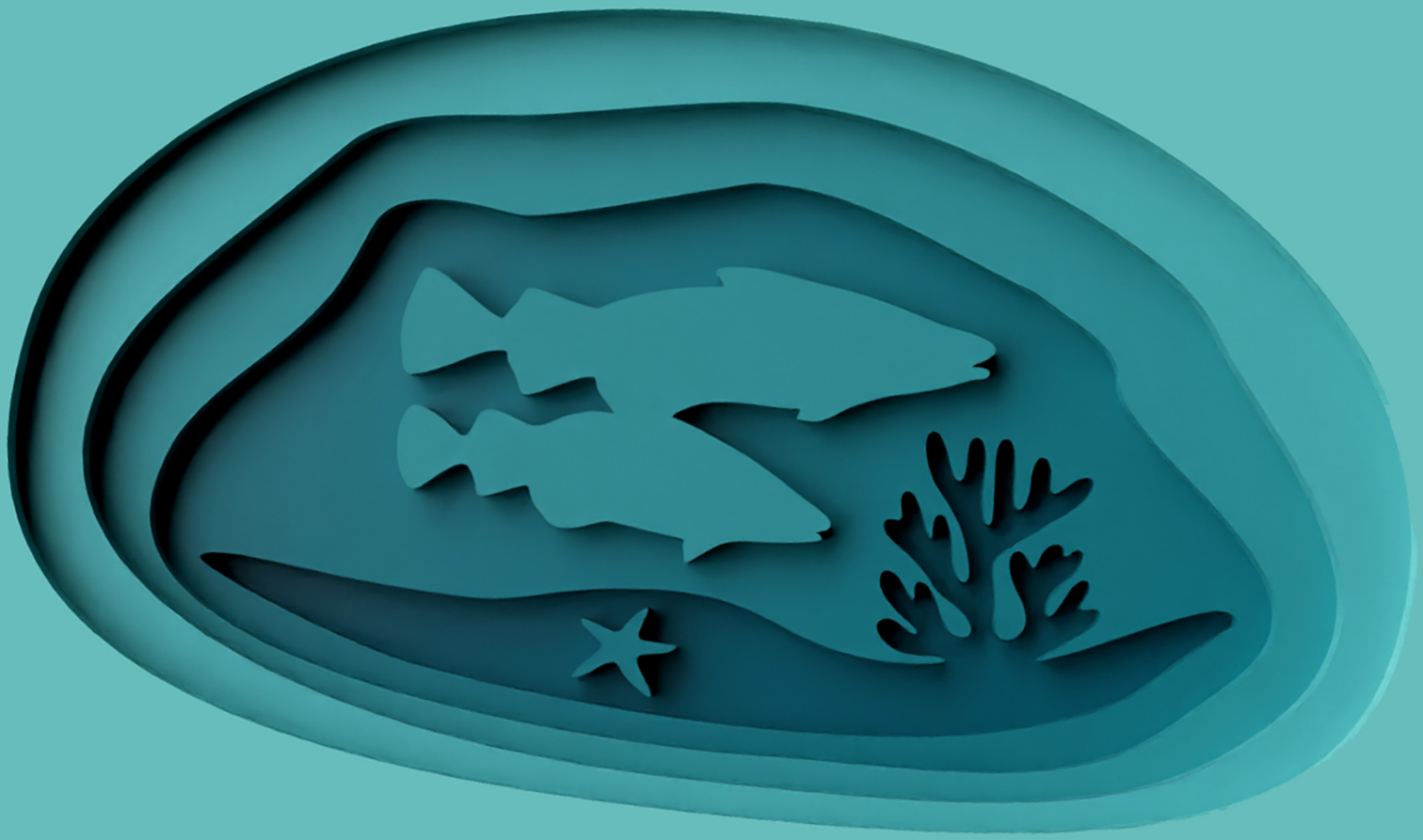
ARCTIC FRONTIERS

Arctic Frontiers Fourth Roundtable Discussion

Pan-Arctic Coexistence: Balancing Growth and Conservation along the Coasts

DATE: January 4, 2026



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Arctic region is at a critical juncture, facing both unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The impacts of global warming, which are four times faster in the Arctic than in the rest of the world, underline the urgency of transitioning from a fossil fuel-dependent economy to a sustainable, renewable energy-driven future.

