



27 May 2021
Virtual Meeting

Barents Euro-Arctic Council
Working Group on Environment
59th meeting

MINUTES (adopted on 16 Sept 2021)

1. Welcome and introductions

The WGE Chair **Henna Haapala** welcomed participants to the virtual WGE#59 meeting. The meeting was especially devoted to merging process of the WGE and the Regional WGE, proposed by the Norwegian Chairmanship of the BEAC to streamline the structure of the Barents working groups. Another issue for discussion was the WGE input to the Update of the Action Plan for the Barents Cooperation. WGE members, RWGE Chair Mats-Rune Bergström, as well as SNW and SHE Chairs and secretaries were invited to the meeting. Russian representatives were not able to attend. The introductory round followed (see list of participants in paragraph 9). The Chair welcomed the new WGIP representative to the WGE, **Ms. Natalia Silakova**, Head of the Rybrika rural settlement of Karelia.

Agenda of the Meeting and [WGE#58 Minutes](#) (February 2021) were adopted without changes.

2. Results of the webinar Climate Smart Barents Region

[Climate Smart Barents Region presentation](#)

The newly appointed Norwegian WGE representative **Silje Dalehaug** presented the main outcomes of the Climate Smart Barents Region virtual conference arranged on **27 April 2021** as a part of the Norwegian BEAC Chairmanship. Draft report on the webinar, prepared by CICERO, Norwegian Center for International Climate Research, was distributed before the meeting. The webinar concluded that climate impacts on the Barents region require immediate transition to low carbon solutions; heat&power and transport are the first sectors to decarbonize. Local communities, youth and indigenous peoples should be involved in the process at an early stage. Climate change mitigation will require new land areas for infrastructure development, which may cause conflicts of interest with biodiversity and traditional livelihood, therefore, all steps should be carefully considered and discussed. Final version of the report will be published on the [page](#) of the webinar in June 2021.

[Read more](#) in the presentation of the Climate Smart Barents Region webinar.

3. WGE Input to the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation

Final draft of the WGE input to the APCC was circulated prior to the meeting. It had been provided to the IBS to be included to the Update. Several other Barents Working Groups (including, WG on Forest Sector Network, JWG on Tourism, WG of Indigenous Peoples and Barents Regional Youth Council) have submitted their proposals to the AP; several other active



WGs are finalizing their inputs. Some WGs, like JWG on Energy, haven't been active for some time, therefore, no inputs are expected. During summer the first draft of the Update will be prepared: IBS is responsible for compiling the WGs' inputs and Finland will work on the introduction, summarizing also new reports produced by the Arctic Council. In addition, Finland will provide more details on their initiative on black carbon to be added to the WGE input. The draft will be shared with the WGs and then with the BEAC Committee for Senior Officials (CSO) for comments. In September, the Update of the APCC will be sent out by e-mail to the Barents Ministers of the Environment for approval before adoption by the Foreign Ministers on 26 October 2021.

Norway thanked the Chair for taking the lead in the process and proposed to involve [Sigra Group AS](#) to the WGE proposal on climate-related webinars. The company is implementing a project 'Energy Efficiency Experience Exchange Program' analyzing buildings in Murmansk and could contribute to the webinars with a presentation on energy efficiency in buildings. **Sweden** added that Norrbotten is interested in arranging an event on wetlands, preferably in a form of physical meeting including practical visit. Details from both countries will follow.

4. Possible merging of the RWGE and WGE

The Chair presented background information on merging of remaining national and regional Barents working groups sector-wise upon request of the Norwegian Chairmanship of the BEAC (2020-2021). Merging is proposed to optimize the WGs structure in order to meet new demands. Relevant Working Groups (on economic cooperation, transport and environment) are requested to provide the CSO with their reactions preferably by 3 June, but not later than 15 June. Draft letter from the WGE-RWGE was sent out before the meeting; it suggests a positive response to the merging, but foresees some clarification from the BEAC CSO. The WGE in practice operates as a joint working group, since regional representatives are as a rule invited to the meetings; and official merging should strengthen regional participation even better. Coordination between co-Chairs from national and regional levels is foreseen (rotation of the chairmanships will correspond with BEAC and BRC). In this respect, the WGE would ask the CSO to clarify what kind of practice exists in the case when either national or regional co-Chair is not operationally available and if it's possible for one co-Chair to temporarily take over the tasks. It would be important for the joint WGE to be able internally structure and work in the same way it is currently arranged according to the existing WGE mandate and to have a possibility to establish new subgroups if needed and coordinate their activities. Chairing the current subgroups is to be discussed further.

Mats-Rune Bergström, current RWGE Chair from Västerbotten, added that reorganization should be supported by actual boosting of regional activities, which is a challenging task. **Sweden** also proposed to take the lead in revising the current WGE mandate to reflect the merger, which was highly appreciated by the Chair. **Markus Karlsen**, IBS, informed that no deadline had been set by the CSO on revising the mandates yet.

