognise the value of having a research funding model with the right mix of long-term and short-term funding, some of which is strategically directed, some of which responds to proposals by researchers. This allows researchers to participate in long term monitoring, observations and collaborations. For example, support for long term monitoring of the marine environment, including the Arctic Ocean, is funded through NERC's long-term National Capability programme, the priorities for which are contained within the UK Sustained Scientific Observation Priorities (SSOOP) report led by the National Oceanography Centre in July 2023.

12. Strong international partnerships are also key, with many long-term ocean monitoring programmes being part of wider international collaborations. Additionally, large strategic investments by NERC/UKRI in Arctic science in recent years have had international co-funding partners, for example, the Changing Arctic Ocean Programme (2017–21) with Germany and the Canada-Inuit Nunangat-UK Arctic research programme (2021–25).

Recommendation 11: *The Minister should explore options with NERC for a voyage by the SDA to the North Pole.* (Paragraph 184)

and

Recommendation 12: *We are concerned that the time that the RRS Sir David Attenborough can spend in the Arctic is limited, and recommend that consideration is given to the provision of an additional ship for UK scientists and researchers in the Arctic.* (Paragraph 185)

Disagree.

13. The RRS Sir David Attenborough is planned to undertake its first research programme in the Arctic (southeast Greenland) in 2024. The RRS Sir David Attenborough works in the Arctic to deliver science and is deployed according to science priorities, rather than UK presence. NERC ensures that our ships are used most efficiently to deliver science and to save fuel/carbon and reduce transit times between research activities. This also includes working in partnership with other countries with research vessels exchanging ship access time to maximise research opportunities.

14. Inevitably opportunities for the RRS Sir David Attenborough will take into account the need to meet the UK's commitments in Antarctica. The average duration for a ship in

Antarctica, including transiting time, is about 8 months. Taking into account maintenance and refit, off-loading and other tasks, the total research time available for Arctic work in any given year is likely to be 45–50 days.

15. However, we should not only consider the RRS Sir David Attenborough for Arctic science; although they are not ice-strengthened, the ships operated by the National Oceanography Centre (NOC) - RRS Discovery and RRS James Cook - are able to support much Arctic and North Atlantic research (and have also supported northern Antarctic work in recent years).

16. NERC will plan future voyages to ensure the most efficient use of the RRS Sir David Attenborough, the NOC operated ships, RRS Discovery and RRS James Cook, as well as partnering with other countries to share assets, as a collective means to maximise research opportunities, foster international science collaboration and partnerships, and drive better outcomes from UK and international Arctic science.

Recommendation 13: *The UK Research Station in Ny-Ålesund is a key element of the UK's science capacity in the Arctic. It is vital for UK researchers and for the UK's scientific influence internationally. We are concerned that the operation of such a vital resource to researchers may be jeopardised by rising running costs. We urge NERC to ensure that the station receives adequate funding.* (Paragraph 195)

and

Recommendation 14: *We recommend that the station is given enhanced support by NERC to enable it to open for a longer period during the year and that researchers be encouraged to use the station during winter. NERC should give consideration to maintaining a year-round operational presence in the station.* (Paragraph 196)

Partially Agree.

17. The Government agrees that adequate funding for the NERC Arctic Research Station in Ny-Ålesund is important. The station opens when there is demand from funded research projects. Although it is typically open for periods between March and September there are no 'set' periods when it is open and closed. It can support projects at any time of the year. NERC has recently set up a Station Access Scheme to provide funding for new users/innovative use of the Station. NERC will be undertaking a mid-term review of the Station's 10-year funding agreement in 2024 which provides the opportunity to look closely at researcher demand, service provision and to identify cost-effective methods of developing the Station's impact.

Recommendation 15: *There are numerous benefits to opening an additional platform in the Arctic for UK research, not limited to the potential for deepening scientific understanding of climate change in the Arctic. We urge the Government to consider increasing the infrastructure available to UK scientists in the Arctic.* (Paragraph 197)

Partially agree.

