

**Government Response to the International Relations and Defence Committee's  
Report  
'Our friends in the North: UK strategy towards the Arctic'**

1. The UK Government is grateful to the International Relations and Defence Committee for their report *Our friends in the North: UK strategy towards the Arctic* published on 29 November 2023.

**The case for scrutinising the UK's Arctic strategy:**

***Recommendation 1: The Arctic has traditionally been viewed as an area of high co-operation and low tension. The UK's long-term goal is for the region to return to this state. It is questionable whether this is achievable. As the region pivots from an area of co-operation to one of competition and potential confrontation, the UK Government needs to make sure its strategy reflects this new reality. (Paragraph 22)***

Agree.

2. The UK's Arctic Policy Framework, *Looking North*, published in February 2023, represents an evolution to the UK's approach to the Arctic at a time of heightened uncertainty and tension in the region. It recognises that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has undermined the peaceful cooperation that had characterised the Arctic Council since its inception in 1996. It also recognises that climate change impacts on the Arctic will be devastating unless action is taken to limit global warming, and the likely consequential increase in economic activity and competition in the Arctic, including from China. Notwithstanding these challenges, our long-term strategic objective remains for the Arctic to be a peaceful and stable region, characterised by cooperation, and the Framework sets out how we intend to adopt a positive and proactive approach to achieve this ambition.
3. This approach is underpinned by our engagement with our partners to contribute to ongoing critical work in the Arctic, noting the recent limited resumption of co-operation on technical and science matters within the Arctic Council under the Norwegian 'Chairship', and we stand ready to recommence participation in broader multilateral co-operation across the Arctic region when appropriate. We are also clear that we will work with Arctic partners and Allies to contest malign and destabilising behaviours and activity in the region. Our approach will remain dynamic and responsive to changes in the region and across the globe.

**The Russia challenge and deterrence in the Arctic:**

***Recommendation 2: Russian sub-threshold activity in the High North is a significant and growing threat. The UK and its allies should prepare contingency plans to detect, deter and respond to hybrid and 'grey-zone activities', and consult on how to best do this in situations when public attribution is not possible. (Paragraph 120)***

Agree

4. As set out in the 'The UK's Defence Contribution to the High North', the UK is prepared to defend our Arctic Allies and respond to aggression across the region. We will protect and, where appropriate, assert our rights against those who wish to challenge the rules-based international system and freedom of navigation, or threaten the stability of the region in other ways. We recognise the Committee's assessment of Russia's interest in the region and remain vigilant to its increased militarisation. We regularly consider how to respond to hybrid challenges in the region – bilaterally with our close partners, as well as in the JEF and NATO – and recognise that circumstances may mean that details of specific assessments of risk from hostile states cannot always be publicly shared or attributed.

**Recommendation 3: Close co-operation between the state and the private sector, which operates most subsea cables and pipelines, is key to deterring threats to critical infrastructure. The UK Government should establish partnerships for working with businesses to combat threats to critical infrastructure.** (Paragraph 121)

Partially Agree

5. The UK government works with industry to combat threats to, and improve the resilience of, subsea infrastructure. This approach can be found in the recent agreement between the UK and Norway, announced on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023, that they will develop a Green Industrial Partnership to explore new areas of collaboration including on critical national infrastructure (CNI) as we develop future energy systems, offshore wind, low emission transport (including green shipping corridors and batteries for electric vehicles), and critical minerals. During the early stages of this project, government and business interaction will be more focussed on collaborating to develop new CNI (or upgrade current capacity). The UK and Norway have also agreed to develop a strategic partnership to counter shared threats in the undersea domain, including threats to our undersea infrastructure.
6. The UK Government is also following this approach in attracting institutional investment from North America into infrastructure in the UK and is seeking to identify opportunities for industry cooperation with priority partners to develop infrastructure in third markets.

