

REPORT TO THE BARENTS ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS' MEETING IN LULEÅ 28-29 AUGUST 2003

From the Working Group on Environment

1 INTRODUCTION

The Ministers of Environment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council approved a plan of action for environmental protection and sustainable development in the Barents Region at a meeting in Bodø in 1994. This plan focused on five areas: prevention of radioactive pollution, environmental protection management, reduction of industrial pollution, protection of biological diversity and regional environmental collaboration. Since the first meeting in Bodø, the co-operation was further developed at ministerial meetings in Rovaniemi 1995 and in St. Petersburg in 1997 where issues like sustainable development in forestry and environmental investments were introduced.

At the meeting of Environmental Ministers in Sweden in 1999, the ministers called for further development of the above issues, and underlined inter alia the need to seek co-operation and integration with the environmental and economic aspects of the Northern Dimension of the European Union. In addition, the strengthening of environmental co-operation in the Barents Region through the implementation of Local Agenda 21 was recommended.

At the meeting of Environment Ministers in Kirkenes in 2001, Norway presented a report on the follow-up of the Environmental Action Programme under the Norwegian chairmanship. Cleaner Production, the need to enhance financial instruments such as NEFCO, climate change and bioenergy were emphasised as some of the key priorities for the Swedish chairmanship in 2001 - 2003.

In January 2003, the Heads of Government of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the Russian Federation meet for the Summit Meeting in Kirkenes, to celebrate the 10 Year Anniversary of co-operation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

In the Joint Statement from the meeting references were made to the impact of climate change in the Barents Region as well as to nuclear safety and the instrumental role of NEFCO in implementing environmental and cleaner production projects in the region.

1.1 The Working Group on Environment

The Barents Working Group on Environment (WGE) comprises representatives from the following parties; Russia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland and the European Commission. In the period 1999-2001, the WGE was chaired by Norway. Since the Ministerial

meeting in Kirkenes in 2001, Sweden has been chairman of the group, now followed by Finland and then Russia.

Five meetings have been held under the Swedish Chairmanship, in Stockholm in November 2001, in Umeå in March 2002, in St Petersburg in October 2002, in Stockholm in January 2003 and finally in Syktyvkar in April 2003. Several observers have participated in the WGE, e.g. NEFCO, AMAP, WWF, IUCN, TACIS and the United States. Joint meetings have been held with the BEAC Regional WGE and the Forest Sector Task Force. The WGE has also contributed to the overall BEAC contribution to the EU's Northern Dimension Action Plan 2004-2006. Separate seminars have been held in a special Task Force on Cleaner Production, appointed by the WGE, in Stockholm in January 2003, and in Moscow in March 2003.

In the first meeting in Stockholm in November 2001, the WGE decided upon issues to focus in the period of the Swedish chairmanship and on an Action Programme for the period 2001-2003 (attached). The Action Programme builds upon the previous programme and on the Joint Statement from the ministers meeting in Kirkenes in August 2001.

Six specific objectives and activities have been identified as priority areas in the Action Program; energy and climate change, industrial pollution, cleaner production, nature protection/biodiversity conservation, sustainable forestry and strengthening local action.

2 ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The energy systems in Northwest Russia have a low energy-efficiency degree and are to a large extent based on coal and heavy fuel oil in addition to nuclear power. In order to reduce local and regional air pollution, as well as emissions of greenhouse gases, investments are needed to modernise the energy infrastructure and to utilise energy resources more efficiently.

A special focus has been given to the potential for fuel switching from fossil fuels to renewable resources and to energy efficiency measures. Steps have been taken to establish a closer co-operation between the WGE and the Task Force on Bio Energy under the Barents Energy Working Group. A key task for the Bio Energy TF is to identify good examples as well as barriers to project implementation and to evaluate the need for a further inventory project list on small and medium sized projects.

A Bioenergy Programme in Northwest Russia is under development to co-ordinate actors in the Barents Region. This needs to be co-ordinated with similar activities under the Nordic Council of Ministers and in the Baltic Sea Region. On the Russian side an important step has been made by Archangels Oblast in proposing to establish a Pilot Region for Joint Implementation in Arkhangels, and the oblast has been designated by the EU as a pilot area for energy efficiency.