This green transition is not just an environmental necessity but an opportunity to redefine economic structures and foster resilient communities across the Nordic Arctic. Simultaneously, green transition in the Arctic requires consultations and coexistence between industry and traditional livelihoods.

This project seeks to address these pressing needs by creating a structured platform for dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and actionable policy recommendations. Through a series of moderated roundtable discussions, we aim to bring together key stakeholders to address the multifaceted challenges of the green transition.

The project is generously funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and will focus on three key themes:

→ **Economic and Investment Needs**
How to attract and secure sustainable investments while managing risks, fostering innovation, and ensuring the equitable distribution of resources.

→ **Energy Security and Resource Management**
Addressing the transition to renewable energy, the secure supply of critical minerals, and the development of place-based production systems.

→ **Balancing Growth and Conservation**
Navigating the complex interplay of economic development, environmental stewardship, and the rights and traditions of Indigenous and local communities.

OBJECTIVES AND DELIVERABLES

The primary objective of this project is to define what the green transition looks like in the Arctic by producing a comprehensive policy roadmap for sustainable development. This roadmap will guide policy-makers and stakeholders in implementing strategies to achieve economic resilience, energy security, and environmental sustainability across the region.

Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs

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KEY ACTION POINTS:

1. Arctic green transition needs strong, coordinated and ethical governance at all levels. Ensure national participation in international governance bodies and ensure resources for local and Indigenous inclusion.

2. Ensure and enforce precautionary principle in all action to protect the nature, environment and bio-diversity.

3. "Easy wins" can build momentum: protect high-biodiversity/low-use areas, engage communities to identify valued sites, and restore overexploited areas.

4. Promote and support circular economy.

5. Support and finance multi-sectoral, trans-disciplinary approaches to estimations on protection, pre-servation and conservation.

6. Offshore wind development requires thorough need assessment and sector coordination, and trust is a key to achieve sustainable and just development.

KEY THEMES:

1. Apply the cautionary principle to all resource extraction

- Planetary-scale pressures—warming waters and biodiversity loss—strengthen the need for an expanded precautionary approach.
- Regulation must define responsible actors, establish baseline conditions, and acknowledge that pre-cautionary management can also mean choosing inaction.
- Decision-making must integrate scientific, biophysical, cultural, and historical knowledge.
- Preservation of nature in its original state should be the starting point for any planning, rather than introducing other activities first.
- Existing models like the Central Arctic Fisheries Agreement demonstrate the feasibility of precautionary, pre-emptive governance.

2. Accelerate coordinated Arctic conservation efforts

- Conservation requires cooperation across international, national, local, and Indigenous governance levels, including adequate resources for advisory bodies and Indigenous consultation.
- A multisectoral process should include all existing and potential future sectors, with bottom-up approaches prioritised.
- Internationally agreed no-go areas—potentially including closing off the Arctic Ocean—should complement licensing of all industrial activity and support for the circular economy.
- Human rights and biodiversity risks must be avoided, while flexible protection systems (e.g., time-limited or rotating zones) allow focus on endangered areas and long-term ecological value.

3. Make area-based protection core to sustainable Arctic action

- Identifying protection areas requires time, data, resources, and ethical consideration, and must be done collaboratively for a holistic view.
- Multi- and interdisciplinary research is needed, supported by strong, election-cycle-resistant national policies aligned with international commitments, including consequences for non-compliance.
- Protection should prioritise vulnerable, biodiversity-rich areas, banning highly damaging industries — such as oil and gas extraction, bottom trawling, and seabed mining—from these zones.
- Evaluations of industrial impacts must be equal, comprehensive, and continuous, with the possibility of fully restricting sectors if they prove severely harmful.
- All ecosystem types should be considered for protection (e.g., peatlands), while maintaining trust in existing data and cooperation networks; military presence may be allowed when tied to research monitoring.