18. There are no limits on the geographical location of infrastructure to which UKRI will provide funding. Funding is competitively available to all UK-based researchers. NERC has invested significant sums in the RRS Sir David Attenborough, the UK's polar research vessel, and also in a genuinely world-class fleet of autonomous underwater and

aerial vehicles. Increasingly this autonomous fleet – launched from ship or shore – will be the backbone of research infrastructure. The UK is also investing heavily in remote Earth observation, with a major £19.3m investment in new data infrastructure to support use of satellite-based Earth observation at the National Centre for Earth Observation.

19. Any additional dedicated Arctic infrastructure would need to be considered as part of the preparations for the next Spending Review. Increasingly the largest and most pressing research questions require international collaboration, rather than duplicating platforms. Agreements with Norway and the United States provide examples of how NERC can create synergies with other countries to increase the infrastructure available to UK-based researchers, and UK scientists frequently work in collaboration with Germany, Canada, and other Arctic nations on Arctic science projects, sharing their infrastructure.

Recommendation 16: *The Government, UKRI and NERC should explore options for further coordination, through a dedicated institute or body to provide strategic coordination of UK Arctic science.* (Paragraph 207)

Disagree.

20. The Government does not agree with this recommendation. The NERC Arctic Office – hosted by the British Antarctic Survey in Cambridge – already plays an important strategic and supporting role for Arctic research: representing the UK research community in international settings; building new international partnerships and research programmes; developing new national funding opportunities; and creating a more cohesive community. Opportunities to strengthen the role and remit of the Arctic Office may bring specific benefits. The Arctic Office has already taken action to bring together Arctic research projects with UK involvement into a single database, the UK Arctic Projects Database (www.arctic.ac.uk/research/projects-database/), and are committed to furthering its development and outreach.

21. Broader polar issues are considered by the UK Arctic and Antarctic Partnership, a community-led initiative to bring together all researchers interested in the polar regions. This meets regularly and provides an important opportunity for the community to speak collectively and directly to NERC.

Recommendation 17: *The Government should consult on a strategic national Arctic research plan, including both the natural and social sciences, with its own long-term funding, to help to understand, anticipate and respond to the changing Arctic environment and its impacts for the UK and the rest of the world.* (Paragraph 208)

and

Recommendation 18: *As part of the long-term research strategy that we recommend, the Government should include its approach to international collaboration, and how it will coordinate investment in research capability and infrastructure with like-minded countries.* (Paragraph 215)

Disagree.

22. The Government does not believe the creation of a strategic national Arctic research plan would add significant value. As the UKRI's research council for the environment, NERC invests heavily in polar infrastructure, strategic programmes and observations

and researcher-led open calls through well-established and well-known routes. The vital links between global processes and the Arctic would mean that a single Arctic plan would risk losing these important research connections. We recognise the increasing value of international collaboration and UKRI/NERC has a strong track record of creating and investing in such partnerships. It will look to coordinate investment within these existing partnerships – and create new ones – wherever there is a scientific and value for money case to do so.

Recommendation 19: *The Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Norway has been very valuable for UK Arctic science, enabling meaningful international collaboration. We strongly encourage the Government and UKRI to consider reproducing this model with other Arctic capable countries.* (Paragraph 224)

Agree.

23. Polar focussed MoUs can incentivise and support international partnerships, and can be especially useful, given the need and opportunity to consider the mutual use of polar infrastructure such as ships, aircraft and stations. They also present the ability to streamline application and assessment processes, removing ‘double jeopardy’ constraints with the analysis of potential projects. The UK has signed MoUs to facilitate scientific and Arctic collaboration with Iceland, Japan, Canada and Greenland, and will look at further opportunities to do so.

Recommendation 20: *We recommend that NERC prioritise more co-production of research with Indigenous Peoples across the Arctic. This engagement should follow the principle of the ethical and equitable engagement with Indigenous knowledge holders.* (Paragraph 225)

Agree.

