

United Nations Environment Programme

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General Assembly

Committee Background:

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was founded in 1972, during the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden. Before 1972, the United Nations contained the UN Conference on the Human Environment, which acted similar to what UNEP does today. After the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, UNEP was developed to monitor environmental conditions, provide insights for policymaking on climate related issues, and facilitate efforts to tackle global environmental issues. Since its establishment, the UNEP has been at the forefront of partnerships with its 193 Member States and diverse stakeholders to mobilize global commitments and coordinated initiatives in tackling numerous urgent environmental issues. Additionally, it has served as a crucial hub, facilitating and coordinating 15 multilateral environmental agreements to enhance international environmental cooperation.



Topic A: The Prevention of Invasive Species while Safeguarding Ecosystems

Introduction

As time goes on, many invasive organisms are going extinct. To define invasive, an invasive species can encompass a wide range of living organisms, including amphibians like the cane toad, plants, insects, fish, fungi, bacteria, as well as their seeds or eggs, that are not indigenous to a particular ecosystem and inflict harm upon it. These harmful effects can extend to the environment, economy, and even human health. The "invasive" label is applied to species that exhibit rapid growth, aggressive spread, and the potential to cause detrimental impacts. Interestingly, invasive species need not originate from foreign countries; even native species can be deemed invasive when they disrupt the ecological balance, as seen with lake trout in Yellowstone Lake, Wyoming, where they compete with native cutthroat trout for habitat. Additionally, human activities play a significant role in the unintentional spread of invasive species.

The rapid movement of people and goods across the globe serves as a key vector for introducing uninvited species to new environments. Aquatic organisms can be transported in ships' ballast



water, while smaller boats may inadvertently carry them on their propellers. Insects can find their way into wood, shipping palettes, and crates used in international trade. Furthermore, certain ornamental plants can escape cultivation and establish themselves in the wild, becoming invasive. Also, some invasive species originate from intentional or accidental releases of pets. An illustrative example is the proliferation of Burmese pythons in the Everglades, presenting a significant challenge for the ecosystem.

Current Events

Invasive species have been in the news frequently lately, underscoring how urgent it is to address this major environmental problem. The unintentional introduction of a non-native insect species through imported agricultural products was one significant occurrence that made the problem prominent. The agriculture and ecosystem of a certain region suffered significantly as a result of this terrible tragedy. Through commerce, the non-native bug entered the area, upsetting the delicate ecological balance and causing significant losses for local farmers. Such events highlight the need for more stringent biosecurity controls and improved import product monitoring to stop unintentional introductions of invasive species. Additionally, the growth of e-commerce and internet trading has created new channels for the spread of invasive species. Invasive species are more likely to enter new areas as a result of laxer controls and laws on the international transportation of exotic plants and animals. Online markets enable unfettered movement of living things, raising the possibility of introducing invasive species to regions that might not be ready to handle the potential repercussions. Invasive species have had a particularly negative influence on some nations, particularly those in the Southern Hemisphere. An invasive plant species that has caused havoc on the local flora and wildlife of one country has been spreading unchecked there. This invasive plant has outcompeted native vegetation due to its rapid spread, which has caused habitat degradation and a loss of biodiversity. Invasive species control measures have proven difficult, requiring large resources and concerted action, and local ecosystems are under extreme stress.

Past UN Action

The United Nations already recognizes the serious threat invasive species pose to the world's ecosystems and biodiversity. UNEP has taken a number of actions to address this issue. This means supporting countries in their efforts to prevent and manage invasive species, leveraging critical resources and expertise to address invasive species challenges through capacity-building programs and technology. UNEP also played a key role in administering an important international agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and promoting global cooperation to combat invasive



species and conserve biodiversity. . Invasive species contribute significantly to biodiversity loss and the CBD recognizes the need to address this issue urgently. Parties to the CBD commit to taking measures to prevent the introduction and proliferation of alien species and, where appropriate, to appropriately manage them. Through the CBD, countries have developed standards and best practices for the prevention, eradication, and management of invasive species. They have also participated in the exchange of scientific knowledge and experience to combat invasive species at local and global levels. To improve the global response to invasive species, UNEP has also facilitated the formation of networks and partnerships between countries, regional organizations and other stakeholders. These networks serve as a forum to exchange knowledge, lessons, and best practices in invasive species management, and foster collaborative and effective strategies to combat the harmful effects of invasive species. Additionally, the United Nations has implemented several programs in certain regions, such as the United States, such as the Invasive Species Management Strategy and the Invasive Species Strategic Plan. These plans help prevent invasive species by developing action plans and risk assessments, early detection and rapid response, inventory management, restoration and rehabilitation, and treatment options.

