



5 June 2020  
10:00-13:00 (Finnish time)  
virtual meeting

Barents Euro-Arctic Council  
**Working Group on Environment**  
56th meeting

## MINUTES

### 1. Welcome and introductions

The *WGE Chair Saija Vuola* welcomed participants to the first WGE meeting of the Finnish Chairmanship. Originally, the meeting was going to be held in Joensuu, North Karelia, but the visit to Joensuu had to be postponed until October due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting was held in a virtual format using the Go To Meeting platform hosted by the IBS. 34 participants, including two interpreters, participated in the meeting and got to know each other through the introductory round. The participants are listed in paragraph 8.

**Jari Vilén**, *Finland's Ambassador for Barents and Northern Dimension*, and Finland's recently appointed member of the BEAC Committee of Senior Officials, introduced himself to the WGE members. He mentioned that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland had started preparations of the Finnish BEAC Chairmanship to be taken over from Norway at the end of 2021. Environment will be among the priorities of the coming Chairmanship, and therefore, close cooperation with the WGE is expected.

### 2. Update from the International Barents Secretariat

**Tomas Hallberg**, *Head of the Secretariat*, talked about current development of the Barents cooperation under the unusual circumstances of the pandemic. In March 2020, just before the lock-down, Barents Predators Seminar was held in Arkhangelsk with active participation of the IBS and of Västerbotten County Administration, who are chairing the Barents Regional Council. Following this successful event, Västerbotten prepared a project application on further cooperation on predator research. [Read more about the seminar](#). Hallberg mentioned that a similar concept could also be a suitable format to discuss some topics of the WGE, for example the spread of invasive alien species.

Several BEAC working groups, including BFSN, JCRC, WGEC, JWGSH, JWGY and JWGT are arranging virtual meetings before the summer break. Barents Regional Committee and BEAC CSO are also planning to meet in June. In addition, Barents Governors will gather online on 10 June to discuss the situation with the corona virus in the region. [A recording of the event is available online](#). IBS is assisting the working groups in hosting meetings on the Go To Meeting platform, purchased by the IBS. Follow the Barents calendar on [www.barentscooperation.org](http://www.barentscooperation.org) for more information.



### 3. Sustainable Development and the Whole-of-Society Approach – Finland’s Experience

#### Agenda 2030 presentation

**Annika Lindblom**, *Director of International and EU Affairs, Ministry of the Environment of Finland, and Secretary-General of National Commission on Sustainable Development*, presented Finland’s experience in implementing Agenda 2030. Finland is committed to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals set by the Agenda 2030. Some goals, such as quality education (SDG 4), affordable and clean energy (7) or reduced inequalities (10) have already been achieved, others, such as sustainable consumption and production (12) and climate action (13), still require major efforts.

Implementation of SDGs requires integrated solutions and coordination between different sectors. In order to better root sustainable development into Finnish policies, measures, budget and action, Finland established a National Commission on Sustainable Development in 1993. The National Commission unites 57 members; it is chaired by the Prime Minister and vice-chaired by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. The Expert Panel for Sustainable Development, consisting of ten professors from different disciplines, and the Agenda 2030 Youth Group with 20 young members complement this important work.

To boost larger involvement of society in sustainable development, an online service was created: [Commitment2050.fi](https://commitment2050.fi). Over 2100 operational commitments to advance sustainable development have been made by schools, private companies, cities and municipalities; four green deals have been agreed upon, including less single-use plastic bags and more oil waste recycling. Civil society has been actively engaged in the process contributing to the whole-of-society approach in achieving SDGs. Since 2017, SDGs have also been considered in planning the state budget. Lindblom showed the second [Voluntary National Review](#) of implementation of Agenda 2030 to be presented in the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July. In addition to describing Finland’s progress in implementing the SDGs in 2016–2019, it contains case-studies from different Finnish organizations, including the Regional Council of Lapland and cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Turku. (see [Case: Lapland Region](#) on p. 41)

**Elin Kronqvist** thanked for an interesting presentation. She informed that the Swedish government will submit a new bill on Sweden’s continued implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to the Swedish Parliament in June 2020. It will include new national objectives and proposals. Once every fourth year, the Government will present a status analysis in an annex to the Budget Bill, with a full account of the Government’s work to implement the 2030 Agenda. A national coordinator was appointed in Sweden in February 2020 to enhance involvement of civil society, academic and business sectors in this work.