**Recommendation 4: The risk of unintentional escalation in the Arctic following an accident has risen as a result of increasing maritime activity in the region, and the sharp deterioration in relations between Russia and the West. The UK must continue to work closely with its allies to maintain good situational awareness. It should co-operate closely with Arctic allies on intelligence gathering and sharing on Russian activities in the High North.** (Paragraph 122)

Agree

7. The UK is committed to both improving our understanding of the region, how it is changing, and the activities of state and non-state actors within it, and also to working with regional Allies and partners. Allies engage regularly through the

NATO, the JEF, the Northern Group and Arctic Security Forces Roundtable to share situational awareness and align activity in the region.

***Recommendation 5: It is essential that the UK continues to train sufficiently with its NATO and Nordic allies to maintain capabilities and signal commitment to defending the region. The UK Government should continue to enhance capabilities through support for the Joint Expeditionary Force, the Northern Group and the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable. To avoid unintentional escalation, the UK and its allies should ensure their actions are predictable and there are clear contingency plans in place in the event of an incident. (Paragraph 126)***

Agree.

8. The UK remains a committed Arctic partner, as security and stability across the High North has implications for the UK and our Allies. Regular cold weather training and exercising is a key part of this commitment.
9. *The UK's Defence Contribution to the High North* commits the UK to maintain a coherent Defence posture, presence and profile in the region, including training, partnering, and operating from and in the Arctic. We have also committed to do this alongside Allies and partners in the region. We are currently expanding our cold weather training with Arctic partners. This includes periodic deployments of our new P-8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft to the region, further participation in Icelandic Air Policing and the establishment of a dedicated Littoral Response Group (North), optimised to operate alongside NATO, JEF and other partners in the High North. The Army continues to be deployed in Estonia on Operation CABRIT, training and operating during the harsh winter months, and will continue training with Sweden and Finland, as well as Norway. We work closely with Allies and partners to cohere and align activity in the region.
10. We continue to review capability requirements and opportunities with cutting edge technologies to further develop our ability to operate across the High North where appropriate. The MOD takes a scientific approach to analysing the number of platforms that it requires to meet its obligations through a series of wargames and capability audits. This analysis is reviewed annually, with the results being considered within the annual balance of investment assessment. Efforts by UK Defence to maintain communication channels with the Russian MOD also continue for the purposes of risk and escalation management.

***Recommendation 6: We are concerned that placing Finland (and Sweden) under the Brunssum Joint Force Command runs at cross-purposes to the efforts of the Nordic states to strengthen inter-operability and joint defence in the Nordic region. We call on the UK Government to assist in capacity building at JFC Norfolk so that Finland and Sweden can be placed under its command as soon as possible. In the interim, it is particularly important that NATO tests the flexibility and inter-operability between the two joint commands. (Paragraph 128)***

Agree.

11. We welcome the accession of Finland to NATO, and support swift accession of Sweden to the Alliance. Finland and Sweden operate highly capable armed forces who will strengthen NATO's Northern Flank and the Alliance more broadly. NATO is undertaking a once-in-a-generation military transformation and the UK is committed to working with Allies to provide NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe with the freedom he requires to iterate these plans for the future, including with the integration of Sweden into the Alliance. Ensuring interoperability and flexibility within NATO's Command and Control structures will help support executability of NATO's family of plans. We will work with Allies to strengthen both JFC Norfolk and JFC Brunssum, particularly as Finland and Sweden are incorporated into NATO's family of plans.

### **The Internationalisation of the Arctic**

***Recommendation 7: China has shown a strong interest in contributing to polar research and environmental protection in the region. The UK should continue to engage with China on scientific research and climate change issues as they relate to the Arctic, where possible, while remaining vigilant regarding the dual civilian-military use of some research activities. (Paragraph 160)***

Agree.

12. Where it is consistent with our national interests and our higher interest in an open and stable international order, we will engage constructively with the Chinese government, business and people – including on shared priorities in the Arctic. We will remain attentive to the dual use of certain research activities and the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) policy of military-civil fusion. Where tensions arise between protecting the UK's interests and other objectives, the Government will always put national security first.

