

BEAC Working Group on Environment. Activity report November 2017- February 2020

Introduction

The Chairmanship of the BEAC Working Group on Environment (WGE) was handed over from Norway to Sweden at the 13th Meeting of the Ministers of Environment in Vadsø, in November 2017. In Vadsø, the ministers adopted a declaration that gave directions for the work in WGE.

Organizational matters

Ms Elin Kronqvist from the Swedish Ministry of the Environment chaired the WGE during the Swedish Chairmanship. The Climate and Hots Spots advisers at the International Barents Secretariat, first Ms Maria Dianova and then Ms Julia Bobina, assisted the WGE in the coordination of climate and hot spots issues, and in administrative support for WGE-meetings.

During the Swedish chairmanship, the WGE reduced the four subgroups to two. The Subgroups on Nature Protection and Water Issues were merged into the Subgroup on Nature and Water (SNW). The Subgroup on Cleaner Production and Consumption Subgroup was discontinued, and relevant areas of cooperation were merged into the work of the Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion (SHE). Climate change issues are coordinated by the WGE.

The WGE had four meetings back-to-back with subgroup meetings:

- in Piteå/Storforsen, May 2018
- in Skellefteå, November 2018
- in Stora Sjöfallet, March 2019 and
- in Umeå, September 2019

There were between 30 and 40 participants in the meetings. A WGE-meeting was held in Stockholm in November 2019 and a final telephone meeting on January 22nd 2020. In addition, subgroups and projects under the WGE have organized their own separate meetings.

The Working Group on Environment updated its mandate, upon request from the BEAC CSO. The WGE also reviewed the order of chairmanship rotation to be in line with the chairmanship of BEAC. The order of rotation will be fully aligned after a transitional period of 2018-2025.

All Barents working groups in the Barents cooperation were commissioned by the BEAC to present recommendations on inclusion of youth in their work. The WGE focused on youth involvement in the Habitat Contact Forum, further addressed below.

The International Barents Secretariat has continuously posted information on the WGE activities on the Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation's webpages (www.barentscooperation.org) and social media.

Climate change

Climate change is an overarching priority for the WGE. During the Swedish Chairmanship of BEAC, the *Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation* was implemented by the working groups, monitored by the IBS. The first Action Plan was adopted at the BEAC Environment Minister's Meeting in Inari, 2013 and an updated Action Plan that contains projects up to 2020 was adopted by Ministers of the Environment in Vadsø in 2017. The Action Plan contains contributions and actions from the Working Group on Environment, the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, the Joint Working Group on Education and Research, the Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation in the Barents Region, the Barents Regional Youth Council, the Barents Forest Sector Network and the Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics. In March 2019, the IBS made a status report about the implementation of the Action Plan and presented it to the WGE. In the discussion that followed, the need for contributions from the Working Groups that have not yet contributed to the Action Plan was addressed, as well as the need for all groups to take further climate action in 2020 and beyond.

During the Norwegian chairmanship 2015-17, the WGE commissioned a study called "*Barents 2050 – Opportunities for contributing to climate change mitigation*". The goal of the study was to assess how low emission pathways, consistent with the Paris Agreement, could affect economic activities in the Barents region and to assess how the region can contribute to the achievement of the Paris goals and build resilience. During the Swedish chairmanship, the content of the report was disseminated to other BEAC Working Groups. The report was presented to the Working Group on Economic Cooperation in June 2018.

The work on *Development of Regional Climate and Energy Strategies*, led by Norrbotten, Sweden has been a priority under the Swedish Chairmanship. The aim of the work is to support cooperation on regional climate and energy strategies that can support and increase the speed of the transition to a low-carbon society. A concrete part of that work was the project "Facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building through network activities and learning-by-doing" in Arkhangelsk and Norrbotten, financed by the Nordic-Russian Programme for Environment and Climate Co-operation in North-West Russia (PECC). The project concludes that the Arkhangelsk region is well prepared to monitor and report its GHG emissions and that there is a huge potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and black carbon emissions through improved energy generation and use, including switching from fossil fuels to renewables and biomass.

