

1. General

The main areas of cooperation of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) Working Group on Environment (WGE) are: the Barents Environmental “Hot Spots”, cleaner production and environmentally sound consumption, nature conservation, water issues, and climate change.

The WGE has met six times during 2012–2013. There have been 40–45 participants in the WGE meetings. In addition, the Subgroups and projects have had their own meetings. The WGE and its Subgroups have facilitated and carried out around 20 projects, and implemented long-term processes such as hot spots and developing the Barents Protected Area Network. We have developed a Communication Strategy to support our communication activities. Around 600–700 persons have participated in the events and projects launched by the WGE.

As a result of our activities in 2012-2013:

- We have enhanced the efforts to prevent and reduce pollution, to protect the fragile northern nature, and to integrate environmental issues into economic development in the Barents Region.
- We have contributed to the Millennium Development Goals on ensuring environmental sustainability (namely: 7A) Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources; 7B) Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss; 7C) Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation).
- We have linked the regional cooperation to global environmental processes, such as the UN Rio+20 Conference and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.
- We have built cooperation networks with other regional organizations and processes, especially with the Arctic Council, Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM), Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership, and Nordic Council of Ministers.
- We have been active in engaging the Barents Working Groups to develop the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation and, in addition, have had active coordination with many of the BEAC Working Groups, especially with the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples and the Joint Working Group on Education and Research.

The Chairmanship of the WGE was transferred from Finland to Russia at the eleventh Meeting of the Ministers of the Environment held in Inari, Finland, 4-5 December 2013. At the meeting, the Ministers adopted a declaration that gave a renewed mandate to the WGE for 2014–2015 and directions for further work.

To support and enhance communication activities, the WGE has developed a Communication Strategy. An internal workshop was held during the WGE meeting in April 2013 and the Communication Strategy was adopted at the WGE meeting in November 2013. The Communication Strategy will be a tool for each chairmanship.

The Regional Working Group on Environment (RWGE) has arranged its meetings back-to-back with the WGE meetings. This has enabled active coordination and participation of the regional representatives also in the work of the WGE. Regions from all countries have been very active in carrying out the project work, and their contribution to the cooperation has been significant. In addition, the level of participation in the meetings from the regional level has increased.

2. Climate change

The BEAC Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Region was endorsed at the BEAC 14th Session, 29 October 2013, in Tromsø, and will be formally adopted at the BEAC Meeting of Environment Ministers on 4–5 December 2013 in Inari. The plan will be followed up by the BEAC Committee of Senior Officials. The Action Plan includes recommendations for a number of selected measures and projects to be carried out by the working group within the BEAC which give the BEAC an added value compared to the work on climate change going on in other arenas. The measures are proposed for mitigation, adaptation, research, observations, monitoring and modelling, and outreach.

A workshop for the preparation of the Action Plan was arranged in Oslo in March 2012. After the workshop each BEAC WG has elaborated proposals for the Action Plan. The WGE proposed 5 activities of its own and 5 cross-sectoral issues.

Regional climate strategies: An analysis of Regional Climate Strategies in the Barents Region was published in autumn 2012. It is based on the regional climate strategies done in Northern Finland in 2010–2011. The aim of the publication was to assess how national climate targets have been implemented in regional and local strategies and programmes. Further cooperation on this issue will be promoted by organizing a seminar on “Climate Smart Regional Planning — from strategies to practice”, which is planned for 2014.

3. Subgroup on “Hot Spots” Exclusion

SHE has continued to implement the exclusion procedure adopted by the Ministers in 2010. The focus has been on gathering Screening and Analysis reports from all 39 remaining hot spots (Step 2 of the exclusion procedure), describing measures taken and the current status for each “hot spot”. Thirty-one Screening and Analysis reports have been received in 2012–2013. The Regional Hot Spot Exclusion Groups (HEG) in the Russian part of the Barents Region have been responsible for providing these reports.

During 2012–2013, SHE has received 6 proposals from the HEGs for exclusion. A decision to exclude A2 “Arkhangelsk Heat and Power Plant” was made at the WGE meeting in September 2013. Decisions to exclude K1 “Gas emissions from Kondopoga pulp and paper combined mill” and N4 “Handling of mercury containing wastes” were made at the WGE meeting in November 2013.

