

1. Introduction

The 20th anniversary of environmental co-operation within the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) coincided with the Russian Chairmanship of the BEAC Working group on Environment (WGE) in 2014-2015. During the Russian Chairmanship, WGE has continued its efforts under its thematic Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion, Subgroup on Cleaner Production and Environmentally Sound Consumption, Subgroup on Nature Protection, Subgroup on Water Issues. Special attention was paid to climate issues and the implementation of the BEAC Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Region (as endorsed at the BEAC 14th Session, October 2013, Norway and adopted at the BEAC 11th Meeting of Environment Ministers, December 2013, Finland).

In 2014-2015, the WGE had four meetings back-to-back with the meetings of the subgroups. To enhance information exchange and activities on the Hot Spots exclusion from the Barents Environmental Hot Spots, a new format of Extended Hot Spot sessions with the regional representatives and the international financing institutes was successfully proved. The WGE meetings were hosted by the regional ministries on nature resources and environment in the Russian part of the Barents region. They gathered some 50 participants each. In addition, the Subgroups and projects under the Barents cooperation umbrella have organized own separate meetings. Approximately 400 persons were altogether involved in the events.

Information on the WGE activities and climate change was timely updated on Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation's webpages (www.beac.st) and social media by the International Barents Secretariat (IBS).

2. Working Group on Environment in 2014-2015

The Chairmanship of the WGE was transferred from Finland to Russia at the 11th Meeting of the Ministers of the Environment in Inari, in December 2013. The Ministers have adopted a Declaration that gave a renewed Mandate to the WGE for 2014–2015 and clear directions for further work. The Working Group was chaired by Ms. **Maria Dronova**, Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

Involvement of the regions was taken into focus, and the four WGE meetings with back-to-back meetings of the WGE subgroups and the Regional Working Group on Environment were organized in Petrozavodsk in April 2014, in Arkhangelsk in December 2014, in Naryan-Mar in June 2015 and in Syktyvkar in November 2015. Several projects and events have been carried out by the WGE and its Subgroups during 2014-15.

3. Hot Spots Exclusion and Cleaner Production

The Subgroup on Hot Spot exclusion was chaired by Ms. **Maria Dronova** (Russia), Ms. **Anne Berteig** (Norway) – in 2015, replaced by Mr. **Åke Mikaelsson** (Sweden) and Mr. **Ivan Popov** (Arkhangelsk Oblast).

The Work on Barents Hot Spots was targeted to further exclusion of Hot Spots from the Barents List (2003). To facilitate this work, a new format to conduct Hot Spot meetings was presented in 2014: that is the extended Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion (SHE) meetings with the attendance of the Subgroup on Cleaner Production and Environmentally Sound Consumption (CPESC), regional SHE groups, Hot Spots owners and international financing institutions to facilitate relevant environmental investment projects. Altogether, SHE has received 12 new exclusion proposals, as well as proposals for new projects. At least three Hot Spots, out of which two partially, were recommended to WGE BEAC for exclusion. In total in 2014-2015 SHE held 11 meetings.

The Hot Spots may be excluded from the Barents List either by fast track or by conventional eight-step (long-track) procedure. So far, all six exclusions have been done by the fast track procedure, based on improvements that have occurred at these Hot Spots mainly due to companies' own investments in previous years. In 2014-2015, the Hot Spot Group worked thoroughly to promote the third step (based on defining of the exclusion criteria) of the conventional procedure at those Hot Spots that cannot be excluded by fast track. A template for the third step was developed and proved at pilot three Hot Spots.

SHE considered how to promote sectorial approach in the further work, inter alia with branch wise meetings on Best Available Techniques and Best Environmental Practice as a base for experience exchange between Russian and Nordic experts in the further cooperation on the Barents Environmental Hot Spots.

In order to improve the information exchange on Hot Spots, the Hot Spot information system (www.beac.st/IBS) was updated with the latest information from the Hot Spot owners.

