

EU and Arctic partners enter historic agreement to prevent unregulated fishing in high seas - Frequently Asked Questions

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[1]

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What is the Arctic region? While various definitions for the Arctic exist, we consider the notion “Arctic region” to cover the area around the North Pole, north of the Arctic Circle (latitude 66 degrees, 32 minutes North).

It includes the Arctic Ocean and territories of the eight Arctic States: Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States of America.

The Agreement itself covers the high seas portion of the Central Arctic Ocean.

What is the Agreement about?

The Agreement will prevent unregulated commercial fishing in the high seas portion of the central Arctic Ocean, an area that is roughly 2.8 million square kilometres in size: about the size of the Mediterranean Sea. Commercial fishing has never been known to occur in this area, nor is it likely to occur in the near future. However, given the changing conditions of the Arctic Ocean, the Agreement was developed in accordance with the precautionary approach to fisheries management.

Under the Agreement, the Parties have agreed not to engage in commercial fishing activities in the high seas portion of the Central Arctic Ocean for an initial period of 16 years after the Agreement enters into force. This period can be extended automatically every five years, unless one Party objects.

The Agreement covers fish, molluscs and crustaceans - except those belonging to sedentary species, which are defined in Article 77 of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea as “organisms which, at the harvestable stage, either are immobile on or under the seabed or are unable to move except in constant physical contact with the seabed or the subsoil”.

The Agreement will establish and operate a Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring with the aim of improving the understanding of the ecosystems of this area and, in particular, of determining whether fish stocks might exist in this area that could be harvested on a sustainable basis.

On the basis of the science provided through the Joint Program, the Agreement envisions the possibility that one or more additional regional fisheries management organizations or arrangements may be established for this area in the future.

What are Regional Fisheries Management Organisations or Arrangements?

Regional Fisheries Management Organisations or Arrangements (RFMOs/RFMAs) are international organisations formed by countries with fishing interests in an area. Some of them manage all the fish stocks found in a specific area, while others focus on particular highly-migratory species, notably tuna, throughout vast geographical areas.

The organisations are open both to countries in the region (“coastal states”) and countries with interests in the fisheries concerned. While some RFMOs have a purely advisory role, most have management powers to set catch and fishing effort limits, technical measures, and control obligations. The EU, represented by the Commission, currently plays an active role in [six tuna organisations and 11 non-tuna organisation](#) [2].

Who are the Parties to the Agreement?

The Parties are Canada, the People’s Republic of China, the Kingdom of Denmark in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland, the European Union, Iceland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Kingdom of Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States of America.

These Parties both have a fishing interest in the area concerned and have the technical capacity to do so.

Can other Parties join the Agreement?

Yes, after the entry into force of this Agreement, the Parties may invite by consensus other States with a real interest to accede.

What was the process behind the Agreement?

On an initiative by the United States, the Agreement was negotiated over six rounds, including one exploratory meeting, held between December 2015 and November 2017. All Parties participated in these meetings. As the European Union speaks with one voice on the conservation of marine biological resources under the common fisheries policy (Art 3 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU), the European Commission negotiated in this process on behalf of the EU Member States.

What is the next step for this Agreement?

The Agreement will only enter into force if all ten Parties have ratified the Agreement with their respective legislative branches.

In the European Union, the Agreement will be concluded by the Council (EU Member States), acting by a qualified majority and after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament.

After the entry into force of the Agreement, a Meeting of the Parties is to take place every two years in order to review and implement the agreement.

[Text to the Agreement](#) [3]

[More Frequently Asked Questions regarding the EU and the Arctic region](#) [4]

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