***Recommendation 8: It is essential that the UK Government pays close attention to Sino-Russian collaboration in the Arctic. UK scenario planning should consider the possibility that China could in the future seek to establish a military presence in the Arctic. This would represent a significant strategic challenge to the West. (Paragraph 163)***

Agree.

13. The UK is monitoring closely Sino-Russian collaboration in the Arctic, especially around strengthened maritime security cooperation and cooperation in the development of new shipping routes. We remain alert to the possibility of Chinese military investment in the Arctic. The UK will continue to assess changes across the High North and will work with our partners to uphold an open and stable international order.

***Recommendation 9: As a non-Arctic state, the UK's influence in the Arctic depends on strong diplomacy and coalition-building, and it should seek to expand co-operation with other observer states on the Arctic Council on matters of shared interest. However, it should do this in a way that does not***

***undermine existing governance structures. In particular, the notion of the primacy of the Arctic states in Arctic governance should be maintained.***  
(Paragraph 174)

Partially agree.

14. The Arctic matters to the United Kingdom. We are its nearest neighbour and its climate, environment, security and prosperity are crucial to our own. As the Committee's report recognises, most of what happens in the Arctic takes place within the territory of sovereign states, most of whom are our close partners and allies. That activity falls within their national jurisdiction, and our respect for their territorial sovereignty is a key principle of the UK's engagement in, and with, the region. It is in that context that we remain committed to the Arctic Council through our role as a State Observer, and in which capacity we continue to enjoy and strengthen co-operation with the Arctic States and Permanent Participants, as well as other State and non-State Observers alike.
15. The Arctic Council has been the preeminent intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation in the Arctic since its inception. Following the transfer of the 'Chairship' of the Council to the Kingdom of Norway in May 2023, the Council has resumed limited co-operation with Russia at a scientific and technical level, by correspondence, through its Working Groups which will allow the Council to agree scientific priorities for research, and the sharing of data and research findings. This reflects the view of the seven like-minded Arctic States that it is in everyone's interest for the Council as an institution to survive and thrive in the long-term, while recognising that business-as-usual cannot continue with the current Russian regime.
16. The UK has supported this approach. It serves to facilitate continued scientific collaboration to protect the people, climate, and environment of the Arctic, while being clear that there can be no normalisation in our relationship with Russia while it threatens our allies. The Government has recently committed new funding to strengthen engagement of UK-based researchers with the Arctic Council working groups. By being a more active partner in the Working Groups, the UK can play a more influential role in the work of the Council and its impact as a whole, and this funding reflects the commitment in the UK's Arctic Policy Framework to enhance our contribution to the work of the Council.
17. The UK has a lot to offer the Arctic. For example, we have an excellent reputation for Arctic science and contributing to the global understanding of climate change, while London is a global centre for shipping and the financial expertise that underpins much of the new commercial activity in the Arctic. Alongside the Arctic Council the UK therefore plays a significant role in most of the international organisations and fora that develop and implement policies of relevance to the Arctic, such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
18. We should also recognise that if the UK seeks a greater role in Arctic governance, then it is likely that there will be other countries who consider themselves to have interests in the Arctic who will also seek a greater role for

themselves. What matters for the UK is the expertise and capabilities we have to offer: that is why our partners value the UK's contribution in the region, and that enhances our ability to influence what happens in the Arctic.

### **Prospects and impacts of growing economic activity in the Arctic:**

***Recommendation 10: The UK should continue to advocate for the prevention of unregulated fishing in the Arctic Ocean. We urge the Government to re-join the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean at the first opportunity. In the meantime, and as a signal of its commitment, the UK should make a unilateral declaration stating that it will abide by the Agreement's fishing moratorium, pending accession. In response to this report, we ask the Government to set out the steps it is taking to clarify with the Parties the Agreement's accession process and timeline for joining. (Paragraph 194)***

and

***Recommendation 11: The UK should collaborate in international fora on Arctic fisheries management to ensure the long-term sustainability of Arctic fish stocks and thus safeguard food security. (Paragraph 195)***  
Defra

Agree.