3 INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION

Reduction of industrial, municipal and agricultural pollution has been a priority from the start of the Barents environmental co-operation. To be able to choose the right projects for modernisation of major point sources and pollution and waste hot spots, reliable information and analyses of environmental effects are needed.

The NEFCO hot spot list is a key instrument to reduce industrial pollution in the Barents Region. On the assignment of the Nordic Council of Ministers, NEFCO in 1995 together with AMAP prepared the report "Environmentally sound investment projects in the Russian part of the Barents Region. A number of hot spot projects (22) were singled out for priority action, both non-nuclear (17) and nuclear safety (5) projects. A progress report shows that some level of concrete action has started or been implemented in 8 projects and furthermore studies have been carried out or are on-going in 10 projects.

At the WGE meeting in October 2002 it was decided to make an update of the NEFCO hot spot list. A directive for the update has been agreed by the WGE. According to the directive key matters to take into consideration include e.g. the WGE Action Programme 2001-2003, new priorities due to new multilateral agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Stockholm Convention, the extension of the co-operation to the Komi Region, new possibilities for environmental partnerships such as the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership and additional on-going environmental project co-operation both bilaterally and e.g. in the Arctic Council.

According to the directive, the update of the NEFCO hot spot list should be done in collaboration with AMAP and the Russian-Norwegian Cleaner Production Centre, Energy Efficiency Centres and Tacis Local Offices when appropriate. Finland, Norway and Sweden have contributed financially to the update of the hot spot list.

4 CLEANER PRODUCTION

The WGE identified in its action programme for 2001-2003 a need to further develop and strengthen the process on Cleaner Production and how Cleaner Production could serve as an instrument for promoting economic and environmental efficiency.

Cleaner Production has been a prioritised instrument for promoting Economic and Environmental Efficiency (Eco-efficiency) in Russian industry. Since 1996 more than 1100 engineers in the Russian part of the Barents Region have acquired the know-how of how to make their activities and production processes more environmentally friendly. Measures have been implemented at 500 different sites. This means that all larger industries have been involved in this programme. Even though these cleaner production investments are profitable, too few enterprises have so far been able to implement them. NEFCO's revolving facility for cleaner production has been an important financial instrument for low cost projects with short pay back time, but has not been sufficient to achieve significant progress in implementation of projects.

There is need to develop a platform for co-coordinated development of cleaner production and sustainable activities in the Barents Region and to clarify the division of responsibilities between different levels in order to promote more systematically the program for the regional level and at a plant specific level.

Cleaner production initiatives have generally so far been non-governmental activities and focused on manufacturing processes. Less progress is made in the other stages of the life cycle of products. The environmental impact of waste is just one element among other impacts arising from resource extraction, design, manufacturing, transport, trade, use and disposal of products. The focus should therefore be put on evaluating and improving the environmental performance of products throughout their life cycle in order to maximize the efficient use of raw materials, energy and water, and to minimize the output of waste and harmful substances.

More emphasis should also be put on an extended cooperation between actors along the life cycle. To achieve this a common Cleaner Production Strategy, is needed.

The Expert Working Group on Cleaner production was established on the initiative of the WGE, in October 2002. The task of the group was to produce a Policy Document and Action Plan on Cleaner Production and to present the document for the ministerial meeting in August 2003. The group has had three meetings during 2002 and 2003 and has developed a policy document and Action Plan.

In a broader context (such as the IPP context), it is important to consider the whole life cycle of a product, from extraction of raw materials and transports of materials, to production processes, transports of products, use and reuse and disposal of products. However this policy document and Action Plan comprise a somewhat restricted approach in order to make the strategy for cleaner production for the Barents area realistic to fulfil. The focus will be on the plant level, but with consideration taken to necessary co-ordination, co-operation and dissemination of information to different actors along the product life cycle and other important actors in the society such as research actors, universities, massmedia, NGO:s etc. The Policy document and forthcoming measures will however serve as the basis for further development towards a more comprehensive IPP approach. The focus of the Action Plan will be on the Russian part of the Barents Council co-operation even though several of the measures are expected to be fulfilled in each country within the Barents co-operation.

The Policy document and Action plan focus on 5 areas;

1. Awareness, education and training – building up capacity through knowledge, awareness, education and training,
2. Integration by encouraging participation, cooperation and development of tools,
3. Cooperation and communication by broad participation,
4. Implementation by taking action to adopt Cleaner Production,
5. Research and development by creating innovative solutions.

