

Arctic Ocean, Coastal and Meteorological Data Shared

NOAA, Shell Exploration & Production, ConocoPhillips, and Statoil USA E&P Inc. have signed an agreement to improve collaboration on ocean, coastal and climate science for the Arctic. The agreement calls for sharing a number of scientific data sets for this largely frontier region, including weather and ocean observations, biological information, and sea ice and sea floor mapping studies.

This agreement provides a framework among the signatories to share high-quality data to enhance NOAA's ability to monitor climate change and provide useful products and services that inform responsible energy exploration activities in the region. Integrating these types of data could also provide a greater national capacity to effectively manage and respond to environmental disasters, such as hazardous spills, in an area where limited personnel and facilities exist.

NOAA will conduct quality control on all data provided under this agreement before it is incorporated into NOAA products and services through compliance with OMB and NOAA guidelines implementing the Information Quality Act, for example, through peer review. NOAA will make the data obtained under this agreement available to the public except as limited by a specific annex, and will seek to have as much data as possible publicly available.

While NOAA's data is generally available to the public, types of data the companies have agreed to share with the government address issues including meteorology; coastal and ocean currents, circulation, and waves; sea ice studies; biological science; hydrographic services and mapping.

A dramatic reduction in sea ice as a result of climate change raises new environmental, economic, and national security issues that have immediate and long-term impacts for human lives, livelihoods, coastal communities and the environment and demand extensive and collaborative analysis.

"Despite the wealth of scientific research conducted on the Arctic environment to date, much remains unknown, and no single government agency or entity has the resources or capacity to meet the task alone," said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "We will hold our industry partners to our high standards, and make sure that as we learn more, we also prepare for and minimise the risks involved in Arctic oil and gas development," said Lubchenco. "Consistent with our commitment to quality-check data and make public as much of it as possible, we anticipate being able to take advantage of multiple sources of information. In view of the rapid of change in Arctic ecosystems and populations, additional credible courses of data are welcome."

Products and data from this collaboration will help NOAA achieve many of the goals it has for the Arctic. Earlier this year, NOAA released its Arctic Vision and Strategy, a document crafted to address Presidential directives on the Arctic, including the US Arctic Region Policy and the National Ocean Policy, as well as the needs and requirements articulated by NOAA partners and stakeholders for Arctic services. The Vision and Strategy encompasses all of NOAA's capabilities, including fisheries management, weather and sea forecasting, climate services, mapping and charting for safe navigation, oil spill readiness and response, observations by satellite, ship, and aircraft, and oceanic, atmospheric, and climate research.