**Ingrid Lillehagen** thanked for the informative presentation and commented that the SD index shows that all the Barents countries have challenges to be solved.

Read more in the [Agenda 2030 presentation](#).



#### 4. Finnish Chairmanship – mandate and tasks from the Ministerial + other plans

##### [WGE presentation](#)

**Saija Vuola** reminded the group of the [WGE Mandate](#) adopted in 2018 and tasks given by the Environment Ministers at the [14th Ministerial meeting](#), held in Luleå in February 2020. In accordance with the mandate, two WGE meetings will be arranged per year. Finland considers holding one online and one physical meeting per year. Two Subgroups, SNW and SHE, will continue their activities. Regional WGE members are invited to join WGE meetings.

[The Ministerial Declaration of Environment Ministers](#) points out the assessment of the Hot Spots exclusion procedure along with further work on intact forests and the Green Belt of Fennoscandia among other important tasks. Following these tasks, the Finnish Chairmanship has set several priorities for 2020-2023, namely: carbon neutral circular economy, biodiversity protection (including promotion of nature-based solutions) and climate change issues. Together with the Norwegian BEAC Chairmanship, the WGE is tasked with involving all BEAC working groups in strengthening climate action beyond 2020. It needs to be discussed whether updating the Action Plan on Climate Change would serve this goal. The Norwegian BEAC Chairmanship is arranging a conference on Climate Smart Barents Region in spring 2021 in Tromsø.

**Elin Kronqvist** thanked the chairmanship for the programme. She stressed that cooperation with the BEAC CSO on updating the Action Plan on Climate Change is an important issue, so that this document wouldn't be only the WGE's product. With regard to biodiversity protection, Kronqvist noted that a joint voluntary commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity was related specifically to the project on invasive alien species, initiated by Sweden. However, the commitment can be considered also with a different scope. The project on invasive alien species is unfortunately still lacking a Russian representative. **Ingrid Lillehagen** mentioned that start of the Finnish Chairmanship is promising and expressed gratitude for work on the programme. The Conference on Climate Smart Barents Region planned for spring 2021 will discuss how the Barents Region can make climate-smart investments to fulfill the Paris Agreement in combination with biodiversity goals. It will contribute to strengthening climate actions as called for by the ministers.

After Saija's reflections on the previous discussion of the [WGE Work Programme 2020-2023](#), it was approved by the WGE as a living document with a possibility to fill it in with concrete examples of taken actions.

Read more in the [WGE presentation](#).

#### 5. Report from the Subgroup on Nature and Water

##### [SNW presentation](#)

**Aino Lipsanen** presented the Subgroup's Work Programme and plans for the coming period on behalf of Henna Haapala, SNW Chair. There will be 1 to 3 meetings per year, both physical and virtual. Among planned activities are: Green Belt of Fennoscandia and sustainable nature tourism, XIth Habitat Contact Forum (planned for 2021 in Norrbotten, Sweden), biodiversity on changing climate, preservation of wetlands and intact forests, cooperation on water



management and aquatic ecosystem restoration etc. Cooperation with the Green Belt of Fennoscandia is clarified in the draft SNW work programme: SNW's role is to follow and promote, when appropriate, the work of the GBF with a view of finding possible synergies.

The updated [SNW Work Programme](#) is sent out to the SNW members for silent approval until 9 June. **Sweden** and **Norway** commended the efforts put in the development of the work programme.

Read more in the [SNW presentation](#).