In November 2019, a workshop was held in Luleå, Norrbotten with participation from Arkhangelsk, Nordland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten. A network was established in order to continue to exchange experiences and information on regional climate strategic work in the Barents region.

Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion (SHE)

The Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion (SHE) was chaired by Mr **Åke Mikaelsson** (Sweden) and Mr **Alexander Druchinin** (Russia). SHE held 30 meetings during the period of November 2017- January 2020, both physical (6) meetings and telephone-meetings (24). The subgroup works closely with the Nordic Environment Finance Cooperation (NEFCO) and the International Barents Secretariat. NEFCO's Barents Hot Spots Facility is a useful tool for financing activities in the subgroup and to facilitate the implementation of concrete measures in the Barents environmental "hot spots".

The Barents Hot Spots List from 2003 describes 42 prioritized sites with environmental problems in the Russian part of the Barents region. Solving these hot spots contributes to better health and environment locally, and to reduced emissions and environmental pollutants into the Arctic.

During the Swedish chairmanship, the SHE-group focused extensively on further designing and implementing ten so-called Supporting Activities to promote capacity building on permit granting based on Best Available Technique (BAT), strengthening environmental action and propelling more hotspots forward in the hotspot exclusion process. Upon recommendation from the SHE-group, the WGE decided to exclude the following hot spots from the list:

- *A5 Koryazhma branch of Ilim Group JSC (Old name of the Hot Spot: Kotlas Pulp and Paper Mill) (Arkhangelsk A5)*
- *Enterprises of pulp and paper as sources of dioxin pollution in the Arkhangelsk region (Arkhangelsk A9-1)*
- *Sewage treatment in Petrozavodsk (Karelia 5)*
- *Mondi Pulp and Paper Mill, Waste water discharge (Komi 3-2)*

11 full and 5 half hot spots have been excluded from the list as a result of environmental improvements and cooperation under the WGE.

Meetings between SHE and the Regional Hot Spots Exclusion Groups (HEGs) in Arkhangelsk and Karelia were conducted in February 2018 and November 2019 respectively. These meetings facilitated capacity building both for the regional Hot Spots Exclusion Groups as well as for SHE. The meetings included information from SHE on the hot spot procedure and exclusion criteria, Supporting Activities and information about the environmental progress in the hot spots from the hot spot owners. SHE received documentation about the environmental improvements from the regional hot spot exclusion groups (HEGs).

During the Swedish Chairmanship, the SHE-group implemented several Supporting Activities in close cooperation with NEFCO, the Russian BAT-bureau and the HEGs. Eight so-called task forces, of both thematic and overarching nature, were formed with experts from all the member states to design and help implement tailored Supporting Activities. They will also assist with the review and commenting of hotspot documentation, thereby replacing the old role of the Technical Expert Committees (TECs).

The concrete Supporting Activities implemented during the period include:

- Capacity building seminars in the BAT-permit granting procedure for managers and experts in all five Russian Barents regions with hundreds of participants from regional authorities, academia and different industries (SuppAct no. 1a-b)
- Branch-specific trainings and seminars for the pulp & paper and wastewater sectors in Karelia and Komi (SuppAct no. 2)
- Drafting of Environmental Efficiency Plans (SuppAct no. 4) and training in BAT-based Permit Granting leading towards Agreed Criteria at selected Pilot Plants (SuppAct no. 5) for the hotspot sites Mondi Pulp and Paper Mill, Wastewater discharge (Ko3-2) and Sewage treatment in Petrozavodsk (K5)
- Support for the refinement of Screening & Analysis (S&A) Reports and Determination of Specific Exclusion Criteria for several hotspot sites (SuppAct no. 6). For many of the remaining hot spots on the list however, more precise analyses are needed in order to determine if they can be excluded from the list.

The SHE established a Communication Task Force in the spring 2019. The Supporting Activity on Communication aims at providing better understanding and improved tools for communication work around the Barents environmental hot spots.

