

Preliminary Information concerning the outer limits of the continental shelf of Canada in the Arctic Ocean

Introduction

Canada signed the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (the “Convention”) on the day it was opened for signature and ratified it on 7 November 2003. The Convention entered into force for Canada on 7 December 2003.

As reflected in article 77 of the Convention, the rights of a coastal state over its continental shelf exist *ipso facto* and *ab initio*.

Canada is mindful of its obligation, pursuant to article 76(8) of the Convention, to submit information on the limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured. On 6 December 2013, Canada submitted such information to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (the “Commission”) in respect of areas in the Atlantic Ocean.

This document provides preliminary information indicative of the outer limits of the continental shelf of Canada beyond 200 nautical miles in the Arctic Ocean, as well as a description of the status of preparation and intended date of making a submission in this respect in accordance with the requirements of article 76 of the Convention. Filing this preliminary information satisfies the time period referred to in article 4 of Annex II of the Convention, read in conjunction with decision SPLOS/183 adopted at the eighteenth meeting of States Parties to the Convention. As provided in paragraphs 1(b) and (c) of decision SPLOS/183, this preliminary information shall not be considered by the Commission, and is without prejudice to the submission and to its consideration by the Commission.

Consistent with article 76(10) and article 9 of Annex II to the Convention, this preliminary information is submitted without prejudice to the question of delimitation of the continental shelf.

Preliminary information indicative of the outer limits of the continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean

The preparation of Canada’s submission is a joint effort of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, the Department of Natural Resources (Geological Survey of Canada) and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (Canadian Hydrographic Service). The Geological Survey of Canada and the Canadian Hydrographic Service are responsible for collecting and interpreting data as well as preparing the submission from a technical and scientific standpoint. The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development is responsible for legal aspects of the submission and associated diplomatic work. Other departments and agencies are also involved in collecting data for the submission. These include Environment Canada (Canadian Ice Service), Parks Canada, the Canadian Coast Guard, Defence Research and Development Canada and the Department of National Defence.

While some preliminary work was undertaken in the mid-1990s, the preparation of the submission began after Canada became party to the Convention in 2003. Data collection for the purpose of the submission commenced in 2006.

In the Arctic Ocean, Canada faced the challenge of collecting data in areas that are ice-covered, difficult to access and, in some instances, had not previously been surveyed. The existence of perennial ice cover

over much of the shelf area required an acquisition plan that involved data collection through the ice as well as collection of seismic and bathymetry data using icebreakers. International collaboration, notably with the United States of America and the Kingdom of Denmark, as well as the innovative use of technology were used to collect the best data possible in this environment. In preparation for its submission, Canada has acquired about 15 500 kilometres of seismic reflection data, 1100 km of seismic refraction data and 38 000 line-kilometres of bathymetric data, as well as deployed 171 sonobuoys to collect information about the seismic velocity in the sedimentary layers. A total of 58 000 km of airborne gravity and magnetic data have been collected over the Alpha and Lomonosov Ridges in the Arctic Ocean.

The continental margin of Canada in the Arctic Ocean is part of a morphologically continuous continental margin around the Canada Basin and along the Amundsen Basin. It comprises a number of seafloor elevations (Lomonosov Ridge and Alpha Ridge) and forms the submerged prolongation of the land mass of Canada. Throughout, the areas of continental shelf extend beyond 200 nautical miles from the territorial sea baselines of Canada and, on the Alpha and Lomonosov Ridges, beyond the 350 nautical mile constraint.

Status of preparation of the submission and intended date of submission

Canada notes that a substantial amount of the necessary scientific, technical and legal work for the submission of information in respect of continental shelf areas in the Arctic Ocean has been accomplished, and Canada is currently continuing its work on this part of the submission. Canada intends to make a partial submission in respect of areas in the Arctic Ocean at an appropriate date that may depend, among other things, on the acquisition of additional data. Canada will keep the Commission informed of progress in this respect.