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2022 United Nations Ocean Conference Side Event

Establishing the International Arctic Marine Sanctuary

Tuesday, June 28, 2022, Virtual

Organized by: Oasis Earth, The Coastal Coalition, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

Background on the event:

The proposed *International Arctic Marine Sanctuary* would protect all Arctic Ocean waters from commercial or military activities, and is proposed as an Arctic Ocean Treaty to all U.N. members. This online Side Event presented spectacular photography of the Arctic Ocean to highlight the unique place, the threats, and the solutions urgently necessary to protect this remarkable ocean region, in particular the *International Arctic Marine Sanctuary*. This was the only UNOC Side Event focused solely on the Arctic Ocean.

Key Issues discussed:

- The Arctic Ocean is one of the most spectacular, unique, and severely threatened biomes on Earth, due to climate change (and loss of sea ice), industrialization, and militarization (see: <https://www.oasis-earth.com/imperiled-arctic>).
- The U.N. and international community have not substantively addressed these threats
- While Article 192 of UNCLOS requires that: “States have the obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment,” the U.N. and member states have failed this obligation in general, and in the Arctic Ocean specifically. It is critical to remedy this failure immediately.

Key recommendations for action:

- First, G20 governments must take substantive action at the Bali meeting this November to mitigate the climate crisis: <https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2022/06/22/this-year-may-be-our-last-best-chance-to-solve-the-climate-crisis.html>
- Second, we urge any/all governments to immediately draft and introduce an Arctic Ocean Treaty into the UN General Assembly (UNGA), that will, at minimum, establish an *International Arctic Marine Sanctuary* reserved for peaceful, scientific, and subsistence purposes of coastal inhabitants, to protect this unique biome for all. The Sanctuary must encompass as broad a region of Arctic Ocean waters as possible, and at minimum prohibit all fossil fuel development, commercial fisheries, seabed mining, other damaging industrial activities, and military activity. The Sanctuary must also establish a robust regime to reduce the risks of Arctic shipping and tourism, marine debris, and contaminants.
- Regarding the appropriate mechanism, the Arctic Ocean Treaty could be achieved either through a multilateral treaty (as the Antarctic Treaty) outside of the UN system, an Arctic Amendment to UNCLOS that holds in abeyance Parts V (EEZ) and VI (Continental Shelf) thus rendering null and void the 200-mile EEZ and continental shelf claims in the Arctic Ocean, or a broad treaty within the UN system.
- It is concerning that UNCLOS, negotiated and signed well before the severity and pace of climate change were broadly appreciated, does not address climate change. As well, the UN climate convention (UNFCCC) does not specifically address the global ocean. This disconnect needs immediate resolution. Governments must negotiate a climate change-specific amendment to UNCLOS, and an ocean-specific amendment to the UNFCCC, both stipulating responsibilities for enhanced ocean protection in context of the stark realities of environmental decline today (see: <https://www.oasis-earth.com/oasis-earth-planet-in-peril>).