24. This is already established within Government guidance for ethical engagement in the Arctic. NERC recognises the importance of Indigenous and traditional knowledge in understanding environmental, social and cultural changes, and of the need for self-determination and empowerment in research. UKRI has made a strategic investment (£8m) in this area with key Canadian funding partners to create the Canada-Inuit Nunangat-UK (CINUK) Arctic Research Programme. It puts Inuit researchers and communities at the heart of an international programme, and working together with UK and Canadian researchers it captures 13 projects and over 150 programme participants from 60 organisations. The research questions come from the community, they were part of the peer-review process, are funded researchers, will publish it and own the data. This is a major investment in a new way of doing Arctic research.

Recommendation 21: *The Arctic community is building up towards the fifth international polar year in 2032–33, which has been described as a “once in a generation opportunity” to scale up polar science. The Government and UKRI should set out its targets for that year and put forth a strategic vision of UK activities to display our world-leading contribution to Arctic science, including through our research vessels.* (Paragraph 230)

Agree.

25. The 5th International Polar Year in 2032–33 offers an important opportunity for leadership in Arctic and Antarctic science, to coalesce international commitments, skills and funding, marking a step-change in what we know about the polar regions. Planning is already underway for activity leading up to and during the International Polar Year.

Recommendation 22: *The Government should work with NERC to set out a map of knowledge exchange routes between Arctic science and policy makers, and identify areas where knowledge exchange could be strengthened.* (Paragraph 246)

Partially agree.

26. There is no one route for researchers to talk to policy and decision-makers, and we are always exploring opportunities for new or strengthened knowledge exchange. The current range of knowledge exchange routes includes the following:

- The Cross-Whitehall Arctic Network, chaired by the FCDO, with representation from other government departments, the NERC Arctic Office and others.
- Secondments and exchanges connected to the climate change COP, and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report leadership;
- Dedicated publications and events, for example through the NERC Changing Arctic Ocean Programme and its predecessor;
- The UK Arctic and Antarctic Partnership, a gathering of senior polar researchers with representation from FCDO and other Government Departments and agencies;
- UK annual Arctic Conference, open to policy and decision-makers to speak directly with researchers;
- NERC-run Knowledge Exchange Fellowships, which are open to a wider range of researchers and disciplines, including Arctic science;
- Activities through the European Polar Board of which NERC is a member, which brings together polar organisations across Europe. Part of EPB's activities is to provide advice for EC policy makers, especially on Arctic science; and
- Direct information and evidence straight into Departments – for example from the Meteorological Office to DSIT on climate change, weather and regional impacts.

Arctic resources

Recommendation 23: *The UK has a responsibility to ensure that commercial opportunities in the Arctic are guided by the principles of sustainable development and the Government should consider how the UK can use its expertise to ensure that development in the Arctic is both responsible and balanced against the risks to the environment and ecosystems of the Arctic.* (Paragraph 252)

and

Recommendation 24: ***The Government should ensure that UK businesses are supported to work in genuine partnership with Indigenous Peoples, by developing a parallel code of conduct for businesses with Arctic interests.*** (Paragraph 261)

Partially agree.

27. The Government has a clear vision for a prosperous Arctic where economic and commercial development is achieved in a way that is safe, responsible and sustainable. The UK supports businesses looking to invest in the Arctic and encourages them to engage through the Arctic Economic Council. The Council has endorsed and taken ownership of the Arctic Investment Protocol which sets out guidelines for responsible investment in the Arctic to which the Council seeks to give effect. It is important that commercial development does not damage the Arctic's natural environment or destabilised peaceful co-operation which are fundamental to the prosperity of many Arctic communities, and that the people who live in the Arctic can benefit from increasing prosperity that comes from changes in the region.

28. The UK has considerable influence in areas such as the commercial use of the Arctic Sea due to its preeminent position in maritime services, and provides training and expertise in ice breaking as well as having some ice capability in construction. Due to insurance considerations, anything above 70 degrees North will likely be uninsurable without the Protection and Indemnity clubs.

