



Riksrevisjonen

Office of the Auditor General of Norway

Office of the Auditor General's investigation of the authorities' work on the Arctic Council

Document 3:3 (2014-2015)

Delivered to the Storting 12/17/2014

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Summary

Background and objective of the audit

The Arctic Council was established in 1996 to promote cooperation between the Arctic states and indigenous organisations, particularly within sustainable development and environmental protection. The Arctic is one of the last major areas of unspoiled nature, but it is exposed to environmental impact and deglaciation. Climate change is making the Arctic more accessible and is opening up increased economic activity. At the same time, this is amplifying the environmental challenges. The Arctic Council is therefore going to become an even more important cooperation forum in the years to come.

The objective of this investigation has been to assess the Norwegian authorities' work with the Arctic Council and to elucidate how the Arctic Council organises and finances its work. The investigation is the Norwegian contribution to a multilateral audit of the member states' work on the Arctic Council.

Findings and recommendations

Has strengthened cooperation and increased knowledge:

The Arctic Council has helped strengthen cooperation in the Arctic and increase knowledge – particularly concerning the environment and climate change.

The Council has obtained considerable knowledge that contributes to a common understanding of the challenges in the Arctic and the measures that should be implemented.

While the Council's recommendations are not binding under international law, it is, in the opinion of the Office of the Auditor General (OAG), important that the Arctic states can collectively demonstrate that they take responsibility for ensuring sustainable development in the Arctic.

Better management and organisation can provide greater efficiency:

The organisation of the Arctic Council is impractical and management of the work is deficient – in terms of priorities, financing and reporting.

The Council's working groups function differently with regard to mandate, activities and achievement and have partly overlapping functions. The OAG believes that the Arctic Council needs greater prioritisation, more predictable financing and that the Council should increasingly steer the technical and financial resources towards long-term and specific goals.

- The OAG recommends that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs step up efforts to make the Arctic Council a more efficient body with emphasis on better management, organisation, financing and reporting.

Measures to improve participation of indigenous peoples:

The importance of involving indigenous peoples is clearly expressed in the Arctic Council, but their participation in the Council varies due to lack of resources, both financial and in terms of available expertise and personnel.

Better coordination and follow-up of the Norwegian authorities' work with the Arctic Council:

In addition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the responsible ministry, a large part of the Council's work has been under the Ministry of Climate and Environment's area of responsibility. Other relevant ministries have not been equally involved. Other specialist authorities have a somewhat unclear role and function, and there is no standard practice for gaining an overview of how recommendations are followed up, or if they have already been incorporated in Norwegian public administration.

- The OAG recommends that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs better facilitate coordination and interaction in the work in the Arctic Council with the relevant sector ministries.
- The OAG recommends that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiate measures so that all relevant ministries increasingly find work with the Arctic Council expedient, both to make use of the Arctic Council's work and to contribute relevant expertise in relevant areas.

Definitions of the Arctic

There is no singular definition of the Arctic. In Norway, the political definition is the areas north of the Arctic Circle. The Arctic Council's working groups can define the geographical area covered by their work.

Ministry/ministries:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Modified: 5/6/2015 10:08 AM
