Arctic

Marine Ecosystem Restoration Startup from Tromsø Wins 4th Laurence Trân Arctic Futures Award at Arctic Futures Symposium 2025

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Brussels, December 3rd, 2025

The International Polar Foundation and the Trân Family are proud to announce the fourth winner of the annual Laurence Trân Arctic Futures Award: Marine Spark X from Tromsø, Norway.



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The International Polar Foundation and the Trân Family are proud to announce the fourth winner of the annual Laurence Trân Arctic Futures Award: Marine Spark X from Tromsø, Norway.

The winning startup was announced on Tuesday, December 2nd at the 16th annual Arctic Futures Symposium at EFTA House.

An initiative of the International Polar Foundation and financed by the Trân family, the Laurence Trân Arctic Futures Award was established in 2022 to help a fledgling startup or young entrepreneur based in the Arctic* move their business to the next level.

The winner receives an award of 7,500 Euros and the chance to come to Brussels to present their startup to an international audience at the annual Arctic Futures Symposium in Brussels. They can also count on the network of the International Polar Foundation, the Arctic Futures Symposium partners, and their vast network of contacts.

A focus on restoring marine ecosystems

This year's winning startup was founded by recent graduates of UiT - The Arctic University of Norway studying fisheries and aquaculture sciences. The aim of this unique startup is to help restore Arctic marine ecosystems being harmed by an invasive species - the sea urchin - by harvesting them at masse to create a nutrient-rich fish meal supplement among other products.

Removing sea urchins from the seabeds around northern Norway will not only create a highly in-demand product for the aquaculture industry, it will also help restore natural kelp forests, which are one of the world's largest and most important carbon sinks on Earth and serve as a marine habitat for marine life in coastal regions along Norway.

"We are honoured to be chosen as the winner of the Fourth Laurence Trân Arctic Futures Award," stated Johan Armstrong Støver, Chief Executive Officer of Marine Spark X. "Receiving recognition for our efforts truly motivates the team to keep pushing forward and developing."

"We started the company to create change, to be a key contributor in restoring the kelp forest," stated Gustav Vestile, Chief Strategy Officer of Marine Spark X. "It is amazing that our business case allows us to turn profit while contributing to saving the environment."

An inspiring story

Marine Spark X was chosen as the winner by a committee of experts with years of experience working with startups in the North American and European Arctic.

"It's inspiring to see the wonderful and creative initiatives young people in the Arctic are creating," said Alain Hubert, Founder and President of the International Polar Foundation, life-long entrepreneur, and the initiator of the zero-emission Princess Elisabeth Antarctica research station. "We're glad to help these young entrepreneurs achieve their goals and expand their business."

“Marine Spark X is an exciting company in the High North,” remarked Mads Qvist Frederiksen, Executive Director of the Arctic Economic Council and member of the award jury. “They are turning an ocean problem, sea urchins, into fish feed. This is biotechnology that solves several challenges in the Arctic region and a sustainable business model. Their innovation comes with university support and has the potential to create jobs and income for smaller coastal communities. I can’t wait to follow Marine Spark X on their journey!”

Marine Spark X and its founders have taken part in several support and innovation programs at UiT The Arctic University of Norway and recently participated in Arctic Ignite, hosted by Norinnova, UiT’s innovation and technology transfer partner.

“Marine Spark X is a dream scenario for us – students educated by us in Northern Norway who choose to stay in the region and start an innovative, sustainable business for the Arctic environment,” remarked UiT Rector Dag Rune Olsen.

“We would like to give a special thanks to UiT for enabling us to create innovation through our academic work, and to our many local, national and international partners, we would not have been here today without all of you,” stated Gustav Vestile. “Finally, we want to thank the Laurence Trân family for their trust and recognition!”

The award was presented on December 2nd at EFTA House in Brussels on the first day of the 16th annual Arctic Futures Symposium by IPF Managing Director Nicolas Van Hoecke, IPF Board Member Piet Steel, Director of the Arctic Economic Council Mads Frederiksen, and Secretary-General of the Arctic Mayor’s Forum Patti Bruns.

Honourable mentions

Among the applicants, the selection committee also chose to recognise two startups with honourable mentions. These companies include:

1st honourable mention:
Air Vitalize from Fairbanks, Alaska, which invented a low-power filterless industrial electrostatic precipitation (ESP) device to create outdoor "clean air pockets" to combat the high air pollution in Fairbanks, Alaska.