19. 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, and is keen to contribute our scientific expertise and experience. The UK is currently attending CAOFA meetings as an observer and is committed to joining the Agreement at the earliest possible opportunity. We are engaging with Parties to clarify the accession process ahead of the next Conference of Parties which will take place in South Korea in June 2024.

***Recommendation 12: Commercial maritime activity in the Arctic is likely to grow significantly in the coming decades, increasing the risk of pollution and accidents. It is vital that regulation of shipping evolves to meet this challenge. As a leading maritime nation and the headquarters of the International Maritime Organisation, the UK should take a leading role in negotiating a new Polar Code. We call on the UK Government to set out the steps it is taking to work with others, including businesses, to review the effectiveness of the Polar Code and how it should be strengthened to mitigate risks to safety and the environment. In particular, we ask the Government to provide us with a timeline for conducting its review of the Polar Code, alongside its assessment of whether cruise ships operating in Arctic waters should sail in pairs, and***

***whether this should be covered in an updated version of the Code. (Paragraph 222)***

Partially agree.

20. Increased shipping across the Arctic is not risk-free, and as such, the UK will continue to advocate for the highest possible shipping standards and adherence to the Polar Code. New technology will be required to regularly and predictably meet the challenges of operating in the Arctic.
21. The UK has played a 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 and has helped to frame the Polar Code (the IMO'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.
22. The UK also plays an active role within the IMO where negotiations to review and update the Polar Code continue in pursuit of safer and cleaner maritime activities in the polar regions. As the Committee's report highlights, the IMO has agreed the extension, to a wider range of vessels, of requirements for the safe navigation of ships operating in polar waters which the UK is currently in the process of implementing through an amendment to The Merchant Shipping (Polar Code) (Safety) Regulations 2021 (SI 2012/1401). There is no defined schedule for review of the Polar code, but it may be reviewed on any aspect, as needed, based on papers submitted to IMO by its members. In addition, our own regulations will undergo a Post Implementation Review to assess the success of the regulations, which could then be used as the basis for a paper to the IMO if it was felt the Polar Code was not meeting its aims.
23. Additionally, we support the work of the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) and its goal to manage responsible, environmentally friendly and safe tourism in the Arctic, as well as its efforts in striving to set the highest possible operating standards. But risks to safety and the environment from shipping are also a matter for the Arctic states in their areas of jurisdiction.

***Recommendation 13: Arctic shipping is concentrated in the European Arctic, in close proximity to the UK. As commercial and private shipping increases in the region, demands on the UK's maritime search and rescue capabilities are likely to grow. The UK Government should plan to invest in increased SAR capabilities to meet the predicted demand. (Paragraph 223)***

Partially agree.

24. The UK recognises the importance of close cooperation with the Arctic states and the Arctic Council in relation to search and rescue and disaster preparedness response. We participate in a range of projects, including two Horizon 2020

research 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.

25. HM Coastguard actively participates alongside 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 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.

***Recommendation 14: We recognise that Norway has a comprehensive framework in place to respond to an oil spill emergency. Nonetheless, the UK Government should continue to press for high environmental standards and the protection of the Arctic marine environment by contributing to the scientific research and through continued participation in the work of the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group at the Arctic Council. (Paragraph 231)***

Agree.

26. As set out in our response to Recommendation 12, the UK has played a prominent role in the Arctic Council's Protection of the Marine Environment Working Group (PAME), which is focused on the protection of the Arctic marine environment from land and sea-based activities. PAME has established a set of Arctic Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines and dealing with issues of resource exploration and development has remained a priority in the most recent workplan for the Working Group. Following the re-start of some Working Group projects after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the UK was pleased to continue co-leading work in PAME with the United States and WWF on the Management of Arctic Marine Oil and Gas Associated Noise. We encourage engagement of UK-based researchers and experts in PAME and across the breadth of the Arctic Council's activities.