The Subgroup on Cleaner Production and Environmentally Sound Consumption

The Subgroup was chaired by Mr. **Sergey Chibisov**, Nenets Autonomous Okrug.

WGE CPESC has completed the joint education project on cleaner production with the Joint Working Group on Education and Research (JWGER) with the publication of textbooks (available at www.ruscp.ru) and the final report elaborated in June 2015.

Training on Cleaner Production – A Joint Project of Barents Working Groups on Environment and Education

The education project *Training on Cleaner Production and Environmentally Sound Consumption at Universities in the Barents Region* was initiated already in 2008 in collaboration between the BEAC Subgroup on Cleaner Production and Environmentally Sound Consumption (CPESC) and the Joint Working Group on Education and Research (JWGER). Its aim is to improve the education and the sharing of knowledge about cleaner production. In June 2015, the final report of the project was published.

The implementation of the project started with a preparatory phase in 2012, when relevant topics for the project were selected from the Marrakech Task Forces and from education models for cleaner production.

The following year, a series of kick-off seminars and conferences were held in Arkhangelsk, Syktyvkar and Murmansk, and similar events were organised also in Petrozavodsk in 2015. These events presented the cleaner production methodology and discussed previous experiences of similar programmes in Russia, paying special attention to the experience of local companies in the partner regions.

Workshops were also organised for teachers from universities and institutions for vocational education in the region, where they received training in clean production methodology. Several groups of teachers were established to adapt the training programme to post-graduate education and to produce educational material on cleaner production. In 2015, electronic textbooks were finalised and funding has been obtained to order printed copies. The electronic textbooks will be available to download at www.ruscp.ru

4. Nature Protection

The Subgroup was chaired by Ms. **Tatiana Tyupenko**, Komi Republic.

In 2014, activities aimed to disseminate the results of the first phase of the project *Barents Protected Area Network (BPAN)* and to prepare the second phase of the project, which fully complies with the goals and objectives of the CBD Convention. All the publications and other results were published on the official website of the project www.bpan.fi. In 2014-2015, *Barents Nature has no borders* photo exhibition was presented in several regions of Northwest Russia and Finland, including the Meeting of the Barents Foreign Ministers (Oulu, October 2015). Several communication projects resulted in prepared brochures and arranged events to promote establishment of representative protected area network.

On 29 September – 2 October 2015, the International conference *Methods for assessing status of threats and species extinction on IUCN-based criteria for the Red Book in the Barents Region* gathered 69 experts from the Barents Region and IUCN in Syktyvkar. The conference contributed to coordination of efforts between Russian and foreign experts on applying the IUCN criteria in publishing regional Red Data Books in the Northwest Russia. Proceedings of the conference can be found at <http://ib.komisc.ru>.

The need to protect the last remaining areas of Intact Forests was discussed at several recent meetings of Ministers of the Environment and it became necessary to start this activity. At the Ministerial meeting (Inari, 2013), the Ministers called for the finalization of the Strategy for Protection of Intact Forests. In 2014-2015, the Barents region's experts developed the Strategy.

VIII International Contact Forum on Habitat Conservation was held in Petrozavodsk (27.09-02.10.2015). Management of the protected areas in the Barents region, protection of wetlands, the Strategy for Protection of Intact Forests in the Barents Region and other issues were discussed during the meeting.

Within the framework of the project *Green Belt of Fennoscandia*, which involves authorities, specialists and other stakeholders from Russia, Finland and Norway along the Russian-Finnish and Russian-Norwegian border, several events were organized. The common *Strategy for the Development of the Green Belt of Fennoscandia (GBF) until 2020* was finalized by Russia, Finland and Norway. It defines common priorities for future cooperation on the GBF. Several projects on developing the Green Belt of Fennoscandia have been implemented on the regional level. The Northern nature protection should be successfully combined with the socio-economic development, considering historical and cultural features of the region.

5. Water Issues

The Subgroup on Water Issues was chaired by Mr. **Vladimir Smirnov** from the Murmansk Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment until he passed away in an accident in June 2015. Murmansk region has nominated new Chair Mr. **Igor Konyuhov**.

