



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 5 June – adoption of work programmes of WGE, Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion and Subgroup on Nature and Water
- Virtual WGE meeting 7-8 October – preparation of the WGE proposal for the CSO for the update of the Action Plan on Climate Change, discussion on strengthened climate action, discussion on Hot Spot Evaluation ToR, discussion on a suggestion for a Barents biodiversity commitment
- Also Subgroup on Nature and Water held two virtual meetings (21 April and 23 September) and Subgroup on Hot Spot Exclusion held eight meetings (two during the Swedish chairmanship: telephone meeting on 14 January, physical / telephone meeting on 29 January; and six during the Finnish chairmanship virtual meeting on 7 April, 3 June, 17 September, 7 October and 2 December, and an email meeting in August)

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

- Under the Finnish chairmanship, the SNW organized a webinar on sustainable nature tourism on 25 November. The webinar brought together different projects working with the issue, to network and discuss possible further need for cross-border cooperation.
- The eight SHE Task force groups (including around 40 experts from all Barents countries) were gathered in a webinar in April for an overview of the hot spot exclusion procedure

and the tasks of the groups. Since then the groups have had meetings to plan and develop Supporting Activities to promote and support the work of the Regional Hot Spot Exclusion Groups, HEGs, and encourage the progress in environmental performance of the Barents regions and hot spots. The first Supporting activities were organized in December as webinars on Contaminated Sites management and on Best Available Technologies (BAT) and permitting in the Mining and Metallurgy sector.

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

- Most significant decision has been to facilitate the update of the Action Plan on Climate Change together with the Committee of Senior Officials and the Regional Committee.
- WGE adopted in November the Terms of Reference on Evaluation of Hot Spots Exclusion. Objectives of the evaluation are to assess hot spots' environmental status, work practices around HS exclusion process and the Barents Hot Spots Facility administered by NEFCO.
- Finnish initiative of a project on high conservation value forests (Forest biodiversity protection in the Barents Region in 2020 and beyond: assessing the status and paving the way for mainstreaming biodiversity into forestry) has received funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers (amount: 67 000 €)
- Finland has launched an initiative for Barents biodiversity protection commitments. The idea is to invite the Barents community to make Voluntary Biodiversity Commitments under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity to strengthen cross-border and regional actions to protect the freshwater biodiversity in the Barents region. This initiative is still under discussion in the WGE.

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

- Joint Working Group on Youth is invited to work on the update of the Action Plan on Climate Change

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

- Transition to virtual working methods went rather smoothly and the working group was able to find alternative activities to replace physical meetings and visits (webinar on sustainable nature tourism)
- Contacts with other Working Groups, especially with the JWGY will be intensified, especially with regards to the work on update of the Action Plan on Climate Change

7. Other