

Report from the Subgroup on Water Issues (SWI), 2010-2011

The Tromsø Declaration states inter alia that the Environment Ministers emphasised the need for improving the quality of drinking water in the Barents Region and also recognised the relation between clean water and socio-economic factors, as treated under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe/World Health Organisation (UNECE/WHO) Protocol on Water and Health; welcomed the plans for a comprehensive water project in Arkhangelsk Oblast, with the possibility of exchanging experience with other parts of the Barents region. Furthermore it was also underlined in the declaration the need for further studies on the correlation between climate change and the condition of water bodies and wetlands and continued the importance co-operation on transboundary water.

The SWI has under the Swedish Chairmanship adopted a Work Programme where the main activities and priorities for the chairmanship are outlined. It is stressed that the projects and activities in the Work program will be addressed as time, resources and opportunity permit and the work of the SWI is carried out in close cooperation with the Regional Working Group on Environment.

During the Chairmanship the SWI has held meetings in Kiruna (April, 2010), Arkhangelsk (November-December, 2010), Komi (June, 2011) and Piteå (September, 2011).

The priorities for the SWI are the following (under each bullet a comment will be enclosed):

- Arrange a multilateral workshop/seminar for water experts including all Barents countries as a part of the development of a comprehensive water project with the Arkhangelsk region, with the possibility of exchanging experience with other parts of the Russian Barents region.
 - A comprehensive conference on Water Management Resources was arranged between November 29 and December 3, 2010 in Arkhangelsk together with the Arkhangelsk Region Government. The Swedish Environmental Agency funded the conference. The Conference gathered experts from both the Nordic countries and the North-West of Russia and app. 90 persons attended the conference.
 - Back to back to the meeting a joint meeting for the Subgroup and the Regional Working Group on Environment was organized. At the meeting the subgroup identified two modules for cooperation where Sweden was prepared to cooperate on waste water and drinking water and Finland and Norway was prepared to cooperate with Russia on exchanging information on the European

Union's Water Framework Directive and the Russian governmental programme on Clean Water.

- The SWI has continued the work to seek possibilities to develop a multilateral project on Water Management Initiatives in Arkhangelsk and other Barents regions. Meetings to discuss the development and to seek opportunities to link the activity to the project on UNECE Protocol on Water and Health of a multilateral cooperation was held in Komi in June, 2011 and May in Arkhangelsk.
- Seek opportunities to link activities to the project on UNECE Protocol.
 - It is noted that Norway participated in the conference and made a presentation of the UNECE Protocol. The SWI have supported the Norwegian initiative.
- Arrange a joint cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers, a conference in Arkhangelsk on exchange of experiences on water management and climate change in the Barents region and develop follow-up actions on climate change and water.
 - The conference was held in June, 2011 and the SWI has supported the development of the conference on "Climate Change and Water Management – meeting the challenges in the Barents region". It was jointly organized by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Government of the Arkhangelsk Region and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.
- Other projects have also been reported to be carried out from the members of the work group. These projects are mainly bilateral projects between a Nordic country and the Russian Federation.

Mattias Lindgren

Chairman of the SWI