***Recommendation 15: The UK's stated policy on protecting Arctic biodiversity and mitigating climate change requires new fossil fuel extraction in the Arctic region to be kept to a minimum. The UK can most effectively contribute to this goal by adhering to its legally binding commitments to decarbonising its economy and achieving net zero by 2050. (Paragraph 232)***

Agree.



27. The Government is committed to delivering on net zero at home and to driving forward progress internationally to keep 1.5C alive in this critical decade. The COP28 outcome held 1.5 degrees as a “North Star” and marks a key moment in efforts to get to net zero by 2050 by agreeing – globally – to transition away from fossil fuels for the first time. The UK is leading in tackling climate change. We are the first major economy to halve its emissions and we have one of the most ambitious decarbonisation targets in the world. We have achieved this whilst growing our economy by over 70% since 1990.

***Recommendation 16: The UK Government should continue to advocate for the establishment of marine protected areas, including in the Arctic. The Agreement on Biological Diversity Beyond National Jurisdictions offers the UK and its partners a unique opportunity to do the same for the high seas and the central Arctic Ocean in particular (although we recognise that it will likely be several years before the Agreement comes into force, and that the Agreement’s impact in the Arctic will be limited as long as Russia is not a party). We encourage the UK Government to ratify the treaty as soon as practicable and take the lead on establishing Arctic marine protected areas under the Agreement as soon as feasible. (Paragraph 244)***

Agree.

28. The UK was pleased to be one of the first countries to sign the Agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) at the UN on 20 September 2023. The Agreement was laid before Parliament for scrutiny on 16 October 2023. Work is underway across government departments and in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders to bring forward legislation and other measures required to translate the detailed and complex provisions of the Agreement into UK law before the Agreement can be ratified.

29. Once the Agreement has sixty parties it will enter into force and the Conference of the Parties will be able to take decisions on the establishment of Area Based Management Tools, including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. The UK will play a proactive role in preparing for the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, including consideration of potential proposals for the establishment of MPAs.

***Recommendation 17: The UK Government should promote a sustainable approach to UK investment in the Arctic, including by directing potential investors to the Arctic Investment Protocol and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (the Ruggie Principles). (Paragraph 248)***

Agree

30. 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. We welcome UK business looking to invest in the Arctic and

encourage 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 destabilise peaceful co-operation both of 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.

31. The UK government has consistently supported the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) which are widely regarded as the authoritative international framework to steer practical action by Governments and businesses worldwide on this important agenda. Implementation of the UNGPs will support access to justice and remedy for victims of business-related human rights abuses, wherever these occur, and encourage businesses to voluntarily adopt due diligence approaches to respecting human rights. In response to the UNGPs, the UK was the first State to produce a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. The UK Government is clear that it expects all UK businesses to respect human rights throughout their operations, in line with the UNGPs.

***Recommendation 18: While there are limits to the direct support the UK can provide to local communities and indigenous populations, the UK Government can and should assist by maintaining its support for the work of the Arctic Council, particularly the work of its Sustainable Development Working Group. (Paragraph 256)***

Agree.

32. The United Kingdom remains committed to the Arctic Council through our role as a State Observer, recognising that the Council has been the preeminent 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.

***Recommendation 19: The UK Government should encourage local partnerships and support UK businesses wishing to operate in the Arctic by signposting them towards local companies and business organisations. (Paragraph 262)***

Agree.

