

Swedish Chairmanship
of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council
Working Group on Environment
Working programme 2018–2019





Photo: Jörgen Naalisvaara

The Barents region contains large areas of land, largely unexploited by man. Mountainous areas grazed by reindeer, beautiful views, unique ecosystems, high biodiversity and cultural values. The main land ecosystems are boreal forests and mires, many of which are intact, with very high nature conservation value from an international perspective. These ecosystems are also very important from the perspective of climate change, responsible for the natural greenhouse gas balance and producing ecosystem services. Other important ecosystems are lakes, watercourses and coastal marine areas. The natural ecosystems of the Barents region are important heritages of global significance, and cooperation is essential to preserve them. The region, with its vast natural resources and a long tradition of cross-border cooperation, also has the potential to contribute to the green transition and a more sustainable future.

But the region also faces major challenges. The region is warming at more than twice the rate of the global average. Arctic warming impacts precipitation, permafrost and snow and ice cover, and the Barents Sea is expected to be the first year-round ice-free sea in the Arctic. These changes will have profound impacts on ecosystems, societies and communities. The need for adaptation strategies to build resilience is increasing. The vulnerable natural environment is under increasing pressure from land-use, extractive and other industrial activities. Loss of biodiversity and pollution from current and past activities are other challenges in the region.

Celebrating 25 years of cooperation

In 2018, The Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation will celebrate 25 years of cross-border cooperation at national, regional and local level. Sweden also

holds the Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 2017-2019 and is focusing specifically on regional sustainable development for the future. During the chairmanship, a special emphasis will be placed on the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals 'Climate Action' (SDG 13) and 'Life on Land' (SDG 15). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development and the Paris Agreement will provide the basis for the chairmanship.

Sweden will hold the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2018 and the Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States during the first half of 2018. In the Arctic Council and other regional forums, work of relevance to the Barents region is ongoing. We will strive to enhance synergies and cooperation between relevant regional forums.

Priorities for the Swedish Chairmanship 2018-2019

The declaration from the ministerial meeting in Vadsø forms the overall basis of Sweden's Chairmanship of the WGE. Our priorities are:

Climate change

- enhancing further cooperation on climate change, both mitigation and adaptation;
- highlighting opportunities for the Barents region to contribute to the implementation of the Paris Agreement; and
- developing further the work on regional climate strategies and stimulating joint climate projects.

Barents environmental hot spots

- continuing exclusion of environmental hot spots according to the

exclusion procedure;

- promoting progress in environmental performance at the environmental hot spots through supporting activities;
- linking the work on hot spots exclusion process closer to the new Russian legislation on best available techniques;
- strengthening the capacity to ensure efficient environmental protection work; and
- reviewing the exclusion process, to be more in line with the new Russian legislation.

Nature protection, water issues and regional work

- striving to finalise the Strategy for Protection of Intact Forests;

- taking action to preserve biodiversity and ensure the conservation of ecosystems through green infrastructure planning, knowledge exchanges and increased transboundary cooperation on concrete action;
- exchanging best practices for continued conservation and restoration of wetlands;
- cooperating on water protection and management activities, including new interregional projects;
- facilitating knowledge exchange and cooperation on tourism's impact on Barents ecosystems; and
- organising the 10th Habitat Contact Forum in Murmansk, Russia, in 2019.



Organisation of the work

Initially, work under the WGE will be organised in a similar way as during the Norwegian Chairmanship. The subgroup on Nature Protection (NPS) and the subgroup on Water Issues (SWI) will meet jointly with the Regional Working Group on Environment (RWGE). The subgroup on Hot Spot Exclusion (SHE) will be co-chaired by Sweden and Russia. The subgroup on Cleaner Production and Environmentally Sound Consumption (CPESC) will continue to be on hold.

The organisation of future work will be discussed during the Swedish Chairmanship.

The work in the WGE will be conducted in close cooperation with the Swedish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Regional Group on Environment, chaired by Finnmark. When relevant, we will strive to enhance cooperation and information sharing with other working groups of the Barents cooperation.

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