Subgroup on Nature and Water (SNW)

During the Swedish chairmanship, the WGE decided to merge the Nature Protection Subgroup (NPS) and Subgroup on Water Issues (SWI) into one group – The Subgroup on Nature and Water (SNW). Mr **Mats-Rune Bergström** chaired the subgroup, with Ms **Ellinor Bomark** as secretary. The group held four meetings during the Swedish Chairmanship.

The main priorities of the subgroup have been to strengthen the preservation of biodiversity and conservation of ecosystems, to exchange best practices for conservation and restoration of wetlands, to cooperate on water protection and management and to facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation of tourism's impact on the Barents ecosystems.

In the ministerial declaration from Vadsø, ministers called for the finalisation of the *Strategy for protection of intact forests in the Barents region* under the Swedish chairmanship of the WGE, with strong involvement of the relevant Russian authorities. The strategy was initially asked for by the Ministers in their meeting in Inari, Finland in 2013 but could not be adopted by the ministers neither in Sortavala 2015 nor in Vadsø in 2017. The WGE decided to restart the work in 2017. At the WGE-meeting in November 2018, Russia informed that in recent years the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation and the Forest Agency have been preparing revisions to the Russian forest legislation and proposed that the work on the strategy on intact forests should be paused. The Swedish chairmanship has strived to find other ways to increase cooperation on intact forests. At the SNW-meeting in September 2019, the group discussed the countries' national and regional plans for forest management and conservation. This may form a basis to identify necessary steps to take in the Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation to preserve our common biological and cultural heritage.

The SNW and WGE-meetings in March 2018 had a certain focus on sustainable tourism with an excursion. A representative from Sirges Sami Village presented their work with reindeer herding and how it is affected by climate change, predators and tourism. The SNW group also discussed and shared experiences on how to limit negative effects of terrain driving.

A priority during the Swedish chairmanship has been to exchange best practices for conservation and restoration of wetlands. The SNW-meeting in November 2018 had a specific focus on this theme.

The 10th Habitat Contact Forum (HCF) was arranged 17-20 June in Murmansk, Russia. The main themes of the 10th HCF were protection of habitats with a special focus on problems of creating and assessing the effectiveness of specially protected areas, conservation of wetlands and coastal habitats and biodiversity, forest preservation and prospects of ecotourism in the green belt of the Barents region. As a result of a special invitation to youth, several students participated in the Forum. A resolution was adopted and, among other things, the HCF X-resolution notes that invasive alien species are a threat to biodiversity and more information exchange and cooperation is needed on the monitoring and counter-measures against invasive species. This issue was brought up at the SNW- and WGE-meetings and elaborated into 2 concrete project proposals. Work is ongoing on a compilation of relevant databases, of species in general, protected species and invasive species in the Barents region. It will be published in 2020. In 2020, work will also continue

with focus on invasive species in the Barents region, and the aim is to create a network between the Barents countries and regions for mutual exchange of information on the invasive species.

Several applications to financial instruments within the EU, Nordic Council of Ministers and North Calotte Programmes for cross-border cooperation have been prepared. It is quite a resource-demanding task to develop them but once approved, these instruments provide valuable and joint financial contribution to the activities in the subgroup. Project that have been prepared and accepted for funding in this period are for example:

- “CoASal - Conserving our Atlantic salmon as a sustainable resource for people in the North; fisheries and conservation in the context of growing threats and a changing environment”
- “PAN -Phenomena of Arctic Nature” – Increasing awareness about arctic nature for tourists, students, local people and tourism entrepreneurs and developing a network of visitor-centres along the Green Belt of Fennoscandia
- “EMRA - Environmental planning, Measures and Restoration Actions in regulated water systems”
- “WESO - Clean drinking water and healthy environment for Sortavala”
- “PRO TROUT - Prospering native brown trout and local fishing professions”

Below are projects listed that have been ongoing during 2017-2020 with funding from various sources.

Cooperation on water protection and management include:

- “Tana River Interreg II” about joint environmental management of the River Tana,
- “Cross-border dialogue and Multi-Use Planning in the Pasvik and Grense Jakobselv catchments (Kolarctic CBC)” with the expected result of a practical a management plan including a program of measures for 2021-2030.