4. Integrate emerging technologies and energy trends into planning

- The growing need for batteries—especially in remote locations—must be factored into environmental assessments.
- Increasing electrification will generate system-wide pressures requiring anticipatory planning.
- Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) should be evaluated, including possible synergies with wind power.
- The potential for floating data centres warrants assessment due to coastal and environmental implications.

SUMMARY TO ANSWER THE FIRST-ROUND QUESTIONS:

How do we determine which areas to conserve?
Which industries should be provided access to the oceans, coastal areas and the seabed?

Conservation efforts need international, national, local and indigenous governance, guidance and cooperation, e.g. resources for advisory bodies and Indigenous consultation. Needed resources must be ensured. All ecosystem types should be considered for protection (e.g., peatlands), while maintaining trust in existing data and cooperation networks; military presence may be allowed when tied to research monitoring. Protection should prioritise vulnerable, biodiversity-rich areas, banning highly damaging industries—such as oil and gas extraction, bottom trawling, and seabed mining—from these zones.

1. Offshore wind development requires thorough need assessment and sector coordination

- The need for offshore wind must be evaluated profoundly before large-scale commitments.
- Offshore wind can reduce reliance on fossil fuels and support long-term energy transition goals.
- Existing local industrial competence can be leveraged, strengthening national security by supporting inhabited and sovereign coastal regions.
- Current high development costs and internal competition between projects and companies hinder unified sectoral progress.
- A balanced energy mix is essential, as no single energy solution can meet all needs.

2. Regional conditions significantly shape feasibility and planning

- Arctic Canada: Heavy sea ice, limited port infrastructure, and absence of transmission grids restrict offshore wind development.
- Alaska: Northern areas face similar challenges to Canada, while the south supports only small-scale, local wind projects due to lack of markets for large-scale generation.
- Nordics: Political instability, shifting subsidies, north–south transmission challenges, and differing electricity pricing and compensation mechanisms create uncertainty.
- Sweden and Finland have limited large-scale offshore wind due to high costs and the difficult conditions of the Gulf of Bothnia; in Finland, municipal economic benefits increase local acceptance.
- Norway has strong interest, but deep Arctic waters requiring bottom-fixed turbines increase complexity and cost; planning must reconcile conflicts with fisheries, and public acceptance is low.

3. Trust-building and inclusive planning are essential for social licence to operate

- Trust must be built early by assessing both regional and local benefits and losses transparently.
- Planning processes must reflect different stakeholder capacities and ensure meaningful participation of Indigenous communities—Kirkenes was cited as a positive example.
- Projects must avoid radar interference, address social issues including landscape values, and minimise environmental impacts.
- Indigenous and local perspectives are crucial, as offshore turbines involve major on-land infrastructure through grid connections; local ownership from the outset is mandatory for fair outcomes.
- Clear communication and information sharing—potentially through broad innovation and industrial clusters—can strengthen social acceptance.

4. Environmental and security considerations require holistic, region-scale approaches

- Environmental assessments should be regional rather than project-based to support holistic evaluation and consistent criteria.
- Offshore wind planning must consider defence sector restrictions on certain areas.
- Infrastructure expansion into remote areas should include measures to protect against malicious activity.
- Environmental impacts must be minimised throughout planning and implementation.
- Social, cultural, and ecological values must be systematically integrated into site selection and development decisions.

SUMMARY TO ANSWER THE SECOND-ROUND QUESTIONS:

What are the pros and cons of giving offshore wind-industry preference in coastal areas?
What are the main advantages and obstacles of developing offshore wind?
How will this change affect the use of the sea areas?
What affects the acceptability of green industry projects such as offshore wind?

Offshore wind can reduce fossil-fuel dependence, use existing local industrial competence, and bring economic benefits to coastal regions, but high costs, harsh conditions, policy instability, defence restrictions, and conflicts with fisheries or radar systems pose challenges. Development is slowed by limited infrastructure in some Arctic areas and low public acceptance in places like Norway. Expanding offshore wind changes sea-area use by introducing large infrastructures, restricting certain zones, and creating competition with existing marine activities. Acceptability depends on early, transparent engagement; meaningful Indigenous and local participation; minimising environmental and landscape impacts; ensuring local ownership and fair benefits; and maintaining clear communication through broad networks or clusters.

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