

News release

GREENPEACE

McDonald's and global seafood providers take landmark step toward Arctic protection

25 May 2016 (Toronto) – Today, some of the world's largest seafood and fishing companies committed to not expand their search for cod into a large, previously ice-covered area of the Arctic Ocean north of Europe (1). The area covered by the agreement is roughly twice the size of France. The group includes McDonald's, Tesco, Iglo, Young's Seafood, Icelandic Seachill, Russian Karat Group, Fiskebåt — representing the entire Norwegian oceangoing fishing fleet — and Europe's largest processor of frozen fish, Espersen.

The ground-breaking agreement, brokered by Greenpeace, marks the first time the seafood industry has voluntarily imposed limitations to industrial fishing in the Arctic. This means that any fishing companies expanding into pristine Arctic waters will not be able to sell their cod to major seafood brands and retailers.

Currently there is no specific legal regime in place to protect areas of the Arctic Ocean that used to be covered by sea ice. It now falls to industry to follow through on their new commitments, and in so doing ensure their products are not linked to Arctic destruction.

“Today, McDonald's, Espersen, Young's Seafood, and Iglo, Findus & Birds Eye and many more have taken action together with the Norwegian fishing industry to safeguard a huge marine area in the Arctic,” said Greenpeace Campaigner Frida Bengtsson. “Given the absence of significant legal protection of the icy waters of the northern Barents Sea, this is an unprecedented step by the seafood industry.”

In March, [Greenpeace investigations](#) revealed how the melting Arctic sea ice has made it possible for large bottom trawlers to venture into previously ice-covered areas that scientists have identified as 'ecologically significant' (2). Bottom trawling is a controversial fishing method which can cause significant harm to corals and other organisms that live on the seafloor. The report exposed how global, well-known food brands and retailers buying cod from the Norwegian Arctic risked having their supply chains tainted with Arctic destruction.

The region, which includes the Svalbard archipelago, also known as the 'Arctic Galapagos', is home to at risk animals including polar bears, bowhead whales and Greenland sharks. At least 70% of all the Atlantic cod that ends up on dinner plates around the world is from the Barents Sea.

“This is a major step from the seafood industry that highlights the lack of action from governments so far to protect the Arctic, and increases the pressure on the Arctic countries, Canada as well as Norway, to protect the Arctic for the long term,” said Greenpeace Arctic Campaigner Alex Speers-Roesch. “The Trudeau government needs to take strong action to create a network of Arctic marine reserves, including in Lancaster Sound and the Beaufort Sea, and this announcement from industry should be a sign to them of which way the wind is blowing.”

Canada's Arctic waters have received little formal protection to date. A National Marine Conservation Area has been proposed for Lancaster Sound in the eastern Canadian Arctic, but the process has been stalled for some time. Among other issues, there has been disagreement between the federal government and local Inuit, with the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, which represents the Inuit of Baffin Island, calling for a larger area to be protected than the government has proposed.

Greenpeace is calling on the Norwegian government to protect this truly unique and vulnerable area of the Norwegian Arctic and acknowledge the growing opposition to reckless exploitation of the fragile Arctic environment, not only from millions of individuals but also from the corporate world (3).

The statement from the fishing industry comes not long after the Arctic sea ice hit a record low maximum extent for winter. With the extreme loss of sea ice, large areas of the Arctic Ocean are left open for longer periods and the need for legal protection to replace the protective ice-shield is increasingly urgent.

This summer, the Greenpeace ship *Arctic Sunrise* will travel to the Arctic to keep watch over the areas now off limits to trawlers to ensure that the entire fishing industry lives up to its new commitments.

"With out of control global warming making the planet ever hotter, and new heat records being set all the time, the Arctic is increasingly in the global spotlight. Greenpeace will be on the frontline watching how this agreement is implemented as the summer fishing season gets underway," said Speers-Roesch.

-30-

For more information, please contact:

Diego Creimer, Communications Officer, 514-999-6743 diego.creimer@greenpeace.org

Greenpeace International media enquiries: +31 20 718 2470, pressdesk.int@greenpeace.org

Footage and images:

<http://photo.greenpeace.org/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&ALID=27MZIFJ6I9CJP>

Notes to editors:

- 1) <https://secured-static.greenpeace.org/international/Global/sweden/Arktis/Industry%20Group%20Statement%2025th%20May%202016.pdf>
- 2) "This Far No Further", report link <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/publications/Campaign-reports/Climate-Reports/This-Far-No-Further/>
- 3) Norway is internationally obliged through the [UN Convention on Biological Diversity](#) to protect at least 10% of its marine areas by 2020, but is falling drastically short with less than 10% protected so far. As part of an ongoing political process, on May 23 the Norwegian parliament asked the Norwegian government to come up with a plan for marine protection.