

# Agreement to prevent unregulated high seas fisheries in the central Arctic Ocean

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**PURPOSE:** to conclude, on behalf of the European Union, the Agreement to prevent unregulated high seas fisheries in the central Arctic Ocean.

**PROPOSED ACT:** Council Decision.

**ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT:** Council may adopt the act only if Parliament has given its consent to the act.

**BACKGROUND:** on 31 March 2016, the Council adopted negotiating directives which authorised the Commission to open negotiations on behalf of the European Union, an international agreement to prevent unregulated high seas fisheries in the central Arctic Ocean.

On the basis of the relevant negotiating directives, the Commission conducted negotiations with the delegations from Canada, China, Denmark in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland, Iceland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Norway, Russia and the United States of America with a view to concluding a binding Agreement to prevent unregulated high seas fisheries in the central Arctic Ocean.

The Agreement seeks to prevent unregulated commercial fishing in the high seas portion of the central Arctic Ocean, an area that is roughly 2.8 million square kilometres in size. Commercial fishing has never been known to occur in this area, nor is it likely to occur in the near future. However, given the changing conditions of the Arctic Ocean, the governments in question developed this Agreement in accordance with the **precautionary approach** to fisheries management.

**CONTENT:** the present proposal calls on the Council to adopt the decision to approve, on behalf of the Union, the Agreement to prevent unregulated high seas fisheries in the central Arctic Ocean. Becoming a Party to the Agreement will promote consistency in the Union's conservation approach across oceans and reinforce its commitment to the long term conservation and sustainable use of marine biological resources globally.

The Agreement will establish and operate a joint programme of scientific research and monitoring with the aim of improving the understanding of the ecosystem(s) of this area and, in particular, of determining whether fish stocks might exist in this area that could be harvested on a sustainable basis.

Once entered into force, the Agreement will **close an important regulatory gap** in the current International ocean governance framework.