



THE
PEW
CHARITABLE TRUSTS



**OCEANS NORTH INTERNATIONAL
ARCTIC FISHERIES CAMPAIGN**

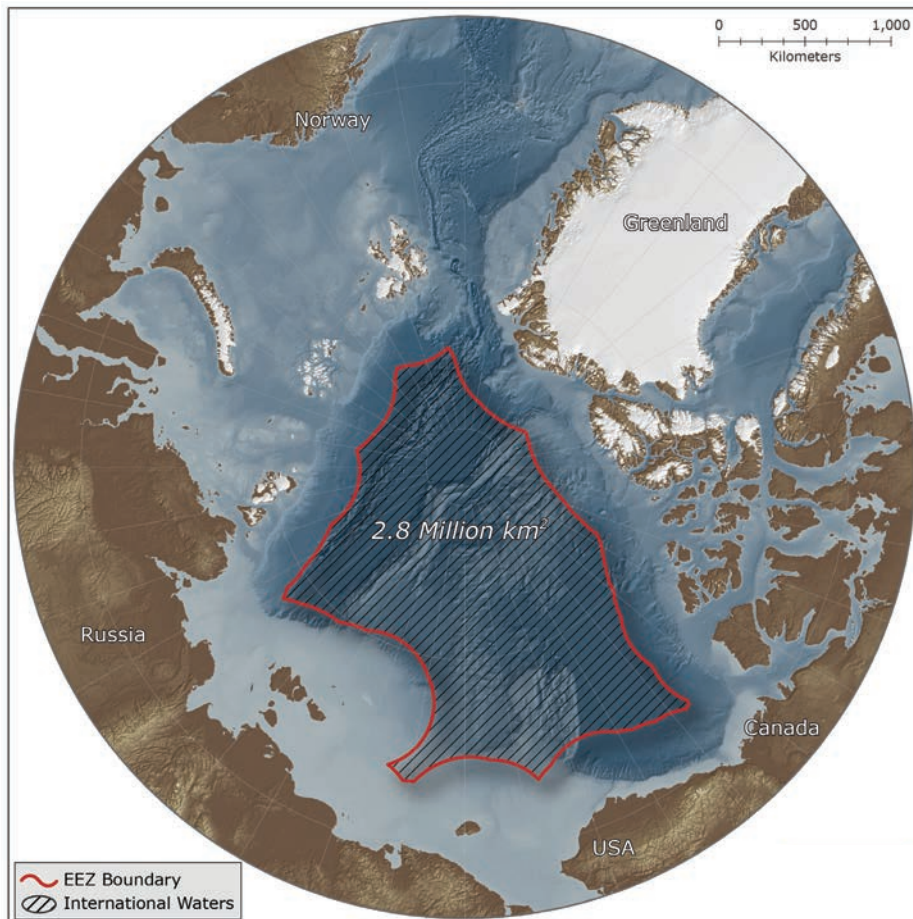
www.OceansNorth.org/International

Protecting Fisheries in the High Arctic

The Arctic Ocean is one of the planet's most pristine marine regions, protected by its ice pack from the effects of commercial fishing, oil and gas development and shipping. But climate change is rapidly melting the permanent ice of the Arctic Ocean, causing a restructuring of its marine ecosystem and increasing human access. Commercial fishing currently does not occur in the international waters of the Central Arctic Ocean—an area as big as the Mediterranean Sea.

But this could quickly change. As sea ice continues to melt, fish are likely to respond by swimming north. Industrial fishing vessels may follow, unimpeded by existing international law. The introduction of large-scale commercial fishing into these relatively unexploited waters could have extremely negative consequences, especially at a time when this sensitive ecosystem is stressed by climate change.

