

SIXTH ANNUAL ARCTIC FUTURES SYMPOSIUM “BEST YET”



Arctic stakeholders gathered in Brussels on Tuesday 17 November and Wednesday 18 November as the International Polar Foundation and a large family of partners held the sixth annual [Arctic Futures Symposium](#) at the [Residence Palace](#) in Brussels.

With a focus on sustainable development of the Arctic, and in particular on what’s happening at the local and regional levels, the symposium welcomed a [distinguished group of speakers](#) from a wide variety of backgrounds to examine the way forward for Arctic development.

As the EU is currently working on its new [Arctic strategy](#) due to be released at the beginning of 2016, the symposium was considered “timely” according to representatives from the European Union.

Lots to discuss

After a warm welcome from the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the UK branch of the International Polar Foundation, Sir Andrew Burns, the symposium began with a keynote speech from Jyrki Katainen, European Commission Vice-President for Jobs, Growth, Investment, and Competitiveness. This was followed by a video greeting from US Special Representative for the Arctic, Admiral Robert J Papp Jr., who outlined the priorities of the [US Chairmanship of the Arctic Council](#).

From there, the symposium launched into discussions on topics such as the role of the business community in local Arctic development, blue growth and maritime transport, innovation in industry, environmental security, aspects of the Arctic bio-economy, and IT solutions in the Arctic. The symposium also included a panel discussion on the role of [Arctic Council Observers](#) before moving to the [Norway House](#) on the afternoon of the 18th for a panel discussion with Senior Arctic Officials and Arctic Economic Council Chairwoman Tara Sweeney. The conference finished with a talk about forthcoming research from the [Arctic Council's Arctic Marine Assessment Programme](#) (AMAP), and a presentation about the upcoming [Arctic Frontiers conference](#) in Tromsø, Norway in January 2016.

Key messages

One of the key takeaways from the symposium, as highlighted a number of times by Norwegian Senior Arctic Official Else Berit Eikeland, is that there are “many different Arctics” - meaning that a “one size fits all” approach to development and governance in the region is not a feasible solution. Best practices can and should be shared between different regions of the Arctic, yet solutions should be tailored to local conditions and needs.

[Arctic Economic Council](#) Chairwoman and [Arctic Slope Regional Corporation](#) Vice-President for External Affairs Tara Sweeney called on policymakers, NGOs, businesses, and other parties interested in the Arctic region to “do no harm” to the people of the Arctic in their decision-making and activities. Ms. Sweeney argued that while Northerners appreciate the extra attention being given to their region, they prefer to be able to make the decisions that affect their own lives, and work with outsiders who understand their communities and needs.

A success on all fronts

With excellent contributions from both speakers and moderators, and more than 200 participants in attendance, the sixth edition of the Arctic Futures Symposium was considered “the best yet” by the conference organisers. [Live Tweeting](#) also raised the profile of the symposium and allowed those not able to attend the event in person have an idea of what the event was like. Recordings of the sessions will soon be posted online so that those not able to attend can listen to the presentations that were given.

Symposium partners hope to continue to hold the annual symposium in Brussels in the coming years, particularly as decisions made in Brussels can have an impact on the Arctic and its residents.