



Report from the Regional Working Group on Environment to the Environment
Ministers of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council
Lulea August 28th 2003.

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Chairman of the Regional Working Group on Environment

Distinguee Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me first express my appreciation for having the possibility to be here and report from Barents Regional Councils working group on environment. In fact this is the second time during the last nine years that the environmental work done on the regional level in the Barents region has a direct dialog with the ministerial level.

The Barents Regional Council established the Regional Working Group on Environment in 1993. The County of Västerbotten in Sweden assumed the chairmanship of the working group. All 13 member counties in the Barents region have one representative to Regional Working Group on Environment.

The mandate of the working group is to work as a consultative body on environmental issues to the Regional Committee and the Regional Council. The Committee and the Council may also submit suggestions to the working group.

We have an action program, which was adopted in 1997, and it covers the following areas. The maritime environment, nuclear safety, acidification and heavy metal, biodiversity, industrial pollution, health and increased environmental concern, both in decision-making processes and to the public.

As you understand, madam chair, this action program covers a large area and to be able to implement this we are now in a phase of updating the action program. We will focus on two major areas and it will be water quality and biodiversity in the Barents region.

The strategic focus in the process to update the action program will be to improve the environmental situation in the Barents region concerning water quality and biodiversity. The planned result of this work will be a strategic plan based on analysis of the environmental situation in the Barents region as a base for future improvement.

There are five major milestones during this process. First are the mapping processes with collecting, identification and comparative analysis and then milestone two is the contact process. Milestone three is the facilitation of relevant communication between sub-regional

institutions and governmental agencies on results from regional workshop. Milestone four is the contract and at last the follow-up during milestone five.

The other parts of the project are an industrial development, higher education and communication. All this will lead to a strategy and action plan for the Barents Region up to 2010. The whole process is called Barents 2010.

The Barents 2010 will be implemented when Västerbotten in Sweden is taking over the chair of the Regional Council from Nordland in Norway in conjunction with Barents Council meeting in Umeå in October.

I would also report, madam chair, on the initiative from the Regional Working Group on Environment on linking nature conservation and tourism in the Barents region.

In the report from Johannesburg meeting in article 43 it stands on the importance of sustainable tourism development in rural and local communities.

In the next article number 44 under bullet point b of the report from Johannesburg meeting the link between the Convention on Biological Diversity and sustainable tourism is highlighted.

As one of the preparatory meetings for the World Ecotourism Summit, the UN Arctic Ecotourism Conference was held in Hemavan, Sweden 2002, as a part of the Barents activity.

The conference participants discussed three main themes, Arctic Ecotourism and Conservation, Communities, and Certification and Marketing.

Recommendation number 2 from the workshop “Ecotourism Certification, Marketing and Management” was to prepare the arctic-based tourism industry and its stakeholders for a future sustainable tourism certification program specific to the Arctic.

In Sweden there already exists a quality labelling system called Nature’s Best. It relies on the fulfilling of six main groups of criteria, within which there are a series of detailed demands that have to be met by both the operator and by those tour products the operator would like to label.

The Barents Regional Working Group on Environment has taken the initiative to support a development process to prepare the tourism industry and its stakeholders for a future sustainable tourism certification program specific to the Barents region based on the Swedish quality labelling system called Nature’s Best and the WWF’s Code for arctic sustainable tourism certification program.

The Swedish Ecotourism Association together with WWF International Arctic Programme, based in Oslo, has by order of Regional Working Group on Environment made a proposal for information and training package on EcoTourism in Barents Region. This report is available at this conference.

This report has also been processed during a Barents Local Agenda 21 meeting in Svanhovd last week and there is also a statement from that meeting available.

In this statement there is a recommendation to give priority to following activity; establish a pilot project as good example on sustainable tourism by implementing the report on ecotourism.

I would also, madam chair, take the opportunity to stress more the importance of strengthening the co-operation on sustainable use of nature, especially of conservation areas, between administrators, researchers, and entrepreneurs in the Barents region. The awareness raising and environmental education is also important elements of this co-operation to achieve sustainable use of nature and the protected areas. The local people and the entrepreneurs see this work very important. They want to use their nature in a sustainable way, but they may not have the knowledge and tools for doing so.

I would also report on the work done on regional level on the environmental situation in the area around Pechenganikel industrial complex.

The main threat to aquatic and terrestrial environments in the joint Finnish, Norwegian and Russian border area is the neighbouring Pechenganikel industrial complex. The Regional authorities in Murmansk, Lapland and Finnmark have in collaboration with research institutes in the Barents region drawn up a Pasvik program.

The main aim of the Pasvik program is development and implementation of an environmental monitoring and assessment programme in the border area. 19 institutions in the Barents region are participating in the program.

The long-term objective of the project is to ensure that the monitoring data covering the state of the environment are reliable, comparable and available to authorities, environmental expert and not least the local people across the national borders.

More reliable and comprehensive information are also required as a support for decision making and planning the effective utilisation of natural resources in the region in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

In order to strengthening the co-operation and promote the community-to-community co-operation for example on ecotourism in the Region there is a ongoing work with establishing bilateral and trilateral friendship parks along the Russian, Finnish and Norwegian border. This work is also a part of the Fenno-Scandian Green Belt concept.

As an conclusion I will notice that many of the activities that I have been mentioning is reflected in the draft declaration and that is a very important support for our regional environmental work in the Barents region within the frame of the Regional Working Group on Environment.

Thank you for your kind attention.