## 6. Report from the Subgroup on Hot Spot Exclusion

[SHE presentation](#)

**Helena Dahlbo**, SHE Chair, talked about the adopted [SHE Work Programme](#) and the priorities of Hot Spots work, such as supporting activities (with a special focus on mining and metallurgy, waste management and voluntary climate inventories); evaluation of Hot Spots exclusion procedure and Barents List; looking for synergies with the Arctic Council's work on black carbon. Eight SHE Task Forces, which work in different areas – from wastewater to communications – had their virtual meetings during spring to agree on further steps in Hot Spots exclusion process.

Representatives of three Russian regions took part in the SHE meeting on 3 June - Arkhangelsk Region, Nenets Autonomous Region and Republic of Karelia - and reported on the situation with remaining Hot Spots; Komi Republic sent an update in writing. Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia is to appoint a new SHE co-Chair to replace Alexander Druchinin.

**Finland**, **Sweden** and **Norway** supported the work programme and SHE priorities for the coming period; they welcomed the idea of the Hot Spots exclusion procedure evaluation and underlined the importance of appointing a new Russian co-Chair by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (as well as a new WGE member). **Henrik G Forsström** added that the role of NEFCO and the BHSF should also be evaluated within this work.

Read more in the [SHE presentation](#).

## 7. Conclusions, next meeting

Several administrative changes will take place in the WGE work. Henna Haapala will be chairing the WGE from August 2020 until June 2021 instead of Saija Vuola. Anna Kuhmonen, SYKE, will hopefully be the new SNW Chair, although this depends on her employer (the Finnish Environment Institute SYKE). Helena Dahlbo will continue as SHE Chair and Aino Lipsanen – as Finland's WGE representative.

The next WGE meeting will be held in **Joensuu, North Karelia, on 7-9 October 2020** (the situation with the pandemic will be closely followed). The programme will include an excursion to wetlands, Subgroups' and WGE meetings. The meeting will be arranged back-to-back with the meeting of the Green Belt of Fennoscandia (6 October).



## 8. List of participants

1. Saija Vuola, WGE Chair, Ministry of the Environment (FI)
2. Annika Lindblom, Ministry of the Environment, National Commission on Sustainable Development (FI)
3. Henna Haapala, SNW Chair, Ministry of the Environment (FI)
4. Aino Lipsanen, Ministry of the Environment (FI)
5. Helena Dahlbo, SHE Chair, Finnish Environment Institute (FI)
6. Emmi Vähä, Finnish Environment Institute (FI)
7. Tapio Lindholm, Finnish Environment Institute (FI)
8. Jari Pasanen, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of Lapland (FI)
9. Vilma Lehtovaara, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of North Karelia (FI)
10. Kimmo Aronsuu, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of North Ostrobothnia (FI)
11. Tatu Turunen, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of Kainuu (FI)
12. Katja Sukuvaara, Regional Council of Kainuu (FI)
13. Jari Vilen, Ambassador, Ministry for Foreign Affairs (FI)
14. Ingrid Lillehagen, WGE member, Ministry of Climate and Environment (NO)
15. Kristin Eine, Norwegian Environment Agency (NO)
16. Olaug Bjertnaes, Norwegian Environment Agency (NO)
17. Tiia Kalske, Office of Troms and Finnmark County Governor (NO)
18. Elin Kronqvist, WGE member, Ministry of the Environment (SE)
19. Åke Mikaelsson, Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SE)
20. Rickard Nätjehall, Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SE)
21. Yvonne Lundell, Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SE)
22. Mats-Rune Bergström, NPS/SWI Chair, County Administrative Board of Västerbotten (SE)
23. Ellinor Bomark, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten (SE)
24. Magnus Johansson, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten (SE)
25. Ruslan Butovsky, VNII Ecology (RU)
26. Tatiana Guseva, Environmental Industrial Policy Centre (RU)
27. Yana Vojcehovskaya, Department of Natural Resources, Environment and Agro-Industrial Complex of the Nenets Autonomous Region (RU)
28. Henrik G Forsström, NEFCO
29. Tomas Hallberg, IBS
30. Roman Gokkoev, IBS
31. Roy Hojem, IBS
32. Maria Dianova, IBS
33. Boris Kochetkov, Interpreter
34. Evgeny Galchenko, Interpreter