



Barents Euro-Arctic Council
Working Group on Environment
Subgroup on Nature and Water

Minutes of the virtual meeting 23.9.2020

1. Opening of the meeting

Chair of the Subgroup Anna Kuhmonen opened the meeting and introduced the agenda. The meeting started with a round of introductions. The list of participants can be found at the end of this document. Ilona Grekelä acts as secretary and writes the minutes.

2. Adoption of the minutes from the previous meeting

The Minutes from the previous meeting were adopted. The annex 1 to the SNW work programme 2020-2022 Project list has been updated. This document was delivered to the subgroup ahead of the meeting. New updates are welcome in the future as well to the email addresses: anna.kuhmonen@ymparisto.fi and ilona.grekela@ely-keskus.fi. Always before the meeting SNW's members will get the updated project list.

3. Suggestion on Biodiversity commitment from the Barents Region

Ms. Henna Haapala, Ministry of the Environment of Finland ([presentation](#))

WGE chair Ms. Henna Haapala presented a suggestion for a joint voluntary commitment to protect biodiversity, that could be given under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Haapala noted that the Barents region has unique and special ecosystems and already long experience of cross-border initiatives to protect it. The CBD has invited stakeholders ranging from public and private organizations to individuals to give voluntary commitments. Link to CBD is especially topical now, as the Aichi targets are expiring in 2020 and a new global biodiversity framework is being negotiated.

The voluntary commitment from the Barents region is suggested to focus on freshwater ecosystems primarily in the river catchment areas that cross either international borders or borders between regions/counties/oblasts. The focus areas would tentatively include e.g. restoration of rivers and wetlands, including removal of barriers to fish migration; combatting invasive alien species related to freshwater ecosystems and establishment of freshwater and wetland protected areas. Each region and organization could freely choose action areas under these themes.

In general the subgroup considered the suggested commitment to be a very good initiative and fitting well together with already existing projects. Yvonne Lundell noted that the two projects initiated during the Swedish chairmanship, Data sources for Species in the Barents region and Invasive Species in the Barents region, could also take a form of a commitment. Jari Pasanen considered the commitment to be relevant from a regional perspective, and supported the idea that the commitment could also highlight existing efforts and promote funding instruments. Minister Anna Bagrova noted with appreciation that such joint activities are taking place in the Barents region and informed that Murmansk region would be interested to take part



in the commitment. Tiia Kalske and Magnus Johansson also expressed their support for the commitment. The proposal for commitment will be discussed further in the WGE meeting on 8 October.

4. Short updates of the projects in the Work Program

4.1 Biodiversity in changing climate ([presentation](#))

Kirsi Kostamo from Finnish Environment Institute SYKE presented the project “Impacts of the climate change on the biodiversity in the Barents Region – from knowledge to mitigation and adaptation (BARIMS)”. The project has got funding from the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs last week. The project will start this year. The goal of the project is to identify the key areas of biodiversity (BD) across land-sea interface within the Arctic parts of the Barents region. The distribution of biodiversity across physical boundaries, including elements from marine, freshwater and terrestrial BD will be studied. Distribution of BD will be modeled based on predicative scenarios of climate change and high conservation value areas in the region will be discovered. Expert knowledge will be incorporated with stakeholder views and values. This will provide opportunities to develop sustainable use of valuable ecosystem services. Identification of measures and solutions that are needed to support the sustenance of biodiversity and ecosystem services will be made. Both environmental and socioeconomical aspects will be considered when planning the measures.

In addition to already received financing from Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 2020-2021 a funding application was sent to Kone Foundation. Project would like to invite all Barents regions and countries to participate sharing data, making analysis, arranging stakeholder activities, writing reports and scientific articles. Project is looking actively for complementary funding possibilities for the work: e.g. NCM, NEFCO, foundations.

In the discussion participants noticed the project connects to all Barents countries, because of that it is important to get good results. There is an ongoing biodiversity project in North Karelia region in Finland and it is possibility to link it to BARIMS project.