2nd honourable mention:
Willit from Oulu, Finland, which created a digital exchange platform and application to allow those who hunt, fish, and forage in northern Finland to easily sell their country food to restaurants, markets or individuals locally.

Photo: UiT - The Arctic University of Norway

About the International Polar Foundation (IPF):

The IPF is a private foundation with a public service mandate, created in 2002 by Alain Hubert. Its remit is to support international polar scientific research. The IPF was also behind the creation of the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica station, which was officially opened in 2009 as the first and, to date, only zero-emission station, with a view to maintaining a Belgian presence in Antarctica and pursuing its ambition in service of citizens facing climate and environmental challenges. Every year, the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica station hosts numerous scientists of all nationalities. On the horizon is the establishment of the next generation of zero emission polar research station: The Andromeda Earth Observatory.

Contact the International Polar Foundation for photos of the award ceremony:

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About Marine Spark X:

Marine Spark X is a Norwegian biotechnology start-up founded by a group of young marine scientists and entrepreneurs from UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. What began as a shared curiosity for the ocean and its challenges has grown into a company dedicated to creating sustainable solutions that bring underutilized marine resources to their full potential.

Our primary focus is the UrchinEcoFeed projects, where we transform an environmental problem into something valuable. Along large parts of northern Norway, overgrazing by green sea urchins has devastated kelp forests. These forests are essential for marine life, coastal productivity, and carbon capture. By harvesting excess urchins and processing them into KBmel, a marine feed ingredient, we help restore damaged ecosystems while supplying aquaculture with a new, locally sourced, high-quality raw material.

The team behind Marine Spark X consists of six dedicated individuals combining expertise in aquaculture science, biotechnology, logistics, finance, and innovation. Our goal is simple: to demonstrate that responsible, science-driven innovation can create value for both people and the ocean. By combining research, technology, and entrepreneurship, Marine Spark X aims to support a more resilient aquaculture sector and contribute to a healthier Arctic marine environment.”

About the Laurence Trân Arctic Futures Award:

The Laurence Trân Arctic Futures Award is named after the oldest daughter of Mr Trân Van Thinh, Laurence Trân, who died at the age of 26. Laurence was a gifted young woman who was passionate about dance and literature, and was a talented writer.

In loving memory of their daughter, in 1986 her parents and close friends created the Laurence Trân Foundation, which awarded a biannual literature prize aimed at young writers who, through their work, brought cultures together, defended freedoms, and showed solidarity with the marginalised.

After thirty years and more than twenty literary awards given, the Trân family decided the focus of the prize should shift towards more urgent contemporary issues such as environmental protection and climate change. After meeting IPF Founder and President Alain Hubert, the Trân family decided to join forces with IPF to create the Laurence Trân Arctic Futures Award to support young Arctic entrepreneurs working to find sustainable solutions to the challenges they face in the Arctic.

About the Arctic Futures Symposium:

Established in 2010 to raise public awareness of important developments in the Arctic region, the annual Arctic Futures Symposium has become an essential venue for promoting dialogue between Arctic stakeholders and empowering inhabitants of the Circumpolar North.

The Arctic Futures Symposium also provides members of the European Institutions and the wider international community in Brussels with the opportunity to engage with Arctic stakeholders on issues such as marine transport and infrastructure, search and rescue capabilities, concerns of Arctic indigenous communities, scientific research and monitoring, ecosystem stewardship, and the sustainable development of the Arctic's natural resources and economic potential.

www.arcticfutures.org

Eligibility requirements to apply for the Laurence Trân Arctic Futures Award:

To qualify to apply for the award, startups and entrepreneurs must be legally based in one of the following Arctic regions:

- **United States:** the State of Alaska
- **Canada:** Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories, Nunavut Territory, the Nunavik region of the Province of Québec, the Nunatsiavut region of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Census District 23 in the Province of Manitoba
- **Greenland**
- **Iceland**
- **The Faroe Islands**
- **Norway:** Nordland County, Troms County, Finnmark County
- **Sweden:** Norrbotten County, Västerbotten County, Jämtland County, Västernorrland County
- **Finland:** Lapland Region, North Ostrobothnia Region, Kainuu Region

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