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Canada and Kingdom of Denmark Reach Tentative Agreement on Lincoln Sea Boundary

News Release

November 28, 2012 - Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird, the Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister of the Arctic Council for Canada, and Villy Søvndal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Denmark, met today in Ottawa to discuss a range of issues of common interest and, in particular, engagement in Arctic matters.

The ministers announced that negotiators have reached a tentative agreement on where to establish the maritime boundary in the Lincoln Sea, the body of water north of Ellesmere Island and Greenland. This will resolve an issue between the two countries that arose in the 1970s. Once ratified, the agreement will also provide an opportunity to modernize provisions of the 1973 treaty that established the current boundary south of the Lincoln Sea.

“Our government is pleased with the progress made on the Lincoln Sea boundary,” said Baird. “Today’s tentative agreement lessens uncertainty and strengthens Canada’s sovereignty over the Arctic.”

“Canada’s vision for the Arctic includes clearly defined boundaries,” said Minister Aglukkaq. “This brings us toward that vision and demonstrates our mutual commitment to seeing the North realize its true potential as a healthy, prosperous and secure region.”

“Seeking to resolve boundary issues is a priority for both our countries and is articulated in our respective Arctic strategies,” said Minister Søvndal. “This significant step forward exemplifies the cooperative approach endorsed by Arctic Ocean coastal states in the Ilulissat Declaration of May 28, 2008.”

The tentative agreement does not address the issue of sovereignty over Hans Island. That issue is the subject of continuing discussion intended to arrive at a mutually satisfactory solution.

Negotiators will now work to transform this technical agreement into a treaty text for ratification by their respective governments. Once the treaty is ratified, Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark will share a boundary that is more than 1,600 nautical miles long.

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A backgrounder follows.

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Background - Lincoln Sea Maritime Boundary

The Lincoln Sea is a body of water in the Arctic Ocean north of Ellesmere Island and Greenland.

In 1973, Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark signed a treaty that established the maritime boundary in the area between Canada and Greenland as far as, but not including, the Lincoln Sea. In later negotiations, the two countries agreed that the boundary in the Lincoln Sea should be an equidistance line—a line equidistant at all points from the shorelines of Canada and Greenland—but disagreed on some of the technical aspects of how the line should be determined. With the passage of time, these differences have faded.

The boundary in the Lincoln Sea agreed ad referendum by negotiators is an equidistance line that extends to 200 nautical miles from the coasts of Ellesmere Island and northern Greenland. The new boundary resolves an issue between Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark that has existed since the 1970s over a small area of approximately 65 square nautical miles in the Lincoln Sea.

Negotiators will now work to transform this technical agreement into a treaty text for ratification by their respective governments.

The treaty text will also provide an opportunity to modernize the provisions set out in the 1973 treaty and to complete a process of technical adjustments to the coordinates of the existing boundary. Technical adjustments were made to the southern part of the boundary in Baffin Bay and Davis Strait in 2009, and experts have now completed the work for Nares Strait.

Seeking to resolve boundary issues is a priority articulated by Canada in the Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy and by the Kingdom of Denmark in the Kingdom of Denmark: Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020. Close cooperation between Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark in the work to define their respective continental shelves beyond 200 nautical miles also helped pave the way for progress on the maritime boundary at this time.

For more information on the 1973 treaty, see Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Kingdom of Denmark Relating to the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf Between Greenland and Canada , and its subsequent amendment . For more information on the tabling of treaties in the Parliament of Canada, see Policy on Tabling of Treaties in Parliament .



Illustration of the maritime boundary between Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark.

This graphic is for illustrative purposes only.

The solid black line is the boundary agreed in the 1973 treaty. The broken black line is the boundary agreed ad referendum. The broken blue lines indicate 200-nautical-mile zones.

1. Lincoln Sea
2. Nares Strait
3. Baffin Bay
4. Davis Strait
5. Labrador Sea

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