4.4 Forests ([presentation](#))

Anna Kuhmonen remained that at previous meeting it was decided that Finland will make proposal how to continue further with forest issue, as it is one of the key themes of the SNW and in the previous Ministerial meeting the importance of intact forests in the Barents co-operation was notified. She presented an idea of further cooperation on high conservation value forests (HCVFs) in the Barents Region. On the ministerial meetings ministers stressed a need to protect forests among other issues, but at the moment there is not any projects going on related forests. In 2011-2017 SYKE coordinated BPAN I and II phases and all four countries participated its implementation. The BPAN project promoted establishment of representative protected area network in the Barents Region, and the II phase focused on high conservation value forests and wetland areas. Convention on Biological Diversity’s Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2020 are common targets for all the Barents Region and these projects support countries in implementation. During the BPAN project II phase, North Karelia joined the Barents Council, but it was not possible to include it anymore to the project work, and therefore BPAN maps and statistics



exclude North Karelia. The current idea is to prepare a new project on HCVFs to study how the biodiversity targets of Convention on Biological Diversity have been reached by 2020 and to discover other conservation means to safeguard biodiversity outside of the protected area network in co-operation with the Barents Forest Sector Network. We can apply funding from Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) for one year 2021. SYKE is willing to coordinate the project. Participation is wished from all four Barents countries and all 14 regions. Concerning the Convention on Biological Diversity it is important to see on which stage of reaching the Aichi Biodiversity Targets we are, as the target year 2020, and to decide what are the next steps in forest cooperation in Barents region.

Tiia Kalske from Troms and Finnmark County Governor is positive to the idea of a smaller project on forests. Before possible Norwegian participation in the project, more information is needed on what kind of data and information is to be included. There was stressed, that the North Karelia should be included into the project. Both Norway and Region of North Karelia would like to get more detailed information on project plans. The participants of the meeting saw this project as an important next step in further cooperation.

There was additional information given about voluntary forest protection processes in Northern Norway. Currently voluntary forest protection is the only way to more protected forests in Norway. In Finnmark, a rather large area in Øvre Pasvik, has concluded the negotiations. A possible protection process depends now on what the landowner, Finnmark Estate Board will decide upon. In Troms there are three areas under negotiations and a protection process can soon be started. During the five last year's two new forest protected areas have been established in Troms. One of them is in Bardu and the other is in Balsfjord. In Nordland there are 13 areas in different stages of the negotiating and protection processes.

4.5. Migratory fish ([presentation](#))

Tiia Kalske shortly presented the Kolarctic ENI project “Conserving our Atlantic salmon as a sustainable resource for people in the North (CoASal)”. It is a smaller continuation project of Kolarctic salmon project 2011-2013. The project looks at sea salmon fisheries and conservation in the context of growing threats towards salmon stocks. The main objective of the project is to document and examine the effects of the new sea salmon fishery regulations on the different stocks of Atlantic salmon. Each river has its genetically special and own Atlantic salmon stock. Fisheries along the coastline harvests more or less many stocks at the same time, e.g. mixed stocks, due to that several salmon stocks are migrating at almost the same time from their feeding grounds at sea to their home-river to spawn. In addition to the fishing regulations the project studies the growing threats Atlantic salmon populations face today: climate change, increasing cage culture industry and diseases. The website of the project is <https://www.fylkesmannen.no/troms-finnmark/miljo-klima/internasjonalt-samarbeid/coasal/>. CoASal is a two years project, and it started in January 2020 and will probably be prolonged until 2023. Four countries and 5 partners participate. The budget is about 1,15 mill. €. The progress of project implementation is almost as planned (adaptation to pandemic situation of course).

It was noted that the continuation of such cooperation between Norway and Russia is very important, since there are questions on the coastal area.

4.6. Water management and aquatic ecosystem restoration ([presentation](#))



Tiia Kalske shortly presented the project "Multi-Use Plan for the Pasvik and Grense Jakobselv catchments", which is in the second year of implementation and will be finished next year. The Multi-Use Plan will be a tool for future management of the border rivers between Norway, Russia and Finland. In Addition to a descriptive part the multi-use plan will contain a Programme of Measures (PoM) for the time span 2021-2030.

The website of the project is <https://www.fylkesmannen.no/nb/troms-finnmark/miljo-klima/internasjonalt-samarbeid/multiuseplan-pasvik-grense-jakobselv/>

4.7. Water and waste water services ([presentation](#))

Ilona Grekelä shortly presented the project "Tana River I (Joint Environmental Management of the River Tana)". The project is finished in spring 2020 with good results.

