

Canadian Arctic Issues in a Changing Climate

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The seminar, “Canadian Arctic Issues in a Changing Climate,” held on 6 December 2006, was an initiative of The Company of Master Mariners of Canada (CMMC). The Company had support from the Marine Affairs Program and the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, both of Dalhousie University, Halifax, where the seminar, attended by over 100 people, was held. Lloyd’s Register North America Inc. also participated and, graciously, hosted the lunch. The objective of the seminar was to provide perspectives on current Arctic issues based on science and experience, and to stimulate discussion. This brief report notes some of the points raised at the seminar.

Two Dalhousie University professors and a former navy climatologist spoke of natural causes of climate change, including atmospheric circulation, solar radiation and

exploitation of resources continues. The unpredictable conditions make it hard to predict costs. The scientists stated that along the north coast of Russia the ice cover is receding. This may open the Northern Sea Route. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) initiated a study by Lloyd’s Register and other classification societies to develop rules for the winterization of merchant ships which trade in polar regions and regions of seasonal ice. The IMO will require ships sailing in such areas to have suitable hull strength and engine power, and machinery and equipment would be ‘winterized’ and crews appropriately trained and equipped.

Canada Command embraces joint task forces which give Canada a military capability in the northern territories. Canada Command, divided into regional sectors, has a mandate to respond to natural disasters, threats from illegal activities and also to assert sovereignty by its presence in the Arctic through ground forces and aerial patrols from the base in Yellowknife. Search and rescue in the Arctic faces problems due to lack of area-based assets coupled with the long distances and fuelling requirements when deploying aircraft from southern bases.

Arctic jurisdictional issues were discussed by a specialist in international law and the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The two main jurisdictional challenges for Canada are: (1) the legal status of the Northwest Passage; and (2) the ‘High Seas’ beyond national jurisdiction. Canada’s *Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act* which applies to all vessels operating in Canadian Arctic waters, has a questionable geographical limit. The United States claims that the Northwest Passage is an international passage, and UNCLOS does not state what usage of the passage is appropriate. A speaker from Natural Resources Canada who is involved in delineating Canada’s claim of jurisdiction over areas in the Beaufort Sea and the North Atlantic discussed these issues.

Transport Canada has a regulatory role over Arctic shipping through the *Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act*. Transport Canada is collaborating with USA and Finland gathering data concerning the environmental, economic and social impact in the Arctic if current levels of shipping increase, and will report to the Arctic Council. Canada is one of eight Arctic states which cooperate in the monitoring of climate change and assess future challenges in the Arctic.

Please visit the CMMC website, at www.mastermariners.ca, for a full report and a list of speakers. 🍷



Photo: Sgt Denis Power, Army News Shilo (from Combat Camera)

Members of the Canadian Rangers and the Canadian Coast Guard launch an RHIB at Shingle Point, Yukon, in August 2006 prior to departing on a patrol.

cloud cover. They agreed that greenhouse gases and water vapour from fossil fuel burning are also contributory factors.

Coast Guard captains with years of experience navigating in ice stated that in the Arctic ice conditions are unpredictable and they tended to agree with the scientists who showed changes in ice conditions over many years. Storms and wind shifts affect ice cover. Even in areas of open water, hard-as-concrete ‘bergy bits’ and ‘growlers,’ undetectable by radar, may damage a ship. In the Arctic there are no support services for shipping – no repair facilities, no fuel supplies, no ports, no docks and depth surveys are incomplete.

Great quantities of mineral resources have been shipped out of the Arctic, mostly by ice-breaking bulk carrier, and