THE CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN

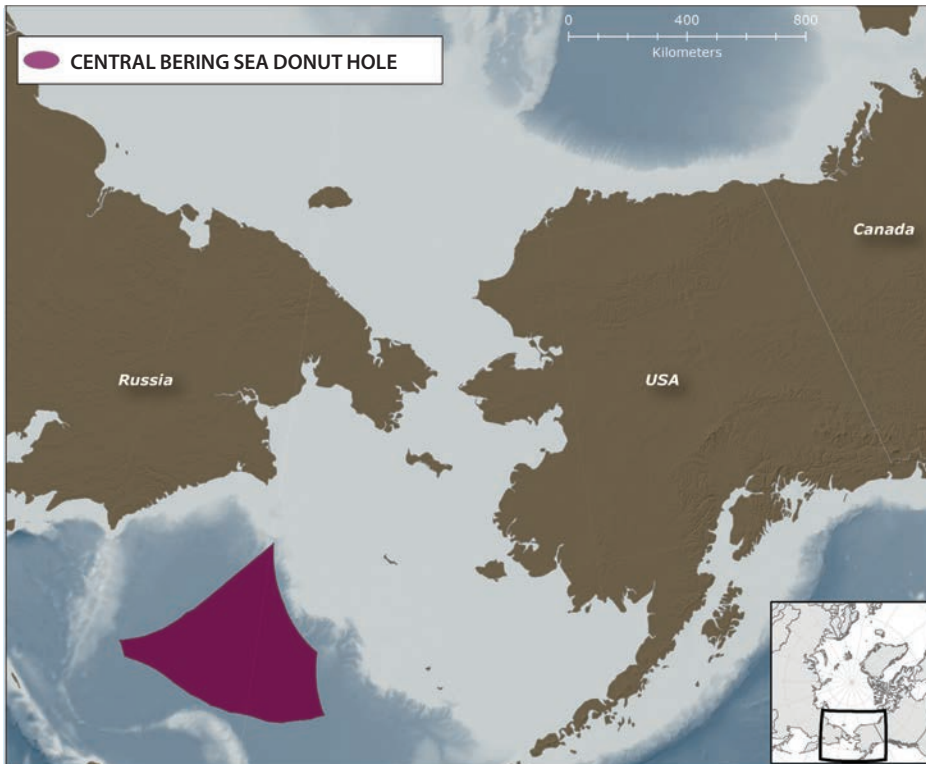


The Central Arctic Ocean is surrounded by the waters of five countries: the United States, Russia, Norway, Greenland (Denmark) and Canada.

Learning from the past, safeguarding the future

Arctic countries have begun to adopt precautionary policies to prevent overfishing in northern waters:

- In December 2009, the United States closed its Arctic waters (507,000 square kilometers or 196,000 square miles) to commercial fishing until scientific research can assess the rapidly evolving marine environment.
- In adjacent waters, Canada is considering a plan to prevent development of commercial fishing in the Beaufort Sea (832,000 square kilometers or 321,000 square miles) while scientists and the Inuvialuit determine how to ensure the sustainability of any proposed fisheries.
- In international waters of the Bering Sea near the Arctic, Russia and the United States developed an international fisheries agreement in 1994. This halted commercial fishing in a region known as the Bering Sea "donut hole" [box, page 2] until such activities are proved to be sustainable.



In the late 1970s and early 1980s, fishing fleets from South Korea, China, Poland, Japan and other countries congregated in international waters in the central Bering Sea to catch pollock. The lack of scientific assessment and regulation led to overfishing, prompting the United States and Russia to seek an international response. The Central Bering Sea Pollock Agreement was signed by the United States, Russia, Japan, South Korea, Poland and China and closed the area to pollock fishing until a set of conservation conditions are met. It also established scientific standards and enforcement mechanisms.



Sarah Case

What's next

The Central Arctic Ocean is vulnerable today to the same environmental harm and political discord that arose over the pollock fishery in international waters of the Bering Sea in the 1970s and 1980s. To avoid this, Arctic countries should negotiate a new international agreement for the Central Arctic Ocean that:

- Prohibits commercial fisheries until the parties agree otherwise.
- Fosters an international scientific research program to establish a baseline of information about fish and other living marine resources.
- Develops conservation and management measures to ensure that commercial fishing will begin only if it can be conducted sustainably.
- Establishes robust monitoring and enforcement to gauge the success of the agreement.

Already, the United States and the European Union have adopted policies recommending no commercial fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean until new international arrangements can be negotiated. The Pew Charitable Trusts' Oceans North International campaign is working with Arctic countries, scientists, the fishing industry and indigenous peoples to achieve expanded support for an agreement that will protect these waters and their living marine resources from premature, unregulated or unsustainable commercial fishing.

ABOUT THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS' ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

The aim of Pew's environmental initiatives is to strengthen policies and practices in ways that produce significant and measurable protection for terrestrial and marine systems worldwide.

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