The results of the project on the website of ELY Centre for Lapland:

<http://www.ely-keskus.fi/web/ely/lappi-projektit-ja-hankkeet>

and on the website of Tana Municipality:

<http://www.tana.kommune.no/interreg-prosjektet-lfelles-miljoeforvaltning-langs-tanaelvar-avsluttes.6301599-439518.html>

The aim of the project was to exchange knowledge, to develop common tools and improve joint Finnish-Norwegian river basin management at the regional and local level. It was a project of regional authorities and border municipalities. The main results of the project are:

1. Joint salmon data base
Salmon data from Norway and Finland is transferred to a GIS map: <http://kalahavainnot.luke.fi/teno-interreg>. It is a tool for the management of fishing, for development of fisheries legislation
2. Updated information on migration barriers for fish
Joint report on current state of road culverts in Tana river catchment: <https://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/176966>.
Several sites were restored on Norwegian and on Finnish side.
3. Joint monitoring programme including water chemistry and biology
This monitoring aims to detect long-term trends and overall regional environment quality. In addition, combined information on environmental effects of wastewater treatment plants on Tana river is presented in a fact sheet on Finnish-Norwegian transboundary water Commission.
4. Improved knowledge of biodiversity in the Tana valley with jointly collected information on rare habitats and species and shared geospatial dataset. New previously unknown habitats were discovered in Tanafjord (Norway). On the Finnish side information on methods and funding opportunities for restoring valuable habitats was shared.

It was noted that many issues of the project will be followed up, for instance restoring of water facilities. There is big potential for continuation of cooperation in biodiversity issues. Now there is a national financing instrument for restoring valuable traditional landscapes in Finland, but there are no special international financial instruments for this. The Norwegian representative raised that in the context of the project, a completely new biotope was found in Tanafjord. The



project is highlighted by managing authority of Interreg programme and will be presented at Interreg Nord Steering Committee meeting in October 2020.

4.8. Habitat Contact Forum

SNW Chair Anna Kuhmonen informed about starting soon Evaluation on the outcomes of the Habitat Contact Forums (HCF). In addition to the evaluation of all the resolutions the key experts, which have been participating at the meetings, will be interviewed. At the next forum, which will be organized in Norrbotten (2021), a workshop for discussion on the evaluation will take place. Evaluation will be one of the items for SNW meeting as well.

It was noted that HCF is a very special form of Barents cooperation. Forum brings many stakeholders of the habitat conservation together and share their views. Evaluation of resolutions is very much welcome; it is important to see which issues from the resolutions have gone forward since the 1990s. The members of SNW stressed the importance of resolutions as well as experts' interviews. Evaluation will be made by Anna Kuhmonen with inputs from SNW and the workshop in the next HCF. The schedule and details of the process will be shared later.

It was decided to start planning of the Forum for next autumn. The Forum could be postponed depending of the coronavirus pandemic situation. It was suggested to have a small planning group and a preparatory meeting this autumn and apply for financial support in January 2021. Norrbotten will lead the work, Magnus Johansson and Ellinor Bomark will coordinate the planning. Contact persons in Finland are Tapio Lindholm and Anna Kuhmonen, in Norway Tiia Kalske and in Russia Anna Bagrova. It was decided that Sweden will send invitation to the planning meeting.

5. Discussion on possible SNW webinars

The Meeting participants supported the idea of arranging webinars. It was proposed to include the projects listed in the SNW work programme and other relevant international and national projects related to waters and nature. It was suggested to include two projects in one webinar with 20–30 minutes for each. It was agreed that the webinars would be open to the members of the subgroup and their relevant colleagues, but not to the general a public.

6. Conclusions and next meeting

SNW Chair thanked the participants for the nice discussion and presentations. The dates for next meeting of SNW and webinars will be set using Doodle scheduling and sent by email.

List of participants

1. Anna Kuhmonen, Finnish Environment Institute SYKE, Finland
2. Henna Haapala, Ministry of the Environment, Finland
3. Anna Bagrova, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of the Murmansk Region, Russia
4. Aino Lipsanen, Ministry of the Environment, Finland
5. Tapio Lindholm, Finnish Environment Institute SYKE, Finland



6. Jari Pasanen, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY) for Lapland, Finland
7. Kimmo Aronsuu, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY) for North Ostrobothnia (Oulu region), Finland
8. Vilma Lehtovaara, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY) for North Karelia, Finland
9. Kirsi Kostamo, Finnish Environment Institute SYKE, Finland
10. Ilona Grekelä, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY) for Lapland Finland
11. Mats-Rune Bergström, County Administration Board of Västerbotten, Sweden
12. Magnus Johansson, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, Sweden
13. Ellinor Bomark, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, Sweden
14. Yvonne Lundell, Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, Sweden
15. Tiia Kalske, Troms and Finnmark County Governor, Norway

Interpreters: Elena Alexandrova
Evgeny Galchenko