Several projects related to water issues were carried out by the partner organizations of the Subgroup on Water Issues and the Regional Working Group on Environment in 2014-2015. These bi- and multilateral projects are, as a rule, financed by EU cross-border project instruments. In 2014, the following projects were completed: *Ground Water Supply in Sortavala District*, *Forestry Impact and Water Management in Torne International River Basin* and *Trilateral Cooperation on our common resource the Atlantic salmon in the Barents region*. The project *Trilateral cooperation on environmental challenges in the joint border area* ended in June 2015.

Within the frames of the *Water Supply* project in Karelia, construction designs for ground water intake, treatment and pipelines were developed for two pilot areas in Kaalamo and Ruskeala (Sortavala district). The project on *Torne International River Basin* (Finland-Sweden) clarified the need for restoration activities in certain rivers and carried out

ecological inventories according to the EU Water Framework Directive. In the *Kolarctic Salmon* project, a comprehensive and detailed genetic dataset on the Atlantic salmon resource in the Barents Region was produced. The project mapped the migration patterns of the fish and the role of farmed salmon for the ecosystem, and provided the ground for more sustainable management of the fish stock. In the Finnish-Norwegian-Russian *Joint Border Area* Project, the effects of climate change, water regulation and contamination were studied and human-induced changes in the ecosystems were detected. A monitoring programme was developed within the project. Follow-ups of the main findings identified in the mentioned above projects are awaited.

6. Climate Change

The *Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation* was adopted in 2013 and in 2014, the WGE started activities for its implementation. Activities included:

1. Facilitation of the regional climate change strategy development by conducting a survey, organizing a workshop on climate change strategies in September 2014 and publishing the results at www.climatesmart.fi in English and Russian. Arkhangelsk region produced an activity plan, hosted three seminars in 2014-15 and founded an expert group for further development of climate change strategies for the Russian part of the Barents region. Project possibilities to continue with the work were mapped.
2. Inventories of emissions of short-lived climate pollutants. In 2014, Finland and Norway have reported their Barents-specific black-carbon emissions and Norway has published a report on both black carbon and methane emissions. Sweden works on the development of the assessment methodology.
3. Mapping of the potential for greenhouse gas and short-lived climate pollutant emission reductions at Hot Spots and the ways to report the progress at the Hot Spots (IBS).
4. Discussing the need and possibilities to launch activities on permafrost in the Barents region. Sweden has started the preparations of organization a Barents-focused conference on permafrost.
5. To raise awareness on climate change in the region, a Russian-English version of a climate change exhibition from Finnish Lapland was produced under the lead of Finland and IBS. The exhibition was presented in St. Petersburg, Petrozavodsk, Murmansk, Polyarnyi and Kirovsk (Murmansk region) in 2015 with lectures and workshops by the exhibition author, Dr. **Stephanie Lefrère**.

7. Cooperation with other working groups and regional organizations

Cooperation between the WGE and the Regional Working Group on Environment was promoted by arranging back-to-back meetings. Other working groups under BEAC and other regional organisations (Nordic Council of Ministers, Arctic Council and others) have been invited to take part in WGE events and exchange information on the on-going and planned activities. BEAC Joint Working Group on Education and Research (JWGER) has completed a joint education project with the WGE Subgroup on Cleaner Production in 2015 (see report). Events of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation and the Forest Sector Network, among others, were attended by WGE representatives. Indigenous Peoples' Representative takes an active part in the WGE meetings and provides input to the work.

A background paper to map synergies between the WGE and the sister organizations was produced by IBS in 2014. There are several emerging and initiated cooperation possibilities for instance with the Working Groups of the Arctic Council on nature protection, contamination and climate issues. These were discussed e.g. in the Sister Councils' meeting in Kirkenes in September 2014. The members of the WGE and IBS have presented Barents activities in several meetings inside and outside the Barents Region.