

Minutes from the Meeting in Barents Euro-Arctic Council Working Group on Environment (BEAC WGE) 8-9 October 2009, Arkhangelsk, Russia

1. Opening of the meeting, presentation of participants

WGE Chair Ms Anne Berteig, Norway, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. She thanked Arkhangelsk Regional Administration for their assistance in arranging the meeting and especially the Hot Spot seminar and excursion to hot spots the previous day. The participants around the table presented themselves (annex 1 - List of participants).

2. Adoption of the agenda

Due to there being meetings in RWGE and the Task Force on Hot spot criteria in parallel with the beginning of the WGE meeting, the chair proposed to leave agenda points 4.2, 4.3, 5 and 7 till all participants were present. Presentations by Mr Valery Efimov and Mr Alexander Davydov, Institute of Northern Environmental Problems in Arkhangelsk, were included as agenda points 8'. The Agenda was adopted with these amendments. (annex 2 – Revised agenda)

3. Adoption of the minutes from the BEAC WGE-meeting 12 March 2009

The minutes were adopted without amendments. The Russian representative, Mr Andrey Peshkov, was not present at the moment of the adoption but was given until the end of the day in case of objections. No objections were raised.

4. Reports from the meetings of the subgroups 6-7 October

4.1 Subgroup on Nature Protection

The report was presented by the chair, Mr Jan-Petter Hubert-Hansen, Norway. The subgroups were given a mandate from the Barents Ministers in 2007. The overall strategy for the Nature Protection Subgroup is to promote co-operation and co-ordination on biodiversity and habitat conservation, with the aim to maintaining biodiversity in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region for the future. The Subgroup is building on the Habitat Contact Forum for the Barents region, which was established in 1999, and still exists.

In addition to organisation of the Habitat Contact Forum, including biannual meetings, the priority project areas are: 1) Protected areas networks, 2) World Heritage Properties, 3) Forest Conservation 4) Climate Change, and 5) Implementation of the Ramsar convention on wetlands. The subgroup will also seek to co-operate with the other subgroups.

In 2009 a special focus is given to forest conservation projects:

- Expedition to the Pyoza river (Mezensky district, Arkhangelsk) to evaluate old-growth forests
- Protected Areas Networks and Ecological Corridors for Forest Conservation

- Green Belt of Fennoscandia
- Trilateral Forest Project (Arkhangelsk oblast, The Republic of Komi, Nenetsky Autonomous District)
- Follow up of the recommendations from the Steinkjer conference (Norway 2007)

The subgroup will follow up on the conference Climate Change in the Barents Region, Vadso, Norway – September 1-2, and the climate change/biodiversity project, executed by the University of Umeå. The subgroup also plans to convene a separate meeting prior to handing over the chairmanship to Sweden.

Ms Maria Dronova, Russia, asked the WGE Chair if Norway would propose any amendments to the draft text of the Memorandum of Understanding concerning “Green Belt of Fennoscandia”. The WGE Chair promised to take the question back to Norwegian authorities and respond to Finland and Russia by e-mail.

4.2 Subgroup on Water Issues

Subgroup chair Ms Bente Christiansen, Norway, presented the report. The subgroup meeting had 20 participants, representing Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, the EU-commission, and 7 of the Barents regions. The subgroup focuses on knowledge and competence exchange in the water management sector in the Barents region. The subgroup chair noted with satisfaction that the subgroup was in a good process.

Two new project proposals were introduced by the Arkhangelsk region.

Ms Carola Bjørklund, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, gave a presentation on The Norwegian initiative under the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

Mr Ulrich Weins, EU Delegation of the European Commission to Russia, gave a presentation on the environmental EU-Russia dialogue.

The sub group has generally suffered lack of representation from the Russian side, therefore the chair was very pleased to see Archangelsk participating actively in this meeting, introducing good information, project proposals, and status of the environment and waters in the region. The subgroup hopes this will continue in future.

4.3 Subgroup on Cleaner Production and Environmentally Sound Consumption (CPESC)

Subgroup chair Ms Hanne Aronsen, Norway, presented the report from the 5th meeting of the subgroup. The meeting had 11 participants, representing the 4 Barents countries, NEFCO, Russian Cleaner Production and Sustainable Development Centre in Moscow, Russia, the County Governor of Nordland, Norway, and the Committee for Ecology of the Arkhangelsk region, Russia.

Focus in this meeting was the finalization of the priority projects on the “short list”, cooperation with other fora, contents of a final report of the achievements of the subgroup

during 2008-2009 and ideas for a new CPESC work program under the coming Swedish chairmanship. The subgroup also discussed the need for project development and endorsement procedures to clarify roles and responsibilities in projects.

11 out of 16 of the subgroup priority projects have been completed. Project documentation sheets will be finalized accordingly. The remaining projects will continue if they have already been started. The projects that have not been started will be discussed again when making the new work program for the coming two years under Swedish chairmanship. The ideas that have been launched regarding co-operation with other fora (ACAP, BEAC WG Energy, other subgroups under BEAC WGE) will also be discussed when making the new work program.

