

Fragile Arctic must be protected

Written by Sirpa Pietikäinen on 9 July 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

An Arctic environmental impact assessment is urgently needed, says Sirpa Pietikäinen.



Sirpa Pietikäinen | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

Climate change is affecting polar areas faster than anywhere else. The impact of global warming in the Arctic has been more than twice the global average - and the pace is accelerating.

Climate change in the Arctic is felt in Europe in many ways. Rising temperatures have an impact on the weather and sea levels in Europe, which in turn have an effect on food safety.

Climate change and the resulting melting of the Northeast Passage are increasing the pressure for navigation and resource extraction in the Arctic.

RELATED CONTENT

- [Jørn Dohrmann: EU Arctic policy requires a soft, objective approach](#) [1]
 - [Dan Costello: The Arctic's future is both bright and sustainable](#) [2]
 - [Urmas Paet: EU must take Arctic risks seriously](#) [3]
-

Growing activity in this fragile zone increases environmental hazards and accelerates climate change. It also has the potential to increase geopolitical tension.

It is estimated that the Arctic has 13 and 30 per cent of the world's oil and gas resources respectively.

Due to the overfishing in other parts of the world, interest in the Arctic fisheries is also growing. The Arctic is being dragged into the never-ending race for resources. Yet the Arctic is an important spawning and larval ground for many fish species. Disturbances in these areas affect the whole ecosystems and fish populations globally.

The Paris agreement aims to cap global warming at least below two degrees. If we want to reach the global target, it is argued that we would need to leave 49 per cent of gas and 33 per cent of oil reserves unused.

Given that temperatures in the Arctic are rising twice as fast as anywhere else and in some places, they have already increased by over two degrees compared to the average of past 50 years. This means that the natural resources in the Arctic need to be protected.

This is particularly important since the Arctic is so fragile. Its ecosystem, including its flora and fauna, is extremely delicate with long recovery times - if it is able to recover at all. Negative environmental effects are often cumulative and permanent, especially so in the Arctic.

Additionally, the region's natural processes are more fragile. If the tree line rises, it is almost impossible to stop it never mind reverse it. Recovery is weaker.

The combined effects and interdependency are stronger, as are the multiplier effects. Climate change, biodiversity loss and melting of the ice accelerate each other. Given this, it is easy to cause permanent damage in the Arctic.

This is why the Arctic should be protected from natural resource extraction and the environmental risks should be minimised. At the least, the environment and the biodiversity should be protected through international agreements. Furthermore, oil drilling and risky natural resource extraction should be suspended.

The unique characteristics and the value of the Arctic require a specific Arctic environmental impact assessment. This is not a new idea; Finland has been promoting it since 1994. Parliament supports the idea, and the EU should now take the lead. The Arctic Council is also working on it, although its iteration would only be voluntary.

The Arctic environmental impact assessment should take into account the specific features of Arctic nature: longer recovery times, greater interdependence of ecosystems and particular vulnerability.

Products and raw materials available on the EU market need to have undergone this impact assessment. This would deliver a positive effect on the Arctic environment and create an incentive for Russia to commit to stricter environmental permits.

In addition to environmental considerations, indigenous people's rights should be taken into account in the environmental impact assessments and in all Arctic decision-making.

The EU needs to take on a bigger role in the Arctic, with a high-profile policy, since some of its member states - Denmark, Finland and Sweden - are Arctic. Many EU policies already touch on the Arctic, for example fishing quotas and space policy. As well as the three arctic states, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, France and Poland also have their own Arctic strategies.

There are international agreements on the region, but national engagement varies, which limits their influence. The Arctic marine areas are not protected.

The world's polar regions are very similar in many ways. Both have unique ecosystems and effects on the atmosphere. We need to make the Arctic common heritage, like the Antarctic - an area for peace and cooperation.

About the author

Sirpa Pietikäinen (EPP, FI) is Parliament's rapporteur on an integrated European Union policy for the Arctic

Tags

[Environment](#) [4]

[Foreign Affairs](#) [5]

Categories

[Defence and Security](#) [6]

[Environment](#) [7]

[International Relations](#) [8]



THE PARLIAMENT 
POLITICS, POLICY AND PEOPLE **MAGAZINE**

The

Parliament Magazine is a Dods Group plc title

Site Sections

- [Home](#)
- [Content](#)
- [Policy](#)
- [Magazines](#)
- [PM+](#)
- [Thought Leader](#)
- [EU Elections 2019](#)
- [Editorial Calendar](#)
- [Policy Events](#)
- [Event Coverage](#)

- [MEP Awards 2019](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Services

[Dods PeopleDods](#)
[MonitoringDods](#)
[ResearchDods](#)
[EventsDods](#)
[Training](#)

Media & publishing titles

[Politics HomeThe](#)
[HouseThe](#)
[Parliament](#)
[MagazineHolyrood](#)
[Total PoliticsPublic](#)
[Affairs NewsCivil](#)
[Service](#)
[World](#)
[PublicTechnology](#)
[Training](#)
[JournalDods](#)
[Parliamentary](#)
[CompanionVacher's](#)
[Quarterly The](#)
[European Union and](#)
[Public Affairs](#)
[Directory](#)

Dods events

[Westminster](#)
[BriefingDigital](#)
[Health & Care](#)
[ScotlandMEP](#)
[AwardsThe Skills](#)
[SummitScottish](#)
[Public Service](#)
[AwardsPublic Sector](#)
[Procurement](#)
[SummitPublic](#)
[Sector ICT](#)
[SummitCyber](#)
[Security](#)
[SummitCyber](#)
[Security](#)
[2017Training](#)
[Journal Awards](#)

Partnership events

[The Health and
Care Innovation
ExpoCivil Service
LiveCivil Service
AwardsChief
Nursing Officer for
England's
SummitWomen into
LeadershipThe
Youth Justice
ConventionSocitm
Spring
ConferenceNHSCC
Annual Members'
EventDods at Party
Conference](#)

[Privacy PolicyTerms & ConditionsAdvertisingSponsorship Subscriptions](#)

Source URL: <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/fragile-arctic-must-be-protected>

Links

- [1] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/eu-arctic-policy-requires-soft-objective-approach>
- [2] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/arctics-future-both-bright-and-sustainable>
- [3] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/eu-must-take-arctic-risks-seriously>
- [4] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/environment>
- [5] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/foreign-affairs>
- [6] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/defence-and-security>
- [7] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/environment>
- [8] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/international-relations>