Recommendation 25: ***The Government must work with other likeminded partners to ensure that the pursuit of these economic interests do not come at the expense of harming the Arctic environment or Indigenous Peoples*** (Paragraph 270)

Agree.

29. The Government appreciates that the Arctic is, first and foremost, a home to nearly 4 million people. It is a region of vibrant and diverse communities, cultures, languages and traditions. As your report recognises, changes in the Arctic will mean new commercial opportunities and the Government is committed to working with others to ensure that increasing access to the region and its resources is managed safely, sustainably and responsibly.

Recommendation 26: ***The UK should use its leadership in Arctic research to help to fill the knowledge gaps needed to ensure that emerging opportunities in shipping are pursued sustainably. The Government should back this research with funding, such as for marine spatial planning.*** (Paragraph 277)

Partially agree.

30. The UK has played a particularly prominent role in the Arctic Council's Protection of the Marine Environment Working Group, which is focused on the protection of the Arctic marine environment from land and sea-based activities. Through this the UK has helped to frame the Polar Code (The International Maritime Organisation's International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters), and establish the Arctic Shipping Best Practice Information Forum. The Forum is focused on improving safe and environmentally sound marine operations in the Arctic including through the exchange of information and best practice on issues such as hydrography, search and rescue, communications, training,

industry guidelines and ship equipment and systems. As outlined under recommendation 5, the Government has recently committed new funding to further support our engagement with the Arctic Council through participation in its working groups, and which can respond to proposals by researchers.

Recommendation 27: *We welcome the International Maritime Organisation's decision to ban the use and carriage of heavy fuel oil by ships in the Arctic from 2024. However, the exemptions and waivers mean that the ban will only take full effect in 2029, and we are concerned that the ban as it stands will prove ineffective. As shipping increases in the Arctic, the amount of heavy fuel oil used in the Arctic will only increase unless a full ban is in place. We urge the Government to press the IMO for an earlier full adoption of this ban in 2024, and to work with them to set limits for black carbon in the Arctic.* (Paragraph 283)

Partially agree.

31. While the prohibition on the use and carriage for use of HFO in Arctic waters is due to take effect in July 2024, there are a small number of exemptions and waivers available to certain vessels which will be in place up until July 2029. The reasons these provisions were introduced included to ensure that remote Arctic communities, where transportation by sea is the only viable option, could continue to be serviced with the resources they need and for the purposes of SAR and oil spill preparedness.

32. Since the prohibition was agreed, there have been a small number of papers presented at the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) which have called for a reopening of this discussion with the goal of removing or reducing the waivers/exemptions in the prohibition. Whilst we understand the reasoning behind the proposals, the prohibition as it stands is the result of much international negotiation and the Government considers that reopening the discussion may ultimately be counterproductive (a position shared by the Arctic States when the reopening of the discussion was proposed at the IMO). This is particularly true as the geopolitical situation in the region has changed since this prohibition was negotiated.

33. The UK continues to work within the IMO to implement further environmental measures for all vessels operating in polar regions in relation to Black Carbon.

Recommendation 28: *We welcome the steps already being taken by some UK businesses to minimise their use of HFO and to transition to alternative fuels. These efforts must be accelerated as climate change opens up more shipping routes.* (Paragraph 284)

Agree

34. The UK continues to work with other International Maritime Organisation member states to implement further environmental measures for all vessels operating in polar regions and to drive forward the use of alternative fuels.

Recommendation 29: *The Government must continue to use its position at the IMO to push for the Polar Code not only to be strengthened to include a wider range of vessels, but also to be implemented and monitored effectively. The Government should ensure that all UK businesses with Arctic maritime interests and UK registered vessels visiting the Arctic region are Polar Code compliant.* (Paragraph 288)

Agree.

35. The UK implemented the Merchant Shipping (Polar Code) (Safety) Regulations 2021, which entered into force on 6 January 2022, to ensure that all UK vessels visiting the polar regions meet the necessary safety standards. There are amendments coming into force on 1 January 2026 that are applicable to fishing vessels of 24 metres in length and over, pleasure yachts of 300 gross tonnage and upwards not engaged in trade, and cargo ships of 300 gross tonnage and upwards but below 500 gross tonnage.