The subgroup acknowledges that it has matured and is ready to engage more on multilateral projects. This will, however require more focus on procedural matters (roles, responsibilities, who approves what) and the subgroup will develop procedures to clarify this.

Further work of the subgroup will be to complete the project documentation sheets for the completed projects and prepare the report summing up the activities during 2008-2009 for the WGE report to the Ministerial meeting. Then the work of developing a new Work program will start, along with discussing Project development and endorsement procedures.

5. Summing up of experience from the subgroups' structure, working method and mandate

WGE Chair Ms Anne Berteig reminded the audience that the subgroup structure was proposed by the Russian chairmanship and adopted by the environment ministers in 2007. The minister declaration instructed WGE to evaluate the new structure after two years and report to the ministers. At the upstart in 2008 WGE had asked the subgroups to develop strategies and action programs, and recommended them to keep lists of ongoing and completed projects in their respective fields for information and reference.

The chairs of the subgroups expressed positive experiences with the subgroup structure. The groups had produced the documents required by WGE - a strategy, an action program and a list of projects for reference. They were also in the process of writing a report of their accomplishments in the period 2008-2009.

There was general agreement that the subgroups give added value and positive input to the countries' bilateral co-operation, as well as to international co-operation, like the Arctic Council and the Marrakesh process. The subgroup chairs added that it had taken time for the subgroups to mature, and so far there was no concrete co-operation on projects between the groups.

WGE Chair Ms Anne Berteig admitted that setting up and running the subgroup structure had required more work and human resources. The agencies under the

Ministry of Environment had previously not been involved in the Barents co-operation, but were now active as subgroup chairs. However, the activity in the Barents co-operation had increased and given considerable added value for other co-operation.

Chair of the Subgroup on Water Issues, Ms Bente Christiansen, underlined that a weakness in their group was lack of Russian representation in the meetings, except when the meetings were arranged in one of the Russian regions. She also pointed to the fact that water would be an important issue in the Regional co-operation, no matter if the subgroup would continue or not.

Mr Andrey Peshkov, Russia suggested that a solution could be mandatory regional representation in the group. The WGE chair agreed that obligatory representation from the regions in the Barents meetings is a goal, but it would require a mandate from the Regional Council, and some economic support for travel cost.

Ms Ida Reutersward, Sweden, indicated that Sweden was positive to the continuation of the subgroup structure under their chairmanship. She pointed to the challenges of a) setting the meeting so that it is possible with good representation in all meetings, b) to create added value through linking the regional, international and bilateral issues and c) to focus on the needs from the regional perspective.

WGE gave the subgroups mandate to continue their work on approved projects in the interim period between the Norwegian and the Swedish chairmanship. In the Water Issues subgroup and the CPESC-subgroup continuity between chairmanships was provided, since appointed vice-chairs from Sweden would take over as chairs after the Ministerial meeting. Finland would take over the positions as vice-chair at the first subsequent meeting in the subgroups.

6. Information about the meeting of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council ministers in Murmansk 15 October 2009

Ms Ida Reuterswärd, Sweden informed about the meeting of the Barents ministers of Foreign Affairs in Murmansk 15 October 2009. In the meeting the chairmanship of Barents Euro-Arctic Council would pass from Russia to Sweden. Sweden would also take over the chairmanship of the Working Group on Environment in February 2010 and conduct these two chairmanships at the same time.

Focus area will be to take steps towards an eco-efficient economy, strengthening cooperation to meet the interlinked challenges of economic growth, climate change and sustainable use of natural resources. Areas of priority will be Hot Spots, Cleaner Production, Sustainable Consumption and Production, and Energy Efficiency. Sweden will follow up what Norway has done in the WGE and try to arrange cross-sector activities in relevant areas, for example on climate change.

7. Information from the Regional Working Group-meeting

RWGE Chair Ms Bente Christiansen, Finnmark County, reported that in the RWGE-meeting 8-9 October 2009 there had been good presentations and discussions on the following projects: 1) Environmental sustainable enterprises in the Barents region (Nordland, Komi and Oulo), 2) Handling of mercury containing waste (Arkhangelsk), 3) A regional monitoring program (Arkhangelsk), 4) Initiative on a new environmental bus (Norrbotten). There are also proposals for a number of projects to follow up the Vadsø climate meeting on issues such as permafrost (Komi/Finland), flood forecasting models, (Lapland/Karelia), and salmon and climate change.

Ms Christiansen strongly underlined the need for more time for the Regional Working Group to meet. They plan to have at least one separate regional meeting every year. RWGE will have such a meeting in Karelia in December, but they would need funding to secure regional Russian participation.

The WGE Chair acknowledged the need for separate RWGE-meetings, and at the same time stressed the importance of regional participation in WGE and the subgroups.”.

