

Barents Euro-Arctic Council
Working Group on Environment
Subgroup on Nature and Water

Minutes of the virtual meeting 21.4.2020

1. Opening of the meeting

Chair of the Subgroup Henna Haapala opened the meeting and introduced the agenda. The meeting started with a round of introductions. List of participants can be found at the end of this document.

2. Work Programme

Henna Haapala presented the priorities of the SNW under the Finnish chairmanship 2020-2023, emphasizing the significance of the upcoming global post-2020 biodiversity framework of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity for the Subgroup's efforts. Experience from the Barents Protected Area Network (BPAN), which built on the implementation of the Convention, forms a good basis for future work.

The priorities during the Finnish Chairmanship are:

- Greenbelt of Fennoscandia and sustainable nature tourism
- Biodiversity in changing climate, including intact forest, wetlands, invasive alien species, and migratory fish
- Water management and aquatic ecosystem restoration

Sweden and Norway had sent comments to the Draft work programme. Comments were discussed and it was agreed to refer to invasive species instead of invasive alien species in the context of the whole region due to the fact that some nationally invasive alien species may be native species in other Barents countries. It was also decided that even though some national programs might be remarkable investments in nature protection, they won't be listed in the work programme. However, information exchange about major national efforts is encouraged in the SNW meetings, when considered relevant. The WGE Chair invited members of the Subgroup to send information about such programs to the Chairmanship team.

It was noted, that two priority areas of the Finnish Chairmanship, wetlands and intact forests, lacked ongoing projects. Haapala proposed that these items are important and require attention and discussion in the upcoming WGE meeting. Regarding wetlands, she proposed that the SNW will follow-up the Arctic Council ongoing work on wetlands. Norway informed about bilateral cooperation with Russia (Pasvik zapovednik) under the Pasvik-Inari trilateral park to achieve Ramsar status also for Russian parts of the wetland and river areas along Pasvik river (Norwegian nature reserve has been Ramsar area since 1996). The cooperation takes place under the Norwegian-Russian Environmental commission. Sweden informed, that Sweden and Finland are applying LIFE project funding for the restoration of the Tornio river valley. Kristiina Niikkonen raised that a reference to the implementation of the Ramsar convention is important to keep in the text, given its long-standing prioritization in HCF and Barents cooperation in general. It was also noted that many of the ongoing projects have activities related to the wetlands. Tapio Lindholm proposed to learn from the experiences and results of the [NorBal Wet project](#). It was agreed that at the next meeting the SNW will discuss these projects and activities mentioned above and consider the way forward.

It was also discussed, how to promote the protection of intact forests in the Barents region. The Habitat Contact Forums and the Barents Protected Area Network have produced good quality material, that could be used to come up with new pragmatic ideas for further cooperation. The recent establishment of new protected areas on the Russian side of the Barents region was noted with appreciation. The Barents Forest Sector Network (BFSN) has approached the WGE and would like to seek possibilities for cooperation. This suggestion was considered very positive. E.g. sustainable forestry and interlinkages with the protection of biodiversity could be a potential area for cooperation. It was decided that the WGE Chair will contact BFSN to inquire their preferences and ideas for cooperation. Norway informed about ongoing national efforts to protect more old-grown forests and would be happy to share more information later on. The Chair offered to prepare some suggestions for further cooperation on intact forests based on the existing material and work done with regard to the intact forests, including the draft strategy and HCF to the first face-to-face meeting of the SNW, taking place possibly in October.

The work programme will be sent for further comments after the meeting and final version will be adopted in the WGE meeting in 5 June. Comments should be sent to the Chair before the end of April.

3. Update and latest news from relevant projects

A short review of recent news from the projects was held. Kristiina Niikkonen informed that Finland and Russia have applied for project funding from NEFCO for the development of the Green Belt of Fennoscandia. The aim is to enhance synergies between various separate projects along the area of GBF and to strengthen a joint brand to attract more nature tourism. Funding decision is still pending.

Magnus Johansson remarked that SALMUS isn't only about the migratory fish, as indicated in the project listing, but includes also ecosystem restoration. Yvonne Lundell raised that the projects Data Sources for Species and Invasive Species in the Barents Region still don't have confirmed partners from Russia, which is making the implementation challenging. Tapio Lindholm informed that due to COVID-19, the work under DIAS project proceeds now focusing on data collection separately in Russia and Finland. Karelian Research Center has opened a new [portal on invasive species](#).

ReArc, EMRA, SeaCOMBO and WESO are not acutely affected by COVID-19. It is likely that a 6-7 months prolongation will be asked for MUP, due to postponement of some meetings and activities. Jari Pasanen clarified, that TANA II is included in the project listing as a follow-up project to TANA I, which was led by the ELY Center of Lapland. Partners of TANA II are businesses and municipalities, that don't take part in SNW. Norway suggested that the results of TANA I could be presented by the lead partner (ELY) in the next meeting.

The WGE Chair invited the Subgroup to send further comments and information about the projects to the work programme, also including the possible other bilateral and trilateral parks, in addition to those that are part of the Green Belt of Fennoscandia.

4. Meetings of the SNW under the Finnish chairmanship 2020-2023

First face-to-face meeting of the SNW is planned to take place back-to-back with the first physical WGE meeting, likely in October 2020. WGE has a virtual meeting on 5 June, and SNW is welcome to join. During the Finnish Chairmanship, physical SNW meetings are tentatively held back-to-back with the WGE meetings. In addition, virtual meetings are held when needed.

Any other business

Magnus Johansson noted that both ENI CBC and Interreg programs are being updated and reformulated and suggested to discuss how to promote the role of northern areas and the importance of nature and water issues in these funding instruments. Jari Pasanen and Tiia Kalske informed that they are both following the issue nationally and both organizations are involved in the process when asked. The WGE Chair suggested, that Johansson could gather a small group, e.g. Katja Sukuvaara and anyone interested in addition to Pasanen and Kalske, to exchange information and brainstorm. Maria Dianova also reminded that all funding sources for Barents projects are [listed](#) in the BEAC website. Status and plan for the further work on the HCF evaluation was requested from Norwegian side.

List of participants

1. Henna Haapala, Ministry of the Environment, Finland
2. Aino Lipsanen, Ministry of the Environment, Finland
3. Saija Vuola, Ministry of the Environment, Finland
4. Kristiina Niikkonen, Ministry of the Environment, Finland
5. Tapio Lindholm, Finnish Environment Institute SYKE, Finland
6. Jari Pasanen, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY) for Lapland, Finland
7. Kimmo Aronsuu, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY) for North Ostrobothnia (Oulu region), Finland
8. Katja Sukuvaara, Regional Council of Kainuu, Finland
9. Jukka Nykänen, Regional Council of North Karelia, Finland
10. Mats-Rune Bergström, County Administration Board of Västerbotten, Sweden
11. Magnus Johansson, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, Sweden
12. Ellinor Bomark, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, Sweden
13. Yvonne Lundell, Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, Sweden
14. Tiia Kalske, Troms and Finnmark County Governor, Norway
15. Maria Dianova, International Barents Secretariat