It was concluded that the final draft response to the CSO will be sent after the meeting for a silent procedure with a deadline on 2 June 2021, since **Russia** wasn't able to attend the meeting. **Sweden** and **Norway** were positive to a merge.



5. Biodiversity commitments from the Barents Region

[Finland's Barents Biodiversity Initiative](#)

Aino Lipsanen informed about the progress with the Finland's Barents Biodiversity Initiative (Read more in the [WGE#57](#) and [WGE#58 Minutes](#)). An article has been published on the Barents Cooperation webpage; leaflets in five languages and instructions how to submit a proposal to the CBD platform are included to the article. It is requested to send the link to the submitted proposal to the IBS general e-mail, ibs@barentscooperation.org. As mentioned in the previous meetings, Finland is planning to self-monitor the commitments under the Barents umbrella. Finland had arranged a meeting with the CBD Secretariat on voluntary commitments, and the Secretariat proposed to hold a webinar for the Barents stakeholders, which will be considered after the summer break. WGE members are encouraged to distribute the [link](#) among relevant Barents actors.

Sweden thanked for the initiative, informed about an internal meeting between SEPA and Swedish regions to discuss this issue and asked to provide information about further communication with the CBD Secretariat through the SNW.

6. Report from the Subgroup on Nature and Water

[SNW presentation](#)

The *SNW Chair* **Anna Kuhmonen** presented main topics of the discussions at the previous SNW meeting held in March:

- XIth Habitat Contact Forum is planned for spring/autumn 2022 in Norrbotten; two meetings of the planning team have been held and Russian members are welcome to join the preparatory phase.
- In addition, a webinar on HCF is scheduled for January/February 2022. The XII HCF could potentially be hosted by Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the only Russian region which hasn't hosted the forum yet.
- The NCM-funded project 'Forest biodiversity protection in the Barents Region in 2020 and beyond: assessing the status and paving the way for mainstreaming biodiversity into forestry' is implemented in 2021. Henna Haapala acts as Chair of the Steering Committee and also the members of the WGE is proposed to join the SC. If the WGE members wish to appoint other representatives, candidates' details have to be sent to the SNW Chair by 15 June. As proposed, the Steering group will exchange information by e-mail and will arrange a meeting to discuss preliminary outcomes of the project and steps ahead. All 14 regions, including newest member North Karelia, participate the project implementation.

[Read more](#) in the SNW presentation.

7. Report from the Subgroup on Hot Spot Exclusion

[SHE presentation](#)

The *SHE co-Chair* **Helena Dahlbo** talked about the SHE work since the last WGE meeting:

- SHE#100 meeting was held in April 2021; the anniversary was marked by issuing press-releases by member-institutions, Nefco and IBS, followed by a radio interview of the co-Chair.



- Hot Spots Evaluation will start in the summer, one consultancy company will be chosen by the Evaluation Committee by 14 June 2021.
- The third [webinar on Contaminated Sites](#) will be held on 10 June 2021 by the TF on CS and the Russian BAT-Bureau, finalizing the study-program (HS Supporting Activity 2).
- M5 Kovdorkiy GOK (producing apatite concentrate) has submitted updated Screening and Analysis Report to the TF on Mining and Metallurgy, a webinar to discuss further actions will follow in June.
- A meeting with SHE TF on Mining and Metallurgy, Kola GMK company (M1 Pechenganickel smelter) and Murmansk authorities will be arranged in autumn 2021 to enhance the exclusion procedure.
- Webinar on Barents environmental cooperation for the Nefco Board (Steering Committee for the Barents Hot Spots Facility, which supports HS work) to be held on 11 June.

[Read more](#) in the SHE presentation.

8. Conclusions, next meeting



Concluding the meeting, the Chair emphasized that the final draft letter on merging of WGE and RWEF would be sent out to the WGE members for a silent procedure by **2 June**. Names of the country coordinators of the SNW project 'Forest biodiversity protection in the Barents Region in 2020 and beyond' should be provided by **15 June**.

The next WGE meeting will be held on week 37 **13-17 September 2021** virtually. Arrangement of a physical meeting in Joensuu, Finland, was considered, but has to postpone to a later stage. Materials of the WGE#59 meeting can be found [here](#).

9. List of participants



1. Henna Haapala, WGE Chair, Ministry of the Environment (FI)
2. Aino Lipsanen, Ministry of the Environment (FI)
3. Anna Kuhmonen, SNW Chair, Finnish Environment Institute (FI)
4. Helena Dahlbo, SHE co-Chair, Finnish Environment Institute (FI)
5. Emmi Vähä, Finnish Environment Institute (FI)
6. Ilona Grekelä, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of Lapland (FI)
7. Silje Dalehaug, Ministry of Climate and Environment (NO)
8. Elin Kronqvist, WGE member, Ministry of the Environment (SE)
9. Mats-Rune Bergström, County Administrative Board of Västerbotten (SE)
10. Natalia Silakova, WGIP representative
11. Markus Karlsen, IBS
12. Maria Dianova, IBS
13. Elena Alexandrova, Interpreter
14. Yegor Zenov, Interpreter