Recommendation 30: *Arctic fish constitutes 70% of UK seafood imports but the growth of the UK distant water fishing industry in the Arctic is dependent on international agreements. Were the Government to negotiate larger fishing quotas in the Arctic, that must take place within a sustainable level of the overall catch.* (Paragraph 299)

and

Recommendation 31: *We welcome the Government's intention to join the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement. The UK should do so without delay.* (Paragraph 300)

Agree.

36. The UK is committed to playing its role in the sustainable management of fisheries in the Arctic. The annual allocation of cod which the UK receives in the Arctic region is determined on the basis of the Total Allowable Catch, which is set in line with the scientific advice for that stock. To ensure the long-term sustainability of the region, the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA) enacted a groundbreaking 16-year ban on commercial fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean, when it came into effect in 2021. The UK was supportive of the development of the Agreement, is keen to contribute our scientific expertise and experience, and is committed to joining CAOFA at the earliest possible opportunity.

Recommendation 32: *We welcome the Government's commitment not to sponsor or support the issuing of any exploitation licences for deep-sea mining projects until there is further evidence about the potential impact and enforceable regulations are in place. However, the Government must go further and commit to a precautionary pause for deep sea mining which would be directly analogous to the precautionary pause in fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean.* (Paragraph 313)

and

Recommendation 33: *The Government must increase financial support for research into the potential consequences and mitigation strategies related to mineral extraction in the Arctic, to ensure that a sustainable business approach is employed and that adequate policies are in place to protect the Arctic region, its environment, and its inhabitants.* (Paragraph 314)

Partially agree.

37. The UK recognises the growing pressure to extract deep-sea resources to provide the minerals needed to support the green transition. The UK is concerned about the potential

impacts of mining activities on the fragile marine environment. This is why the UK announced on 30 October 2023 it supports a moratorium on the granting of exploitation licences for deep sea mining projects by the International Seabed Authority (ISA).

38. The UK is committed to not sponsoring or supporting the issuing of any exploitation licences for deep-sea mining projects unless and until there is sufficient scientific evidence to demonstrate that potential impacts on deep-sea ecosystems can be fully mitigated, and strong and enforceable environmental regulations and standards have been developed by the ISA. Such regulations and standards set a minimum standard for those to be adopted by States for areas within their national jurisdiction.

39. To support the UK's precautionary and conditional approach, the UK is committed to developing a new multi-disciplinary UK deep sea mining environmental expert network to champion UK expertise in environmental sciences, leading on filling gaps in knowledge to provide sufficient scientific evidence to fully understand the potential environmental impacts of deep-sea mining.

Recommendation 34: *The UK should work with Arctic states and other relevant bodies to co-ordinate safe and sustainable tourism in the region.* (Paragraph 328)

Partially agree.

40. This is a matter for Arctic states in their areas of jurisdiction, and the Arctic Council in relation to search and rescue and disaster preparedness response. However, the UK recognises the importance of close cooperation in respect of these issues and participates in a range of projects designed to address challenges in the Arctic and North-Atlantic region in dealing with disasters in light of the cold climate, remoteness and lack of infrastructure. This includes the need, where necessary, to be able to counter security and safety threats that will result from increased commercial activity in the region, including traffic through the Northern passages, offshore oil and gas activity, as well as cruise traffic.

41. HM Coastguard actively participates alongside other Arctic search and rescue services and cruise operators in the annual joint search and rescue event and exercise facilitated by the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) and is a member of the Search and Rescue Experts Group of the Arctic Council's Emergency Preparedness, Prevention and Response Working Group. HM Coastguard also maintains search and rescue agreements, as per the requirements of the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, 1979, and Annex 12 of the International Convention on Civil Aviation, 1944, with its Arctic neighbours (Canada, Denmark, Norway and the United States) to ensure effective cooperation in search and rescue matters.