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HELMHOLTZ-ZENTRUM FÜR POLAR-  
UND MEERESFORSCHUNG

## Scientific consultation

# German Arctic Office to act as consultant to politics and industry

The Alfred Wegener Institute is setting up the first cross-institutional centre of excellence for questions about the Arctic at the Potsdam site

[04. January 2017] **The rapid climate changes in the Arctic are no longer just the domain of scientists. The shrinking sea ice and collapsing permafrost coasts are now also becoming topics on the agenda of international politics and industry. To be able to offer direct scientific advice to decision-makers, the Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research (AWI) has now set up an office for Arctic affairs at its Potsdam site. The German Arctic Office officially commenced work on 1 January 2017 and draws its expertise from a network of scientists from all German research institutes working on Arctic topics.**

Although Germany is not an Arctic country, it is one of the leading Arctic research nations. It is the aim of the German government to strengthen Germany's role in Arctic affairs. Due to the geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-ecological significance of the north polar region, which is changing particularly rapidly as a result of global warming, the German government endeavours to make the Arctic a key issue of German politics. "To do this, it requires a lot of scientific advice and support - which we as the German Arctic Office will provide", says Dr Volker Rachold.

The AWI scientists and long-standing Executive Secretary of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) heads the new German Arctic Office, which started its activities in January 2017 at the Potsdam site of the Alfred Wegener Institute.

## Neutral science partner for decision-makers in politics and industry

The German Arctic Office was initiated by the German Foreign Office, which represents Germany as an observer in the Arctic Council, and by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, which promotes Arctic research in Germany.

Volker Rachold and his two staff will serve as neutral science advisers to representatives from politics, research and industry in Arctic matters and also work closely with the Berlin embassies of the Arctic countries. The Arctic Office is going to be a cooperation platform and interface between politics, industry and science, providing expertise and a comprehensive overview of the various activities.



Furthermore, the team will continue the "Arktis-Dialog" series of events that was initiated by the AWI and the German Foreign Office, which is currently regularly attended by representatives from six federal ministries. As part of the Arktis-Dialog events, experts from various branches of research answer the government representatives' questions. "Our network includes polar scientists of the Alfred Wegener Institute, but also scientists from other research institutions such as the Institute for Geosciences and Natural

## Downloads





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Resources, the German Aerospace Center (DLR), the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies and the GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research. We need their help, for example, when it comes to appointing German experts for the various work groups of the Arctic Council”, says Volker Rachold.

### Arctic countries interested in German research expertise and environmental technology

The geochemist knows what expectations the members of the Arctic Council have of the German “observer” from his many years as IASC Executive Secretary. “These countries are interested in our research results, for example the designation of marine protected areas. They also rely on German expertise and German technologies when it comes to the economic development and the climate and environmental protection of Arctic regions; Germany for instance contributes to the improvement of ice predictions for shipping and to averting possible environmental risks as a result of increased shipping”, Volker Rachold explains.

He believes that investments by industry and politics in the Arctic region cannot be stopped, they can only be given sustained and vigilant support - for example by making use of modern environmental technology and by means of forward-thinking research. “One of our tasks at the Arctic Office is to explore specific questions asked by the government and companies together with institutions and universities, so that researchers can look into these issues. If we manage to communicate the research results to stakeholders and decision-makers, then we will meet the growing demand for a socially relevant science. To do this, the dialogue between research and stakeholders must be fostered and maintained in both directions”, says Volker Rachold.

Detailed information about the work of the Arctic Office will shortly be available on its website. The first dates have already been confirmed. The first one is an information event at the end of May jointly organised with Finland in the Finnish Embassy in Berlin. In May 2017 Finland will take over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

pursues research in the polar regions and the oceans of mid and high latitudes. As one of the 18 centres of the Helmholtz Association it coordinates polar research in Germany and provides ships like the research icebreaker Polarstern and stations for the international scientific community.

## More information

### Topic pages

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