



Minutes of the BEAC Joint Working Group on Tourism Meeting Online 26 January 2021

1. Opening of the online meeting and approval of the agenda

The JWGT Chair **Hilde Bjørkli** from Visit Northern Norway (Nord-Norge Reiseliv) opened the second JWGT meeting under the Norwegian Chairmanship on 26 January, using the Zoom platform. She presented the activity plan for the second year of the Norwegian Chairmanship aiming at updating the Action Plan on Climate Change as requested by the CSO and the WGE Chairs. She also invited the JWGT to start the process of updating the Action Plan on Tourism in the Barents region, as it was updated last time in 2013 by the Kolarctic funded project (slides are attached).

The Agenda was approved with no additions.

2. Introduction of Working Group members

The following participants introduced themselves:

Satu Luro (Lapland), **Heikki Ojala** (Oulu region) **Tuomo Tahvanainen** (Kainuu), **Jarno Turunen** (North Karelia), **Monica Lejon** (Norrbotten), **Anita Irene Andersen**, **Egil Ørjan Thorsen** and **Kjersti Irina Rosanoff Aronsen** (Troms og Finnmark), **Konstantin Baranov** (Komi), **Maria Sycheva** (Arkhangelsk region), **Julia Zhukova** (Murmansk region), **Andrey Dubovtsev** (Indigenous Peoples).

Also, **Hanna-Mari Kuhmonen** from the Finnish Ministry of Economic Development was following the meeting but was not able to speak.

Incoming CSO Chair **Jari Vilen** (Finnish MFA) and new Head of IBS **Markus Karlsen** introduced themselves and were observing the meeting.

3. Report by the International Barents Secretariat

Roman Gokkoev from the IBS introduced some main events held in 2020, including the Joint High-Level Meeting on 26 October, a digital conference on e-Health on 8 December, arranged by the

Norwegian and Västerbotten Chairmanships. Coronavirus was the main theme for several webinars on the Governor level, initiated by Murmansk region.

The Annual Reports 2020 of all active WGs and IBS are uploaded on the website (most of them managed to continue and went online after March). The new Head of IBS started in Kirkenes on 18 January.

There are several high-level meetings scheduled for 2021, including Parliamentary Conference in Kirkenes in June, Ministerial Meetings, IP Summit and Forest Forum in October. After rotation of chairmanships in Autumn 2021 the IBS is looking forward to close cooperation with incoming chairs Finland and Nenets.

He also presented some statistics about the border crossings in 2020, which declined by 78% on the Russian-Finnish border and by 77% at Storskog compared to the previous year (slides are attached to the Minutes).

4. Activity Plan for 2021: Update of the Action Plan on Climate Change and Update of the 2nd Edition of the Barents Tourism Action Plan

The JWGT Chair presented in detail the schedule for the update process of the APCC aiming at to be adopted at the BEAC Ministerial Meeting in October. The JWGT is invited to provide the initial input in this work to the IBS with a copy to the WGE Chair by e-mail **by 26 February**, followed by several workshops in Spring. To proceed with this request the following Task Force was formed: **Anita Irene Andersen** and **Hilde Bjørkli** representing Norway, **Monica Lejon**, representing Sweden, **Hanna-Mari Kuhmonen**, representing Finland (with assistance from the regions) and **Maria Zhukova**, representing Russia. Also, the Indigenous representative **Andrey Dubovtsev** was invited to join the Task Force.

The JWGT Chair also presented the proposal to start the update of the Barents Action Plan on Tourism with a workshop to be held tentatively in June followed by physical meeting in Autumn. This issue will be further discussed between current and incoming JWGT Chair separately (the need for external financing in case of hiring a consultant to do the update).

5. Covid-19 impact on tourism industry in the region in 2020

Each member was invited to give a short update. JWGT Chair started with presenting the situation in North Norway. She presented how COVID-19 affected tourism sector in Northern Norway in 2020. There were especially many Finns who visited Troms and Finnmark county by car last summer and together with domestic tourists saved the session for many companies, working in this industry (slides are attached).

Tuomo Tahvanainen presented the situation with COVID-19 in Kainuu (presentation attached to the Minutes). Brief reports were also given by Lapland, Oulu region and North Karelia in Finland. The slides from the Finnish Ministry of Economic Development are also attached to the protocol.

Brief reports were also given by Norrbotten (Sweden) and by Arkhangelsk and Murmansk regions. All Working Group members welcomed the activity plans for 2021 as presented by the JWG Chair.

6. Plans of Russia to introduce e-visas in 2021

The Russian Agency for Tourism presented in the last meeting this initiative, expected to be introduced all over Russia in 2021. E-visas will be valid for single-entry travels of up to 16 days. The cost for e-visa is expected to be not more than 50 USD. The start date has been postponed due to continued travel restrictions. Jarno Turunen added that e-visas will be introduced at Niirala-Vyartsilya border crossing point on the land border between Finland and Republic of Karelia.

7. Any other business

Tuomo Tahvanainen from Kainuun Etu Oy presented the new Arctic Lakeland branding material (the slides are attached to the protocol). He also reminded about ongoing Discover Barents 2020 photo contest (extended until 19 March).

8. Next meeting

The JWGT Chair will come up with a proposal to convene tentatively online in June with the aim to update the Action Plan on Tourism. It is hoped that after the summer it will be possible to meet face-to-face in Norway before the chairmanship will be rotated to Finland. The Task Force on updating the Action Plan on Climate Change will meet online on 15 February.