



THE BARENTS WORKING GROUPS

ANNUAL REPORT

Name of the Working Group:	Working Group on Environment
The current Chair and the Chairmanship period:	Finland (Henna Haapala), 2/2020-2/2023

1. Priorities of the Chairmanship

- Carbon neutral circular economy
- Biodiversity protection
- Climate change, including black carbon

2. Meetings (meetings held, main topics and outcomes of the meetings)

- Virtual WGE Meeting 2-3 February – discussion on WGE climate activities and input to the Barents Action Plan on Climate Change; discussion on Barents biodiversity initiative; reports from the Subgroup on Nature and Water and Subgroup on Hot Spot Exclusion; presentation of the project EU-funded Action on Black Carbon in the Arctic
- Virtual WGE Meeting 27 May – WGE input to the Action Plan on Climate Change; results of the webinar Climate Smart Barents Region; discussion on merging RWGE and WGE; discussion on biodiversity commitments; reports from the Subgroups
- Virtual WGE Meeting 16 September – revision of the WGE mandate; finalization of the WGE input to the Action Plan on Climate Change; reports from the Subgroups
- Subgroup on Nature and Water held two virtual meetings (22 March, 14 September) and
- Subgroup on Hot Spot Exclusion held 5 virtual meetings (21 January, 7 April, 2 June, 8 September, 1 December), including the 100th meeting of SHE 7 April. Main topics of the SHE meetings were: starting of the External evaluation on hot spots and the BHSF, activities connected to the mining sector (HS M5) and the waste management sector (HSs Ko6 and K8), webinar series on contaminated sites and the closing of the smelter in Nikel

(HS M1) and need for further actions there. In each meeting updates from the Russian Barents regions from the TF group activities were given.

3. Other activities (projects, events, programmes etc.)

- Finnish chairmanship organized a webinar about voluntary biodiversity commitments together with the Secretariat to the Convention on Biological Diversity on 8 November. Several commitments have been already submitted under the Barents biodiversity initiative.
- Finnish chairmanship organized a webinar on the 9th of December on mainstreaming biodiversity into forestry in the Barents Region together with the working group on Barents Forest sector. Habitat Contact Forum (HCF) has been working actively for planning the HCF webinar on 28 April, 2021, and HCF meeting in Norrbotten, in autumn 2022.
- Activities from SHE: The eight TF groups under the SHE group had meetings once a month or when relevant depending on the situation of HSs under the TF. SHE and TF groups together with BAT Bureau designed and implemented Contaminated sites webinar series and Supporting activities 6, 4 and 5 for HS M5 (Kovdor GOC) (including 2 webinars with the HS owner, Murmansk HEG, BAT Bureau, TF M&M and SHE). Together with Norsk Energi Supporting activity 6 was designed, started and fact-finding carried out for HS Ko6. Norsk Energi Cleaner production project started on HS K8 and continued on HS Ko6. TF W&WW organized meetings together with the Nenets HEG to proceed with HSs N2 and N3. TF H&PS organized a meeting with Komi HEG. Kick-off meeting of the External evaluation of the hot spots and the BHSF was arranged in November for HEGs, SHE, TF leaders and WGE members. Presentations of the Barents hot spot work were given in several webinars (NO-RU Cleaner production webinars (Komi & Karelia), Nevsky Congress (Russia), Boosting circular economy webinar (Finland)). Presentations on circular economy and waste management in Finland were given in the Clean Country Congress (Russia) and in the webinar by FI-RU project Sustainable waste management in Russia.
- Press release was given in connection to the 100th SHE meeting by IBS, MNRE and SYKE.

4. Results of the year (decisions, new initiatives, improvements)

- Most significant result was the adoption of the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs. The Plan contains diverse activities from the working groups and the IBS
- SHE and the TF groups together with BAT Bureau had constructive communication on HS related issues, and designed, carried out and finalized Supporting activities 6, 4 & 5 for HS M5 There was fruitful co-operation between SHE, TF WM and the bilateral waste management projects (FI-RU and NO-RU). Two project plans related to waste management were prepared for call for tenders. Contaminated sites webinar series was organized and attended by environmental authorities, industries, higher school establishments and consulting companies of the region. Implementation of Barents biodiversity initiative, launched by Finland in 2020.

5. Youth involvement (how has the working group included young people or worked with youth issues during the year)

- Working Group on Youth and the Barents Regional Youth Council took part in the preparation of the Action Plan on Climate Change
- SHE representative took part in the BRYC annual event in Kirkenes 4.12.2021 and it was agreed that BRYC member will be invited to SHE meetings

6. Evaluation of the work (What went well, what needs improvement)

- Work has continued despite that the challenges posed by the COVID pandemic
- Contacts to other Working Groups have been strengthened through the update of the Action Plan on Climate Change and with organizing a joint workshop on mainstreaming biodiversity into forestry together with the working group on Barents Forest sector.
- Merging of the Working Groups: Work continues with updating the mandate of the Working Group. Contacts have been established between the national and regional Co-Chairs
- The SHE group and TF experts have been able to work actively despite the challenges caused by pandemic, but site visits have not been possible, which caused some difficulties. The planned study tours and site visits were postponed.
- Contact person for SHE is needed from Arkhangelsk HEG to be able to proceed with HS work in Arkhangelsk.

7. Other