Questions to Consider

1. How can the international community strengthen biosecurity controls and product monitoring to prevent unintentional introductions of invasive species through global trade and commerce?
2. What measures can be taken to enhance international cooperation and information sharing to address the challenges posed by invasive species and promote effective responses?
3. How can countries in the Southern Hemisphere and other regions affected by invasive species receive increased support and resources to implement successful control measures and protect their native flora and fauna?



4. In what ways can UNEP and other relevant organizations further encourage the establishment of networks and partnerships between countries and stakeholders to facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperative strategies in managing invasive species on a regional and global scale?

Helpful Links

1. Ecowatch: “Invasive Species Have Led to a Third of Animal Extinctions Since 1500”
 - a. <https://www.ecowatch.com/invasive-species-animal-extinctions-2630614032.html>
2. PNAS: “Invasive predators and global biodiversity loss”
 - a. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1602480113>
3. Howstuffworks: “Have invasive species caused any extinctions?”
 - a. <https://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/green-science/have-invasive-species-caused-extinctions>



Topic B: The Prohibition of Offshore Drilling in the Arctic Region

Introduction

Offshore drilling in the Arctic is a highly contentious and complex environmental issue that has garnered global attention in recent years. The Arctic region, characterized by its extreme cold and unique biodiversity, has long been considered one of the last frontiers for oil and gas exploration. With the melting of Arctic sea ice due to climate change, the potential for accessing vast untapped energy reserves has become increasingly attractive to countries and energy corporations. However, the pursuit of offshore drilling in the Arctic comes with significant environmental, social, and geopolitical challenges. The fragile Arctic ecosystem, home to a diverse array of wildlife, is vulnerable to the potential devastating impacts of oil spills and industrial accidents. The remoteness and harsh conditions of the region pose immense logistical and emergency response challenges, making the cleanup of any potential spills a daunting task. Furthermore, the extraction and burning of fossil fuels from the Arctic contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions, further exacerbating climate change and the melting of polar ice. As nations weigh the economic benefits of exploiting Arctic resources against the potential risks to the environment and indigenous communities, the debate over offshore drilling in the Arctic becomes a complex balancing act between energy demands, environmental preservation, and the rights of the people who have called the region home for generations. Finding a sustainable and responsible approach to energy exploration in the Arctic is crucial to safeguarding this fragile ecosystem and the planet's future. In this background guide, we will explore the various aspects of offshore drilling in the Arctic, its environmental impacts, current events, relevant UN actions, and questions to consider in guiding our committee's discussions and efforts to address this pressing issue.

Current Events

To this day, offshore drilling in the Arctic remains a matter of concern and debate. Several recent notable events highlight the complexities and challenges posed by this issue. The first accident was an oil spill. One of the recent significant events that highlighted the risks of offshore drilling in the Arctic was the oil spill in certain areas of the Arctic Ocean. A severe disruption occurred on a drilling



platform operated by a multinational energy company, resulting in a massive oil spill. The oil spill had far-reaching effects on the environment. Oil has contaminated the pristine Arctic Ocean and affected fragile coastal ecosystems. The accident highlighted the difficulties of conducting emergency operations in the harsh environment of the Arctic and raised concerns about the industry's ability to effectively manage and reduce the environmental impact of a potential accident. Another incident is the Indigenous Rights and Consultations, which in the wake of increased interest in Arctic offshore drilling, indigenous communities residing in the region have raised their voices to express concerns about the potential impacts on their traditional lands and ways of life. There have been ongoing discussions and debates about the need for meaningful consultation and the recognition of the rights



of indigenous peoples in decision-making processes related to offshore drilling projects. These events have drawn attention to the importance of respecting the rights and knowledge of indigenous communities, whose livelihoods and cultural heritage are deeply connected to

the Arctic environment.

