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DESIGNING A REGIONAL SEAS PROGRAM FOR THE ARCTIC OCEAN: LEGAL, SCIENTIFIC AND OBSERVATIONAL SUPPORT

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Arctic Ocean Stewardship is one of three proposed pillars of the US Arctic Council Chairmanship 2015-2017, when the US may launch negotiation of a Regional Seas Program for the Arctic, to “serve as a mechanism to coordinate and enhance scientific research and potentially to manage increasing human activity in the Arctic Ocean.” Regional Seas Agreements (RSAs) exist for over a dozen of the world’s marine regions but not yet for the Arctic. Legally binding conventions form the basis for many RSAs, which rely on science input to help member states fulfill their obligations to monitor and assess the state of the marine environment in their region.

This presentation will analyze how designing an Arctic Ocean RSA presents a prime opportunity to better coordinate observational, monitoring and assessment science from around the Arctic, for use in policy and management decisions. It proposes a scientific advisory body to the Arctic RSA, not to create a new science body but to be a forum for existing Arctic and ocean science groups to share information and advise Arctic Council members, Permanent Participants and Observer states. The advisory body could draw on the work of IASC, the ocean science organizations ICES and PICES and the Sustained Arctic Observing Network (SAON).

Other RSAs offer good models for promoting ocean science and basing decisions on it. The North-East Atlantic and the Baltic are relevant models and supported by legally binding agreements known respectively as the OSPAR and HELCOM Conventions. OSPAR, to which all five of the Scandinavian Arctic States are party, includes clear environmental conservation goals and mandates, and covers a significant portion of the Arctic Ocean. HELCOM activity includes monitoring and evaluating environmental indicators.

OSPAR and HELCOM cooperate on a range of scientific matters including biodiversity indicators, Marine Spatial Planning, Marine Protected Areas, and Ecosystem Based Management. Such inter-treaty cooperation offers structures with which an Arctic RSA could network and substantive areas for scientific cooperation to inform Arctic Ocean policy around the North. Monitoring protocols for marine pollution under OSPAR’s Joint Assessment and Monitoring Program (JAMP) could serve as best practices for Arctic RSA members.

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