During my appearance, before the Committee on 19 July in relation to your inquiry into *The Changing Arctic* I committed to write to you with further detail on Whitehall’s engagement with our wider geopolitical strategy in the Arctic and address whether the UK should have a policy of opposing drilling for oil and gas in the Arctic.

Firstly, the Arctic is a peaceful region characterised by co-operation and negotiated resolution. Nevertheless, as the Committee noted, changing geopolitics, increased commercial activity and the build-up of Arctic military capabilities means we should not take this position for granted.

Maintaining a peaceful, stable and well-governed Arctic underpins all UK Government policies in the region. We work with our international partners and allies in bilateral and multilateral fora to preserve the security of the region.

Government departments regularly share analysis and understanding of developments in the Arctic through a cross-Government Arctic network, which meets biannually to ensure that UK policies towards the Arctic remain appropriate for emerging trends. This close collaboration was demonstrated when the FCO Head of Polar Regions Department gave evidence to the Defence Select Committee alongside the Minister of State for the Armed Forces for their inquiry into *Defence in the Arctic*. Their report was published on 15 August.

The Government continually tests its understanding and approach by engaging beyond government. For example, representatives of the Arctic States and the Arctic research community recently joined a forum organised by the Ministry of Defence to discuss the UK Government’s approach to security in the region.

As the Committee will know, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change focuses on limiting greenhouse gas emissions rather than on the production of hydrocarbons. The UK’s decision not to call for a ban on Arctic hydrocarbon exploration respects the sovereignty of the Arctic States over their natural resources and is consistent with our Paris Agreement commitments.

The UN recognises that decisions on the development of natural resources are a matter for national governments. Under the Paris Agreement, any emissions resulting from the extraction and use of hydrocarbons from the Arctic, as from anywhere else, will be included in the Nationally Determined Contributions of the countries concerned.

While some countries have taken action to limit offshore drilling for oil in their own territory, this does not extend to a ban in the Arctic. We will continue to encourage all countries to set ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions while also respecting the rights of countries to determine the right mix of policies to meet these targets.

The UK approach supports measures to reduce the demand for oil and gas through the development of a low-carbon economy while opposing restrictions that would
affect the UK’s security of supply, affordability and sustainability. We support the use by the Arctic States of the highest regulatory standards and welcome the steps they have taken through the Arctic Council on pollution prevention and oil-spill preparedness and response.

It is worth noting that carbon pollution from coal is one of the largest contributors to climate change. Climate Change Minister, Claire Perry launched the Powering Past Coal Alliance at COP23 in November 2017 to move the world from burning unabated coal for electricity to cleaner power sources. The UK will continue to lead international calls for ambitious action to tackle climate change.

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