5 NATURE PROTECTION AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

The use of natural resources must be sustainable. Pollution and degradation of the natural environment must decrease in order to make biodiversity conservation measures meaningful. Important pressures on natural resources are external demand, growing tourism and transport. The marine environment is also under threat from increased sea transport not the least oil and gas transports. Standards of ships and harbours, development of early warning procedures and creation of capacity for oil contingency planning and measures are essential.

Extensive multilateral co-operation has emerged regarding the conservation of biodiversity and nature protection in the Barents Region. In 1998, Finland, Norway and Sweden took the initiative to co-operate on a broader multilateral basis and established the International Contact Forum for Habitat Conservation in the Barents Region. Support has been provided to several international expert expeditions to new areas proposed for habitat conservation, new national parks and reserves. This forum has also been a tool for supporting the EU's program entitled the Emerald Network in northwest Russia. Multilateral environmental agreements that particularly affect regional co-operation in biodiversity are the Seville Strategy and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The WGE has supported the efforts to develop and establish a network of protected areas including support to assignment of protected forests. The International Contact Forum for Habitat Conservation was established in 1999. The contact forum is as an open arena for authorities, specialists, NGOs, indigenous peoples' institutions and other stakeholders to co-operate on habitat conservation issues in the Barents Region, including adjacent marine areas. The objectives of the contact forum is to develop the management of existing protected areas, to give recommendations for additional protected areas on the basis of nature inventories and research, and to support other measures relevant for habitat conservation.

The WGE has discussed the long-term programme "Natural heritage of the Barents region: Management in the interests of future generations" elaborated as an IUCN initiative together with the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation. The WGE emphasised that co-operation should be enhanced to further develop the implementation of the programme.

The WGE has also emphasised the need to establish strong linkages between the development of model forests, ecological landscape planning, an eco-system approach on biodiversity conservation and gap analysis of the northwest Russian protected area network.

6 SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

Forestry is one of the main sources of income in the Barents Region and concerns many small and medium-sized enterprises in the rural areas. At the same time forests are very important for biodiversity, outdoor life and recreation purposes and as a resource base to be harvested by local people. A serious problem locally is reviving forests from air pollution. Forestry management issues are handled by the BEAC Forest Sector Task Force.

In addition to on-going work with indicators for the environmental situation in forests, the WGE has taken steps to establish a closer co-operation with the Forest Sector Task Force to adopt a common approach to strengthen environmental considerations in the forestry sector. This strategy should be based on the Malawi Principles [which is?] for eco-system approach, which also includes demands for productivity and efficiency in forest management and at the same time environmental considerations. Three networks are established, one for experience sharing between national forest authorities, one for trade and one for bioenergy. An application for EU Interreg support for model forests has been sent to the EU Commission.

7 STRENGTHENING LOCAL ACTION

Municipality-to-municipality co-operation and Local Agenda 21 involving non-governmental organisations (NGOs), schools, local authorities, industries, indigenous peoples and youth, has been a priority area for the WGE. Several NGOs are active in Russia in the Barents Region. A network of organisations and environmental centres has been established and they have become more active, more visible and have strengthened their credibility in society. More than 30 municipalities in the Barents Region are connected in the network.

Efforts to develop the Solovetsky community in a Local Agenda 21 perspective, including nature conservation and protection of the cultural heritage, reduction of pollution and development of eco-tourism have been given priority. The Solovetsky Archipelago is on UNESCO's World Heritage List. An evaluation of Solovki including restoration works in the monastery as a combined cultural heritage and nature conservation site has been carried out by an international expert group.

Local action issues are mainly handled at the regional level, in particular by the Barents Regional Council Environment Working Group and the Working Group for Indigenous Peoples. The WGE has taken several initiatives to strengthen the co-operation with the regional WGE. At the first meeting under the Swedish chairmanship in Stockholm in November 2001 it was decided that one or two county representatives from each country in the Barents Region, plus the chair of the regional WGE should be permanent representatives in the WGE.

The WGE has also welcomed the Regional WGE's work on developing a quality certification system for the whole Barents Region by combining the results from the UN eco-tourism conference in Hemavan and the UN conference in Quebec with the Swedish eco-tourism labelling system 'the Nature's best'.