33. The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) is already promoting collaboration with local businesses for UK companies interested in the Arctic Region including by:

- planning a UK delegation to the Future Greenland 2024 conference, which will focus on Greenland's tourism, mining, and energy sectors;
- bringing UK Offshore wind companies into contact with local partners in Finland. Wind power developers are working on projects in Arctic waters at

the northern end of the Gulf of Bothnia, and collaboration with local partners is a key requirement where we can play a useful role;

- in Norway supporting UK businesses within our priority export sectors (energy, green mobility/transport, defence and security), including in the High North and the Arctic. For instance, we have been working to encourage the involvement of relevant UK industries in Norway's development of short haul electric/zero emissions flights, which requires the development of an entirely new type of infrastructure and aircraft fleet.

## **The future of co-operation and governance in the Arctic**

***Recommendation 20: ...Russia's attitude towards genuine co-operation should be carefully monitored. Russia must not be allowed to take advantage of its participation in working group activities to undermine the steps taken by the UK and others to isolate Russia diplomatically in response to the war in Ukraine. (Paragraph 280)***

and

***Recommendation 21: This will be a challenging balancing act for the UK's Arctic allies, and one which may prove difficult to sustain in the longer term as there currently appears to be no prospect of an improvement in Russia's relations with the West. The UK Government should therefore prepare for the possibility that the Arctic Council may cease to function or diminish in importance. If a new governance structure were to be established in the Arctic, the UK Government should advocate for indigenous representation that is at least equivalent to the status they currently hold within the Arctic Council. (Paragraph 281)***

and

***Recommendation 23: Supporting Arctic institutions, such as the Arctic Council, can help shield the region from attempts by others to impose a vision for the Arctic that could conflict with Western interests and those of the UK. (Paragraph 291)***

Partially agree.

34. The Council has played an important role in bringing together the Arctic States to tackle some of the most pressing issues in the region around the environment, sustainable development and emergency preparedness. In pausing their engagement with the then Russian 'Chairship' of the Arctic Council in March 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the seven like-minded Arctic States have been clear that they were not seeking to remove Russia from the Arctic Council, and that it was in everyone's interest for the Council as an institution to survive in the long-term, while recognising business-as-usual engagement cannot continue with the current Russian regime.

35. Following the transfer of the 'Chairship' to Norway there has been a limited resumption of Working Group activities, now including some with Russian

engagement, which has allowed important collaboration at a scientific level to continue without undermining wider diplomatic efforts to hold Russia accountable for its actions. The UK has fully supported the Norwegian 'Chairship' in this regard and will continue to monitor progress and Russian involvement closely. In line with this the UK is proactively supporting UK-based researcher engagement with the Arctic Council working groups alongside continuing our direct collaboration with Arctic States and State Observers on a wide range of research programmes. Ensuring the recognition and incorporation of indigenous knowledge in these processes is vitally important.

***Recommendation 22: The UK Government can help strengthen Arctic governance by continuing to work with its partners to uphold the rules and obligations set out in UNCLOS. (Paragraph 290).***

Agree.

36. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides the legal framework for the exercise of the rights and responsibilities of coastal states and for regulating the various uses of Arctic waters. The UK is actively engaged in UNCLOS and the Government set out in the Integrated Review Refresh 2023 that the UK will maintain an active role in upholding freedom of navigation and reinforcing the centrality of UNCLOS in the governance of the maritime domain.

***Recommendation 24: The UK is a world leader in polar science and this provides a strong platform for legitimising our involvement and exerting soft power in the region. The UK Government should continue to support Arctic science and ensure that its funding is appropriately prioritised. (Paragraph 297).***

Agree.

37. As set out in response to earlier questions, the United Kingdom remains committed to the Arctic Council through our role as a State Observer, recognising that the Council has been the preeminent 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.

38. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)/National Environment Research Council (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 many others.

***Recommendation 25: Initiatives like the Canada-Inuit Nunangat-UK Arctic Research Programme, which engages directly with indigenous peoples on***

**scientific research, have been well received. Building on this initiative, the UK Government should consider establishing similar programmes with other Arctic indigenous groups. (Paragraph 307).**

and

**Recommendation 26: The UK Government should also consider increasing support for (1) the study and protection of the languages of Arctic indigenous peoples, and (2) Arctic social science research to better understand and respond to the impact that climate, development and geopolitical changes are having on Arctic indigenous peoples. (Paragraph 308).**

Agree.

