

1.106 Protection of the Arctic Ocean

RECALLING Recommendation 19.97 of the 19th Session of the IUCN General Assembly urging Arctic nations to apply environmentally protective conventions in the Arctic;

NOTING that this Recommendation did not specifically mention the need to apply the MARPOL Convention (International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973/78), nor UNCLOS (the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982) in the Arctic Ocean;

AWARE of interest in expanding shipments of oil by sea in that ocean and of opening up a permanent Northern Sea Route;

WELCOMING efforts underway through the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy to determine present and future ship traffic in the Arctic and its effect on the marine environment;

CONCERNED with the rising level of discharges of oil through chronic leaks and operational releases, as well as spills, into that sensitive marine environment;

BEARING IN MIND that the Arctic environment is already suffering from exposure to mounting burdens of pollution from other sources, such as organochlorines and anti-fouling agents, with adverse impacts upon resident and migratory species and Arctic people;

GRATIFIED that the eight nations of the Arctic region are documenting the risks posed by pollution in the Arctic through the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy process;

CONCERNED about the sensitive nature of the zone of seasonally open water surrounding the Arctic ice pack where life abounds (the so-called “Ring of Life”) and the critical role of ice-edge habitats in the biological productivity of the Arctic;

REALIZING that special steps must be taken to minimize risks to these critical habitats from shipping;

The World Conservation Congress at its 1st Session in Montreal, Canada, 14–23 October 1996:

1. URGES the Arctic States party to MARPOL to take steps as a matter of priority to determine whether it is appropriate to designate, under the relevant criteria, the “Ring of Life” zone in the Arctic Ocean as a Special Area under Annexes I, II and V, so as to provide stricter limitations on discharges;
2. ENCOURAGES Arctic States to take steps through consultations in the Arctic Council to determine whether it is appropriate under Guidelines of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to designate “Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas” (for example, specifying mandatory routes and areas to be avoided) in ecologically significant areas of the Arctic Ocean which are vulnerable to damage by maritime activities so as to supplement the effect of designating Special Areas and thereby provide additional levels of protection;
3. RECOMMENDS to Arctic States that they use their authority under UNCLOS (Art. 211(6) and Art. 234) to prevent vessel source pollution in their Exclusive Economic Zones, including ice-covered areas, and that they cooperate with IMO in so doing;
4. REQUESTS the Director General to help implement this Recommendation through the interdisciplinary Arctic action plan called for under Resolution 1.7 of this Congress.

Note. This Recommendation was adopted by consensus. The delegations of the State members Norway and United States indicated that had there been a vote they would have voted against.