



Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR), The Regional Working Group on Environment (RWGE)

Background

The Barents Regional Working Group on Environment work is naturally problem oriented and aimed at issues essential to the region within a relatively short time frame. The discussions and activities therefore focus on the most urgent problems. At the same time, long-term objectives must be kept in mind. The status of the environment in the Barents region varies a great deal. A common challenge for the whole Barents area is an on-going climate change and adaption to a global warming.

The main tasks of the Barents Regional Working Group on Environment are to act as a network for environmental authorities in the Barents region and to ensure that environmental issues in the region are continuously taken into consideration and given priority on the national and international levels. Also RWGE has to promote local and regional competence to engage in environmental work on the international level and to improve the exchange of information and know-how between the different regions by project implementation.

Goals

It would hardly be possible to cover the range of tasks that fall within the framework of BEAR's environmental work in any meaningful way. Instead priority must be given to the strategically most important areas and the work must be closely integrated nationally and internationally.

RWGE activities have been divided during the last years into the following main items, where climate change can be seen as a cross sector item:

- Surface and drinking water
- Biodiversity
- Minerals and mining
- Information and building of public awareness and knowledge

Concrete project proposals on environmental issues mentioned above can be incorporated in the overall Barents program. Projects may ultimately be financed by various EU programs, bilateral cooperation programs, international financing bodies, etc. Active participation of the Russian counterparts in project preparation, implementation and financing has a vital importance.

Activities

Surface and drinking water

The state of the natural waters in Barents area is good in many cases, but where the state is concerned, the most important environmental issues are acidification, heavy metals and POPs. All these threats are caused by industrial emissions. Concrete water related projects have been implemented during the last years in close cooperation with WGE Subgroup on water issues.

The most important areas of regional cooperation with water issues have been harmonizing of water quality and water ecology monitoring programs, especially in transboundary areas according to water framework directive and other national programs. Project on ground water based small and medium scale drinking water sources in the Russian Barents has been implemented with EU financing. Knowledge on purification technologies on small scale municipal wastewater has been transferred within the Barents regions.

Biodiversity

Nature in the Barents area is vulnerable to environmental changes and this is very important to notice also in the context of climate change effects in the area. Throughout the Barents region there has been an extensive designation of protected areas but large biodiversity values can also be found outside these areas. It is important to develop information and knowledge regarding biodiversity issues.

Habitat Contact Forum has been a very active and important part of the biodiversity co-operation in Barents area and last time the forum was arranged in Norway (Bodö) 2013. From the regional point of view it's very important to continue this co-operation in the future. Green Belt of Fennoscandia initiative and the MoU signed in 2010 is an important follow up of regional level co-operation on biodiversity and protected area management.

Minerals and mining

RWGE believes that increased and conscious networking of the different actors of the sector throughout the region would be an appropriate way of channeling the positive forces to benefit the environment and stimulate development and joint co-operation in general as well.

RWGE has taken part in the arrangement of the Barents mining conference in Rovaniemi 2013, where information on environmental issues in mining activities was delivered. Also a project has been set up by the Swedes for the transfer of methodological competence and experience between regional authorities that regulate mining and environmental issues in the Barents area. There is a need for information change on general principles in permit granting and control of mining activities.

Increased environmental consciousness and influence – public awareness

The environmental consciousness of the people, enterprises and authorities in the Barents region should be increased and possibilities for different social groups to engage in active environmental cooperation should be promoted. These objectives are reached by the conferences on different regional environmental topics. Also RWGE meetings are a good platform to exchange environmental information within Barents region. Excursions as a part of regular RWGE meetings also appropriate to exchange information. Web pages are used for disseminating information on the environmental situation of the Barents region in several environmental projects.

Projects

Concrete projects have been implemented by RWGE background organisations on focused environmental issues during the last years. Projects have been bilateral or multilateral and wide scale of financing instruments has been used for the project implementation.

- Forestry impact and water management in Torne International River Basin (financed by Interreg IV A Nord, 720 000 €)
 - o Project time: 2011-2014
 - o Regions participating: Norrbotten and Lapland

Need of the restoration activities in the certain rivers has been clarified and ecological inventories has been made according to the EU water framework directive. One of the project results will be detailed water restoration plans for pilot rivers in the river basin area.

- EU water framework directive information project in Kola Peninsula (financed by Ministry of the environment Finland, 30 000€)
 - o Project time: 2011-2012
 - o Regions participating: Lapland, Finnmark and Murmansk

Information has been changed on EU water framework directive and Russian water strategy between environmental monitoring authorities in Murmansk, Finnmark and Lapland. Seminars and expert meetings have been used as a tool for the project goals.

- Water Management Initiative in Archangelsk and other Barents regions (financed by Nordic Council of ministers, 130 000 €)
 - o Project time: 2012-2013
 - o Regions participating: Norrbotten, Arkangel, Komi, Murmansk and North Ostrobothnia

Seminars and study tours have been arranged in participating regions and during these activities water experts in the Barents region have exchanged experiences on topics relating to surface waters and sustainable urban water systems.

- Trilateral cooperation on Environmental Challenges in the Joint Border Area (Financed by Kolarctic ENPI, 1,5 M€)
 - o Project time: 2012-2014
 - o Regions participating: Lapland, Finnmark and Murmansk

Mitigation of the harmful effects of climate change, water regulation and contamination has been studied in the Finnish, Norwegian and Russian border area. Information will be produced on environmental impacts and adaptation to the climate change and other anthropogenic effects on a regional level. Also the effects of climate change and water regulation on the fish populations will be evaluated in the river Pasvik area.

- Trilateral cooperation on our common resource the Atlantic salmon in the Barents region (Financed by Kolarctic ENPI, 3,2 M€)
 - o Project time: 2011-2014
 - o Regions participating: Finnmark, Lapland, Murmansk and Arkangel

Management of the shared Atlantic salmon resource in the Barents region has been developed and enhanced for enabling sustainable harvesting regime and conservation of the fishing traditions. Information on salmon wintering behaviour in coastal waters has been collected and a gen map for

salmon populations in the study area will be created. Also effects of the climate change on salmon migration patterns and behaviour will be studied.

- Ground water supply in Sortavala district (Financed by Karelia ENPI, 250 000 €)
 - o Project time: 2011-2013
 - o Regions participating: Lapland and Karelia

Construction designs of ground water intakes, treatment and pipelines has been developed for two pilot areas in Kaalamo and Ruskeala located in Sortavala district. Fields with the deposits of pure ground water have been found in Kaalamo and Ruskeala villages to develop design estimates for the construction of ground water intakes. Treatment facilities and pipelines for two pilot areas in Kaalamo and Ruskeala have been planned.