On September 19, 1996, the Arctic Council was officially established, becoming the leading forum for cooperation in the Arctic as part of the region's transformation from a zone of tension to a zone of peace. The creation of the Arctic Council was an international cooperative effort that took nearly a decade and would not be what it is today without the work of many.

The Arctic Council Today

The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum consisting of the eight Arctic states – Canada, Denmark (through Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. The Council also has 12 Permanent Participants representing Indigenous peoples and 38 Observers, including 12 Non-Arctic states, 14 Intergovernmental & Inter-Parliamentary Observers, 12 Non-Governmental Observers, and 13 Non-Arctic states.

Subsidiary Bodies

The Arctic Council operates through a set of Subsidiary Bodies, including Working Groups and Task Forces. These bodies are tasked with carrying out specific objectives set by the Council, such as conservation and sustainability initiatives of marine ecosystems, reduction in emissions from remote areas, and emergency preparedness.

Timeline of the Arctic Council

- 1/2014: Arctic Economic Council established
- 5/2015: Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation, the third legally binding Arctic Council agreement
- 4/2016: First Model Arctic Council
- 5/2017: Polar Code comes into force
- 9/2018: Arctic Council receives 2019 IAIA (International Association for Impact Assessment) Global Award
- 12/2018: Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, signed by 9 countries plus EU
- 6/1991: Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) approved by the circumpolar states
- 5/2005: Arctic Climate Impact Assessment published
- 10/1987: Mikhail Gorbachev calls for Arctic to be “zone of peace”