



Thirteenth Meeting of Environment Ministers Declaration

Vadsø, Norway, 29-30 November 2017

Senior representatives of Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation and Sweden met in Vadsø, Norway, on 29-30 November 2017 for the Thirteenth 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 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 Sortavala in 2015, held under the Chairmanship of the Russian Federation in BEAC Working Group on Environment;

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;

affirmed their commitment to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including the Sustainable Development Goals and the global 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production;

stressed the importance of cooperation between the national and regional levels, and the involvement of indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations and youth in addressing environmental challenges and opportunities in the Barents Region;

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 in the Barents region;

welcomed the Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of BEAC, adopted in Arkhangelsk, Russia, on 19 October 2017 and the declaration from the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Fairbanks, USA, 11 May 2017;

encouraged co-operation and coordination with other working groups under the BEAC, the working groups and expert groups of the Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers;

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

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Environment Ministers

affirmed their commitment to the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and to contribute to holding the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1,5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels;

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

highlighted the possibilities to mitigate climate change and human health hazards by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and short-lived climate pollutants, such as methane and black carbon, in the Arctic and Barents Regions, and *welcomed* the collective black carbon emission reduction goal and recommendations on methane and black carbon reductions of the Arctic Council;

acknowledged that adaptation to already occurring climate change requires co-operation at national, regional and local levels;

welcomed the study "Barents 2050", *stressed* the need for ambitious mitigation action and the possibilities to combine this with economic development that spurs investment, innovation and creates competitive jobs, and *encouraged* follow-up of the study by BEAC and all relevant working groups;

adopted the revised Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation and *underlined* the importance of the implementation of this plan by the BEAC Working Groups under the active guidance of the Committee of Senior Officials in close cooperation with the International Barents Secretariat (IBS) and the BEAC Working Group on Environment (WGE);

urged the BEAC Working Group on Environment and the Regional Working Group on Environment to further intensify the work towards reduced emissions of greenhouse gases and short lived climate pollutants, improved capacity to adapt and to spread knowledge and awareness on climate change.

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”; Arkhangelsk Pulp and Paper Mill (A4), Reduction of dust emissions by Vorkuta cement plant (Ko2-1) and Wood waste from timber, pulp and paper industry in the 9 forest districts of the Komi Republic (Ko7);

welcomed the results from the efforts in the Komi Republic on the "hot spot" Ko7 to utilize wood waste from the timber industry for energy purposes, contributing to environmental improvements locally and to significant reductions of methane emissions, and *encouraged* that the experiences from this work should be used as a good example in other regions;

welcomed the specific exclusion criteria for the "Hot spot" Ko7 and further work to develop exclusion criteria for the remaining hot spots on the Barents Hot Spots list, and *encouraged* the implementation of action plans for environmental improvements in these hot spots;

acknowledged the work done to develop and implement support activities that can contribute to exclusion of the environmental "hot spots" and implementation of Best Available Techniques, and *encouraged* to continue this work in close cooperation with enterprises, environmental authorities and the Russian BAT bureau;

encouraged to strengthen the cooperation between the Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion and the environmental authorities in the Russian regions and to consider revising the hot spot exclusion procedure, taking into account the new Russian legislation on permit granting;

stressed the need for further environmental improvements in the remaining "hot spots" on the list, with special emphasis on the need for reduction of pollution in hot spots with cross-border impacts, such as from the nickel production in the Kola Peninsula;

welcomed the contribution of NEFCO in the work aimed at “hot spot” exclusion, and *encouraged* implementation of relevant environmental investment projects and support activities.

NATURE PROTECTION

The Environment Ministers

affirmed their commitment to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its strategic plan; and *acknowledged* the importance of activities under the Barents environmental cooperation in meeting relevant targets under the Convention;

underlined the need to maintain the ecosystems and the services they provide, in order to mitigate climate change and to sustain human health;

recognized the importance of appropriately managed protected natural areas, including protection of additional valuable nature areas, in the Barents region, and *welcomed* the results and recommendations from the Barents Protected Areas Network project;

stressed the importance of cross-border cooperation on transboundary protected natural areas and parks within the Barents region, such as the Green Belt of Fennoscandia (GBF), and *emphasized* the importance of maintaining and developing connectivity between protected areas and cooperating on awareness raising activities;

encouraged further transboundary co-operation and knowledge exchange in mapping, analyzing and developing green infrastructure, including sustainable and traditional land-use forms;

acknowledged the Strategy for Protection of the Intact Forests in the Barents Region, as an important contribution to preserve the Region's last pristine forests and to meet the Aichi biodiversity targets of the Convention of Biological Diversity, and *called for* its finalisation under the Swedish chairmanship of the WGE, with strong involvement of the relevant Russian authorities;

stressed the need to protect the pristine mires and wetlands of the Barents region and of restoring degraded mires and wetlands, and *underlined* the importance of monitoring the palsa mires as indicators of climate change;

acknowledged the Habitat Contact Forum (HCF) as an important platform for co-operation on habitat issues in the Barents region, *welcomed* the resolution of the HCF in Oulu in 2017, and *looked forward* to the next HCF meeting in Murmansk in 2019;

recognized the impacts of a growing tourism industry and the need to reduce negative impacts of tourism on the Barents nature.

WATER ISSUES

The Environment Ministers

acknowledged the ongoing work on transboundary waters and *stressed* the importance of continued co-operation on monitoring and management in transboundary river basins, according to international standards and with local participation and involvement;

underlined the need to preserve the pristine water ecosystems and to continue restoring degraded water bodies in the Barents region, with a focus on mitigating negative impacts from land use;

acknowledged the importance of the wild salmon in the Barents region for aquatic ecosystems and the income and life quality of the inhabitants of the region, and *emphasized* the need for further cooperation on salmon management;

stressed the need for improving the quality of drinking water and sewage treatment, especially in those parts of the Barents Region where poor drinking water quality and inadequate sewage treatment is still a major health and environmental problem;

stressed that plastic litter and microplastics in marine and freshwater environments are major environmental problems and *encouraged* the WGE to take this issue on the working group's agenda, building on the experiences from, and not duplicating work done in other fora.

REGIONAL LEVEL COOPERATION

The Environment Ministers

noted that the regional environmental cooperation is crucial in solving common environmental challenges in the Barents region;

encouraged further measures to promote active participation of regional representatives in WGE activities as well as supported close cooperation between the WGE and the Regional Working Group on Environment;

welcomed regional activities on water issues, climate change, environmental monitoring, biodiversity conservation, and environmental awareness;

welcomed the Kolarctic ENI CBC projects Ecological Restoration of Arctic Rivers (ReArc) Pasvik Multi-Use Plan and SALMUS Salmonid Fish and Freshwater Pearl Mussel as important tools in regional cooperation on water issues;

noted with appreciation the work to handle cross-border environmental challenges such as climate change, and *called for* further development of the network for regional climate strategies as a tool to develop regional and local approaches to these challenges;

emphasized the value of regional cooperation projects in seeking solutions for Barents Environmental “hot spots”, for instance in the field of water supply, and other appropriate sectors.

CONCLUSION

The Environment Ministers

endorsed the Report of the BEAC Working Group on Environment on the activities in 2016-2017;

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

welcomed the incoming chair, Sweden, and the Swedish priorities for the chairmanship in 2018-19.