Past UN Action

Over the years, the United Nations has recognized the significance of Arctic offshore drilling as an environmental concern and has taken various actions to address the potential risks and challenges associated with this activity. While the UN does not have direct regulatory authority over Arctic drilling, it has played a crucial role in fostering international cooperation, promoting sustainable practices, and raising awareness about the environmental implications. The United Nations

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Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which came into force in 1994, is a landmark treaty that governs the use and conservation of the world's oceans, including the Arctic Ocean. It establishes the legal framework for the exploration and exploitation of natural resources, such as oil and gas, in the Arctic region. UNCLOS has provisions to ensure responsible management and conservation of marine resources and mandates that activities in the Arctic should be conducted with due regard to the marine environment. Additionally, the United Nations created a subdivision called PAME (Protection of the Arctic and Marine Environment). Activities under the obligation aim to address ocean policy and other measures related to the conservation and sustainable management of the Arctic marine and



coastal environment in response to environmental changes arising from land-based and maritime activities. These activities encompass non-emergency pollution prevention control measures, such as coordinated strategic plans, as well as the creation of programs, assessments, and guidelines. All of these

endeavors are intended to enhance or bolster ongoing initiatives and existing agreements. PAME, within its scope, primarily focuses on five themes: Arctic shipping, Marine Protected Areas, Resource Exploration and Development, Ecosystem Approach to Management, and Arctic Marine Pollution. These activities are carried out through bi-annual work plans endorsed by the Arctic Council,

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following recommendations from the Senior Arctic Officials. The development of these plans adheres to the Arctic Council's Arctic Marine Strategic Plan 2015-2025 (AMSP), serving as a guiding framework for actions aimed at safeguarding Arctic marine and coastal ecosystems and fostering sustainable development, among other objectives.

Questions to Consider

1. How can the international community enhance emergency response capabilities and preparedness to address potential oil spills and accidents in the harsh and remote Arctic environment resulting from offshore drilling?
2. What measures can be implemented to ensure meaningful consultation and the recognition of the rights of indigenous communities in decision-making processes related to offshore drilling projects in the Arctic?
3. In light of the recent oil spill incident, what regulatory measures and best practices should be adopted to minimize the environmental impacts of offshore drilling in the Arctic and ensure the responsible management of marine resources?
4. How can the United Nations and Arctic Council foster stronger international cooperation and collaboration among Arctic nations to address the environmental and geopolitical challenges associated with offshore drilling in the region?

Helpful Links

1. The Wilderness Society: "Offshore Drilling: Arctic Ocean"
 - a. <https://www.wilderness.org/wild-places/alaska/offshore-drilling-arctic-ocean#:~:text=Drilling%20in%20this%20ocean%20could,slow%20to%20recover%20from%20damage.&text=The%20Arctic%20Ocean%20is%20covered,polar%20bears%2C%20seals%20and%20walrus.>
2. World Wildlife: "How would offshore oil and gas drilling in the Arctic impact wildlife?"
 - a. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/how-would-offshore-oil-and-gas-drilling-in-the-arctic-impact-wildlife>



3. Greenpeace: “Arctic Oil Drilling”

- a. <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/arctic/issues/oil-drilling/>



Works Cited

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- “About the United Nations Environment Programme.” *UNEP*, www.unep.org/about-us. Accessed 23 July 2023.
- “Invasive Species.” *National Wildlife Federation*, www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Threats-to-Wildlife/Invasive-Species#:~:text=Invasive%20species%20are%20primarily%20spread,carry%20them%20on%20their%20propellers. Accessed 23 July 2023.
- “Invasive Species News and Events.” *Invasive Species News and Events | National Invasive Species Information Center*, www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/invasive-species-news-and-events. Accessed 23 July 2023.
- “Japanese Beetles Could Spread throughout Washington State, US, in 20 Years.” *ScienceDaily*, 18 July 2023, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2023/07/230718105733.htm.
- “Offshore Drilling: Arctic Ocean.” *The Wilderness Society*, www.wilderness.org/wild-places/alaska/offshore-drilling-arctic-ocean#:~:text=Drilling%20in%20this%20ocean%20could,slow%20to%20recover%20from%20damage.&text=The%20Arctic%20Ocean%20is%20covered,polar%20bears%2C%20seals%20and%20walrus. Accessed 23 July 2023.
- “How Would Offshore Oil and Gas Drilling in the Arctic Impact Wildlife?” *WWF*, 14 Apr. 2021, www.worldwildlife.org/stories/how-would-offshore-oil-and-gas-drilling-in-the-arctic-impact-wildlife.
- “Arctic Oil Drilling.” *Greenpeace USA*, www.greenpeace.org/usa/arctic/issues/oil-drilling/. Accessed 23 July 2023.