Projects to strengthen action on preservation of biodiversity and conservation of ecosystems include:

- “SEAmBOTH Interreg North - seamless mapping and management of the northern Bothnian Bay” which is a marine underwater mapping and management harmonisation project,
- “SALMUS - Salmonid Fish and Freshwater Pearl Mussel”, a Kolarctic CBC project on issues linked to salmonid fish and freshwater pearl mussel and their role in providing ecosystem services and biodiversity,
- “ReArc - Ecological Restorations of Arctic Rivers” a Kolarctic CBC project focusing on knowledge-exchange on restoration planning and restoration of rivers.
- “Felles Fjellrev”, an Interreg North project aiming at strengthening the populations of the arctic fox.

Projects to facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation of tourism’s impact on Barents ecosystems include two Karelia CBC projects:

- “SUPER - Sustainability Under Pressure: Environmental Resilience in natural and cultural heritage areas with intensive recreation” that aim to study and strengthen environmentally sustainable tourism in four different UNESCO world heritage sites,
- “NatureBeST - Green Nature Best Solutions in Tourism to Reduce Negative on the Environment” studies the tourism sector and try to reduce negative impact on the environment in cooperation between small tourist centers and guest houses.

Cooperation with other working groups and regional organizations

The WGE puts emphasis on good cooperation with other relevant fora in the Barents Cooperation and with other regional organizations in the north.

Cooperation between the WGE and the **Regional Working Group on Environment (RWGE)** was promoted by inviting the Regional Working Group on Environment to all WGE meetings. In practice, RWGE members met as a part of the Subgroup on Nature and Water and in the WGE-meetings and no separate RWGE-meetings were held.

A representative from the **Working group on Indigenous Peoples (WGIP)** was invited to all meetings and participated in two meetings. At the WGE-meeting in September 2019, the WGIP-representative, Ms Darya Shvetsova, presented the work of the group and possibilities for cooperation was discussed. At the WGE-meeting in May 2018, a representative from the Swedish Sami Parliament presented a report on traditional knowledge for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity to support the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, articles 8 and 10.

A priority during the Swedish Chairmanship was to reach out to other working groups to enhance understanding and increase cooperation:

- A representative from the **Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY)** participated in the meeting in Skellefteå in November 2018. Initiatives to further participation of youth in the WGE-work were discussed. A concrete outcome of that discussion was the initiative to invite students to participate in the Habitat Contact Forum in Murmansk.
- A representative from the **Barents Forest Sector Network (BFSN)** participated in the WGE-meeting in November 2018 and presented their work. The work of the two groups is of high relevance to each other, for example concerning adaptation to climate change. The WGE and the SNW Chairs participated in a BFSN-meeting in October 2018 and the SNW chair also participated in the Barents Forest Forum, in Umeå in October 2019.
- The Chair of the **Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT)** participated in the WGE-meeting in March 2019 and the SNW-chair participated in the JWGT-meeting in June 2019. Cooperation on sustainable tourism and ecotourism was discussed. The WGE also commented on the JWGT brochure on labels and programmes for a sustainable tourism industry.
- The Chair of the **Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC)** participated in the meeting in September 2019 and presented the work of the group. Possible measures to increase youth participation in the work of the WGE were discussed.

The WGE has also cooperated with the **Arctic Council**. At the WGE meeting in November 2018, a representative of the Arctic Council working group **Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME)**, presented their work on marine litter, including microplastics. Finland, as the Chair of the Arctic Council 2017-2019, informed the WGE about the current work and the WGE identified several possibilities for increased cooperation.

NEFCO kept the WGE informed about different projects under the **Nordic-Russian Programme for Environment and Climate (PECC-1)**, a programme financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Barents Hot Spot Facility that is of high relevance for the WGE. A new call under the programme, PECC-2, is currently ongoing.

At the WGE-meeting in November 2018, a representative from **OECD Environment Directorate** participated in the meeting to present a comparative analysis of the implementation of BAT and environmental permit granting. The OECD BAT-Project is of relevance for the Barents work on hot spots.