8. Environmental Hot Spots in the Barents region

Results of the seminar on Hot spots in the Arkhangelsk Region, 8 October

WGE Chair Ms Anne Berteig, Norway summed up the results of the hot spots seminar. The seminar had given a good overview of in the Arkhangelsk hot spots, and a useful assessment of the situation from the regional authorities. Municipal waste, hazardous waste, oil contamination, and oil containing waste were highlighted as issues of increasing concern in the Arkhangelsk region.

Regional working groups on Hot Spots

Both Murmansk and Komi have established regional working on hot Spots. Ms Tatiana Tuipenko, Republic of Komi, emphasized the need for regional working groups on Hot Spots and recommended Archangelsk Region to form such a group. Mr Kirill Sinitsky, Archangelsk Committee on Ecology, informed that the Arkhangelsk authorities would consider establishing such a group.

It was noted that the larger companies are under federal supervision and the regional authorities therefore have little authority over these companies. Mr Andrey Peshkov, Russia, underlined that there is a further potential of involving the federal level in the hot spot work.

Status for projects, financed by the Barents hot spots facility

Mr Henrik Forsstrøm, NEFCO presented status on allocations from the Barents hot spots facility. There are now more than 50 projects in the pipeline. (annex 3 – report from NEFCO)

Mr Forsstrøm informed that NEFCO will take part in the work of the BEAC Working Group on Energy, and suggested to arrange a joint meeting between Working Group on

Energy and Working Group on Environment. On questions about where to find lists of all the projects and the reports and studies, financed by the Barents hot spots facility, NEFCO referred to confidentiality clauses which may prevent open distribution of the reports.

Report from the Task Force on criteria for the exclusion of hot spots from the list

Mr Åke Mikaelson, Sweden, and Mr Henrik Forsström, NEFCO, informed from the 2nd meeting of the Task Force on criteria for the exclusion of hot spots from the AMAP/NEFCO list and presented the preliminary agreed approach to exclusion and proposal for criteria. The Task Force consists of appointed members from all BEAC countries in addition to NEFCO, which chairs the task force on behalf of the WGE. The task is to propose to WGE criteria for the exclusion of hot spots from the AMAP/NEFCO list to be presented to the upcoming ministerial meeting.

Report on ACAP/WGE-cooperation

WGE noted that steps had been taken to establish such co-operation, and decided to postpone further discussion of this matter to a later meeting.

Status for the Hot spots database

WGE chair reported that the International Barents Secretariat is positive to discussing the question of publishing the Hot Spot database/information system on the website www.beac.st, and the secretariats role in relation to the information system. In October an initial meeting was held between NEFCO, The Norwegian Pollution Control Authority, and the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment with the aim to define the requirement more closely, before presenting it to the International Barents Secretariat. Resources have been allocated through the Barents hot spot facility for development and maintenance of such a system until 2013.

How to reach the target of launching projects by 2013 in all hot spots?

WGE noted that this question can be discussed in detail only after criteria for hot spot exclusion are established at the ministerial meeting. However, this question should be kept in mind when developing the new work plan for the CPESC-subgroup.

8' The last growth forests in North-West Russia – status on challenges

Mr Valery Efimov, Institute of Ecological Problems of the North, UB RAS gave a presentation on the importance of conservation of the last, large, old growth forests in Europe, and Mr Alexander Davydov gave a presentation on sacred sites in the Russian part of the Barents Region.

9. Climate Change conference – follow up on the recommendations

WGE Chair Ms Anne Berteig, informed from about the results of the conference Climate change in the Barents region, held in Vadsø 1-3 September 2009. The conference had resulted in a set of recommendations. Ms Berteig proposed that WGE should use the recommendations as a reference document when planning WGEs further work.

Ms Elena Khoroshkina, Information centre for the Nordic Council of Ministers in Arkhangelsk, informed about plans for organising a conference on climate change in Arkhangelsk in 2010 under the Danish chairmanship of the Nordic Council of Ministers. It will be a joint event for North West Russia including, Karelia, St. Petersburg, Murmansk, Komi and Arkhangelsk. It will be part of NCM's strategy on building up knowledge on climate change in this area. WGE recommended NCM to co-operate closely with the Arkhangelsk regional administration on this matter. Based on the experience from the Vadsø conference WGE chair Ms Anne Berteig recommended to concentrate on specific topics, relevant to the region, for example climate change and water issues. Sweden highlighted its interest in co-operating with NCM and others to organise such an activity.

10. Meeting of Environment ministers February 2010

The meeting of the environmental Ministers will be held in Norway in the second half of February. The week 15-19 February could be a suitable week. A preparatory meeting in WGE will be held, probably second half of January 2010.

11. Any other business

Ms Anne Berteig thanked Arkhangelsk Regional Administration on behalf of WGE for the hospitality and excellent organisation of the meetings.