39. Co-production of research with Indigenous People 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.

40. UKRI has made a strategic investment (£8m) in this area with key Canadian funding partners to create the CINUK Arctic Research Programme. It puts Inuit researchers and communities at the heart of an international programme, working together with UK and Canadian researchers:

- 13 projects
- 150+ programme participants
- 60 organisations.

41. The research questions come from the research community, they were part of the peer-review process, are funded researchers, and will publish it and own the data. This is a major investment in a new way of doing Arctic research.

**Recommendation 27: At the same time, the UK needs to prepare for the potential for significant change in the Arctic. The Arctic will remain a key strategic priority for Russia, and the UK needs to be able to play its part in guaranteeing the security of Finland (and Sweden) within the NATO Alliance. There is a high likelihood that the UK Government will need to give greater attention to the region in the future. In particular, it should consider whether it has invested sufficiently in relevant military assets to meet future as well as current deterrence needs. (Paragraph 315)**

Agree.

42. The UK is committed to our ability to project assets into the North Atlantic and High North. This remains an important part of UK national defence and NATO regional plans. The UK has the capability to project a variety of assets in the High North, dependent on the location, season, and threat, including Littoral capabilities. We have invested in a new generation of Anti-Submarine Warfare frigates and support shipping, enabling us to project UK force into the High North, and ensuring our freedom to operate in the North Atlantic.

43. The UK will continue to review capability requirements in response to regional changes and the UK's role and responsibilities to support defence and security of our Allies. We are committed to developing sustainable, modernised, and proportionate Defence capability for the region, including through investment in Research and Development.

***Recommendation 28: We note that during our visit to Norway and Finland, Arctic stakeholders told us that there was limited UK ministerial participation in Arctic multilateral meetings, whereas ministers from the Scottish Government regularly attended. We call on the Government to increase the participation of UK Government ministers at Arctic multilateral meetings. (Paragraph 317)***

Agree.

44. 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. David Rutley MP has been appointed to this role and is establishing a Ministerial group, comprising Ministers whose portfolios concern the Arctic, to assist with the co-ordination of Arctic policy and associated representation across the UK's various Arctic interests. Ministerial participation is anticipated at forthcoming international Arctic meetings including Andrew Griffith MP, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, at *Arctic Frontiers* in Tromsø in January 2024 later this month, where he will highlight how UK science and technology is helping to support the safe and sustainable development of the Arctic, and Minister Rutley at *Arctic Encounter* in Anchorage in April, to highlight UK Arctic interests and engagement.

***Recommendation 29: The Arctic affects a range of UK interests, from security to energy and climate change. This requires a cross-government and multi-disciplinary approach. The need for effective cross-governmental working will increase as the Arctic opens up to greater maritime activity and the security challenges in the region grow more complex. (Paragraph 318)***

Agree.

45. As set out in the response to recommendation 28 the Government has committed to establishing a new Ministerial group, comprising Ministers whose portfolios concern the Arctic, to meet periodically to help further the co-ordination of Government policy. The Minister is supported by the Head of Polar Regions Department, and a newly established Senior Arctic Lead. These officials oversee the development and implementation of UK Government policy towards the Arctic, including through chairing the cross-HMG Arctic network. Together these efforts seek to ensure more effective cross-government join up on Arctic policy matters.

***Recommendation 30: We reiterate the recommendation of previous inquiries that the UK should establish the position of Arctic Ambassador or Arctic Envoy, who would assist the Minister for the Polar Regions in co-ordinating a***

***cross-government approach to the Arctic. This appointment would send a strong signal regarding the UK's commitment to the region. (Paragraph 319)***

Disagree.

46. 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.