



Fourteenth Meeting of Environment Ministers Declaration

Luleå, Sweden, 5th February 2020

Environment Ministers and senior representatives of Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation and Sweden met in Luleå, Sweden, 4-5 February 2020 for the Fourteenth Meeting of the Ministers of the Environment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). The meeting was also attended by representatives of indigenous peoples, regional bodies, observer states and other invited guests.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council Environment Ministers

noted that the origin of the Barents environmental cooperation lies in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council Environment Action Programme adopted in Bodø in 1994 and its continuity is followed up by subsequent meetings of the Environment Ministers, the latest in Vadsø, Norway in 2017;

acknowledged that climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution of the environment are the most serious environmental challenges in the Barents region and *stressed* the importance of adequate measures to protect the unique and fragile natural ecosystems of the region, as well as a shift to a green, resource efficient and circular economy;

recognized the urgent need to accelerate action on all levels and by all stakeholders, in order to fulfill the vision and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda;

stressed the importance of cross-border cooperation on national, regional and local levels, and *emphasized* the need to engage indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations and youth in addressing environmental challenges;

acknowledged that the future of indigenous peoples' culture and traditional livelihood depends upon access to land and water areas, protection and sustainable use of these areas and *recognized* the right of indigenous peoples to be involved in planning, management and decision-making;

acknowledged the importance of incorporating traditional and local knowledge in natural resource management and climate adaptation actions;

welcomed the Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of BEAC, adopted in Umeå, Sweden, on 3 October 2019;

welcomed measures taken to continue and increase cooperation between working groups in the Barents cooperation as well as with other cooperation formats in the north, such as the Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers;

expressed appreciation for the financial support for the Barents environmental cooperation from the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO), Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP), the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and the INTERREG programme;

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Environment Ministers

reaffirmed their commitment to implement the Paris Agreement, and *underlined* that the latest science is clear about the unprecedented need to raise the collective ambition in 2020 to be in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement;

affirmed their commitment to take resolute action on climate change and *welcomed* the initiatives launched at the UN Climate Action Summit on 23 September 2019;

noted with deep concern that the Barents Region is warming at more than twice the rate of the global average, *emphasized* that these changes will have severe impacts on the ecosystems, societies and communities, including on the livelihood of indigenous peoples and *stressed* the need to intensify the cooperation to adapt to climate change;

stressed the need for ambitious and urgent action to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases in the region, thus promoting sustainable economic development in line with the Paris Agreement, and *underlined* the opportunity to combine mitigation action with sustainable investments, innovation and competitive jobs;

welcomed the implementation of the Action Plan on Climate Change and *called* for strengthened climate action beyond 2020 with enhanced contributions from all Barents Working Groups;

welcomed the establishment of a network for cooperation on regional climate strategies;

emphasized the urgency to reduce emissions of short-lived climate pollutants, such as black carbon, in order to mitigate climate change in the Arctic and reduce local negative health impacts of air pollution and *underlined* the need to raise awareness of these issues;

THE BARENTS ENVIRONMENTAL “HOT SPOTS”

The Environment Ministers

noted with appreciation the environmental progress in many of the Barents "hot spots" in the last two years and *assented* to the exclusion of the following Barents environmental” hot spots”:

- Koryazhma branch of Ilim Group JSC (Arkhangelsk 5)
- Enterprises of pulp and paper as sources of dioxin pollution (Arkhangelsk 9-1)
- Sewage treatment in Petrozavodsk (Karelia 5)
- Mondi Pulp and Paper Mill, waste water discharge (Komi 3-2);

welcomed in particular the environmental achievements made at the Petrozavodsk Wastewater Treatment Plant AO PKS Vodokanal and at Mondi Pulp and Paper Mill in Syktyvkar and *acknowledged* that these are good examples of joint actions under the Barents cooperation as well as of the implementation of the new Russian permit granting legislation based on Best Available Techniques;

encouraged the continuation of the supporting activities that contribute to the exclusion of environmental "hot spots" by cooperation with enterprises, environmental authorities, the Russian BAT bureau, branch experts from all Barents countries and NEFCO;

took note that the hot spots exclusion procedure and the list of Barents Environmental “hot spots” have been operative for more than ten years and *called for* their evaluation, with the aim to optimize the cooperation;

NATURE AND WATER

The Environment Ministers

acknowledged that loss of biodiversity poses a serious and urgent challenge in the Barents region and *stressed* the importance of adequate measures to tackle direct and indirect drivers of the deterioration of nature;

underlined the need to protect and restore the unique and fragile natural ecosystems and biodiversity of the region;

underlined the need to implement nature-based solutions and sustainable management practices to maintain the ecosystems and the services they provide, to mitigate and adapt to climate change and to sustain human health;

affirmed their strong commitment to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its strategic plan as well as the process for a new post-2020 global biodiversity framework and *acknowledged* the importance of activities under the Barents environmental cooperation in meeting relevant targets under the Convention;

recognized the importance of appropriately managed protected areas and *emphasised* the importance of cross-border cooperation within the Barents region, such as the Green Belt of Fennoscandia and bilateral initiatives, to maintain and develop crucial ecological connections and green infrastructure;

stressed the need for cooperation to protect the intact forests, pristine mires and wetlands in the Barents Region and of restoring degraded mires and wetlands;

acknowledged the Habitat Contact Forum (HCF) as an important platform for cooperation on habitat issues in the Barents region, *welcomed* the resolution of the Xth HCF in Murmansk in 2019, and *looked forward* to the next HCF in Norrbotten in 2021;

noted that invasive alien species pose an increasing threat to biodiversity and ecosystem services and *stressed* that more information exchange and cooperation is needed to monitor and prevent further spread in the region;

recognized the impacts of a growing tourism industry and welcomed increased cooperation to prevent negative effects on ecosystems and local communities and to enhance the positive effects of nature tourism on local economies in the Barents region and on human health;

underlined the need to preserve the pristine water ecosystems, to continue to restore degraded water bodies in the Barents region and to enhance cooperation on monitoring and management of transboundary river basins;

REGIONAL LEVEL COOPERATION

The Environment Ministers

stressed that the regional environmental cooperation is crucial in solving common environmental challenges in the Barents region, *welcomed* further cross-border regional activities and *encouraged* further active participation of regional representatives in WGE activities as well as supported close cooperation between the WGE and the Regional Working Group on Environment;

CONCLUSION

The Environment Ministers

endorsed the Report of the BEAC Working Group on Environment on the activities under the Swedish Chairmanship November 2017- February 2020;

expressed gratitude to the outgoing chair, Sweden, the International Barents Secretariat and all members and observers in the Working Group on Environment;

welcomed the incoming chair, Finland, and the Finnish priorities for the chairmanship in 2020-23.