Climate change is about to divide Norway’s largest Arctic island into two

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Radar soundings made by Polish researchers in the area of Hornbreen-Hambergbreen glaciers show that there are no obstacles that would hinder the flow of water though the channel formed between the Greenland and Barents Seas once the glaciers have retreated. Consequently, Spitsbergen will be divided into two islands.

Svalbard, the fastest-heating place on earth, is a live laboratory for everyone studying the dramatic effects of the climate crisis. While world leaders travels to New York on September 23 for the UN Climate Action Summit to find ways to limit the global temperature to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, temperatures on Svalbard have already risen by 4 °C.

At Spitsbergen, the largest island on the archipelago, both permafrost and glacier are melting in a speed nobody could predict a few years ago.

«The conclusion coming from the surveys is that the glacier bed is below sea level and no obstacles have been identified that might prevent connection of the Barents Sea and Greenland Sea when glaciers have retreated,» says Mariusz Grabiec to the Barents Observer.

Grabiec is researcher with the University of Silesia and the Polish Centre for Polar Studies.

Since 1957, Poland has operated a research station at Hornsund, the southernmost fjord on Spitsbergen.

Mariuzs Grabiec tells that the fjord of Hornsund is expanding about 3 square kilometers every

year as the glaciers melts away.