

BEAC Working Group on Environment – Report 2016

2016 was the first year of the Norwegian chairmanship of the BEAC Working Group on Environment (WGE), after the chairmanship was transferred from Russia to Norway in Sortavala, Russia 24.-25. November 2015. Two meetings of the WGE was held in 2016 – the first in Svanhovd, Norway, 13.-15. March and the second in St. Petersburg 21.-23. September. There were 35-40 participants in both meetings.

The main areas of cooperation within the WGE is the Barents environmental "Hot Spots", nature protection, water issues, climate change and sustainability. For the first three issues, there are separate active subgroups while climate change and sustainability is handled by the WGE directly. The fourth subgroup of WGE, the Subgroup on Cleaner production and environmentally sound consumption, is temporarily put on hold due to lack of resources.

The subgroups have met back-to-back with the WGE-meetings and have held own meetings, both physically and by Skype/telephone. In addition there have been several project meetings of the projects carried out under the WGE and its subgroups. The WGE seeks close cooperation with the Regional Working Group on Environment (RWGE). RWGE is always invited to hold their meetings in connection with the WGE-meetings.

Climate change and sustainability:

There are two main goals for the work on climate change in the Norwegian chairmanship: The first is *Updating the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation*, adopted at the Barents environmental ministerial meeting in Inari, Finland, in 2013. The International Barents Secretariat has been tasked to gather proposals for new projects from the relevant working groups in the Barents cooperation. The WGE is currently in the final phase of preparing the proposals for activities from the WGE. The aim is to present a proposal for an updated Action plan for the Committee of Senior Officials in June 2017.

The second goal is to conduct a study "*Barents 2050*", which is a response to the Paris agreement from 2015. The study will focus on how the Barents region could contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Paris climate agreement, build resilience with regard to the impacts of climate mitigation measures, as well as on the potential for a sustainable economic development that arises from mitigation action. The Finnish VTT Technical Research Center has been commissioned to do the study that will be presented to the WGE Ministerial meeting in November 2017.

The BEAC Working Group on Economic Cooperation, Barents Forest Sector Network, Steering Committee for the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area, Joint Working Group on Energy, Working Group of Indigenous Peoples, and Regional Working Group of Environment, have been invited to appoint members to a reference group for the Barents 2050-study. So far, the Barents Forest Sector Network has appointed a representative. The dead line for appointing representatives has been extended to the end of March 2017.

Hot spots Exclusion:

The WGE Subgroup on Hotspots Exclusion (SHE) works to encourage improvements in environmental performance at the Barents "hot spots", aiming at exclusion of hotspots from

the Barents Environmental Hot Spot List¹. The Subgroup consists of representatives from the four Barents countries with NEFCO and IBS as observers and important contributors to its work through funding mechanisms and other assistance. The Subgroup has in 2016 focused on support activities, such as the development of hotspot-specific exclusion criteria for three pilot hotspots and on Nordic expert review of information about environmental improvements at hotspots aiming for exclusion.

The review of information about environmental improvements, including emission data for hotspots in Russia is often challenging for the Nordic experts, as the scheme for monitoring and measuring of emissions to air and effluents to water from industrial facilities in Russia is different from the Nordic countries. It is therefore not always possible to compare them in an adequate way. The new BAT legislation in Russia is considered an important factor for environmental improvements at hotspots when implemented, and the SHE group is closely following the implementation of the new law and looking into how the process for hotspot exclusion can be harmonized with it. In 2016, the group arranged a seminar on BAT for the Pulp and Paper Industry (Arkhangelsk, September 24-26) together with the Moscow BAT Bureau, as a hotspot support activity. A consultant report was written from the seminar in Arkhangelsk, with recommendations on follow-ups.

NEFCO and the Russian Cleaner Production Centre has also presented a “Review on Cleaner Production and Hot Spots in the Russian Barents Region” with certain conclusions and recommendations. Further hotspot support activities are underway. The SHE group also cooperates with the Arctic Council/ACAP WG on certain hotspots related projects. In 2016, the SHE group had six meetings, two face-to face and four telephone meetings.

Nature Protection (NPS) and Water Issues (SWI):

The subgroups NPS and SWI are operating under a joint working program “nature and waters” for 2016-2017, and the subgroups meet jointly. The working program focuses on climate change, ecosystem services, environmental enlightenment and joint management of transboundary ecosystems. Multi and bilateral projects are being implemented within each of the specific areas of the working program. At the end of 2016, the subgroups started planning joint project applications for Kolarctic CBC program funding. The projects will focus on biodiversity conservation, Atlantic salmon management and research cooperation, water restoration, water regulations and climate change, monitoring and multiuse planning of shared water resources.

¹ The 2003 AMAP/NEFCO report on Barents hot spots