In the light of the target set by the Barents Euro-Arctic Council Foreign and Environment Ministers to launch environmental measures at all of the “hot spots” by 2013, the WGE decided to carry out an assessment of the Barents Hot Spots Report, describing the current state of all 42 original Barents environmental hot spots. The Assessment Report has been prepared by Akvaplan-niva AS, Norway, and the System Development Agency, Russia, within an assignment financed by the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO).

4. Subgroup on Cleaner Production and Environmentally Sound Consumption

A Conference on Best Environmental Practices in the Mining Sector in the Barents Region was organized in Rovaniemi on 23–25 April 2013. More than 150 experts, operators, authorities and NGO representatives participated in the conference. The purpose of the Conference was to get an overall understanding of the present and future development of the mining sector, increase awareness of the key environmental and social challenges of the mining sector in the Barents Region, present and disseminate knowledge about the best environmental practices in this sector in Barents countries, and promote the exchange of information on assessing and managing environmental and social concerns in the mining sector. In addition to the Conference, a Finnish report on Best Environmental Practices in Metal Ore Mining has been translated into English and Russian, for use in the Barents Region.

<http://www.barentsminingconference.fi>

An overview of facilities for treatment and destruction of organic hazardous waste in the Barents and Baltic Sea region countries has been published in May 2013. The aim of the report is to present information on technical, operational and legal conditions for a selection of facilities that are granted licenses for environmentally-sound treatment and/or destruction of organic hazardous waste. The report has also been translated into Russian.

A seminar series on environmentally sound consumption and cleaner production training in universities was launched in cooperation with the Joint Working Group on Education and Research (JWGER). During 2013, 4 seminars were arranged at universities and technical institutions in the Russian part of the Barents Region.

5. Subgroup on Nature Protection

Promoting a representative and effectively managed Barents Protected Area Network (BPAN) has been the main effort of the NPS. The project is being implemented in all four countries and 13 regions of the Barents Region. A Steering Committee and expert working group with thematic Subgroups are working to promote and analyse the protected area network, along with national and regional authorities and

experts. The Programme of Work on Protected Areas of the Convention on Biological Diversity has been used as a framework. Several workshops, seminars, a conference and working group meetings have been held during the project. More information: www.bpan.fi

The 7th International Contact Forum Meeting on Habitat Conservation (HCF VII) in the Barents Region was held in June 2013 in Bodø, Norway. There were about 50 participants from all of the Barents countries. The main themes of the HCF meeting were habitat conservation, wetlands and coastal areas, protection of boreal forests, geodiversity, implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Barents Protected Area Network project.

Cooperation on developing the Green Belt of Fennoscandia is based on Memorandum of Understanding, signed in 2010 between Finland, Russia and Norway. Barents experts organized a few preparation meetings, and the first meetings of the Steering Committee and expert working group were held in autumn 2012 in Kotka, Finland. In addition, many ongoing activities and projects, e.g. related to nature tourism, in the border area are being implemented and these support developing the Green Belt of Fennoscandia. A Conference on the Green Belt of Fennoscandia, an official event of the Year of the Environment of the Russian Federation, was organized in October 2013 in Petrozavodsk, Russia.

The remaining pristine boreal forest plays an important role regarding biodiversity and climate change. The strategy for the conservation of the last old-growth forests in the Barents Region is soon to be finalized. An evaluation report that summarizes the results of several field studies in the Russian part of the Barents Region has been completed, giving recommendations for further follow up on forest conservation in the region. There have also been activities to follow up the GAP analysis project in the Russian part of the Barents Region, as well as a study on the effects of climate change and ecosystem services in the Barents Region.

6. Subgroup on Water Issues

Several projects have been implemented by the SWI and RWGE members. Projects have been bilateral or multilateral and a broad range of financing instruments (Interreg IV A Nord €1 million, Ministry of the Environment of Finland, Nordic Council of Ministers, Kolarctic ENPI €4.7 million, Karelia ENPI €250 000) has been used for the project implementation. The following projects have been carried out in 2012–2013:

- In the project “Forestry impact and water management in Torne International River Basin”, the need for restoration activities in certain rivers has been clarified and ecological inventories have been made according to the EU Water Framework Directive.
- Information has been exchanged between environmental monitoring authorities in Murmansk, Finnmark and Lapland on the EU Water Framework Directive and the Russian water strategy. Seminars and expert meetings have been used as a tool for the project goals.
- In the project “Water Management Initiative in Archangelsk and other Barents regions”, seminars and study tours have been arranged and during these activities water experts in the Barents Region have exchanged experiences on topics relating to surface waters and sustainable urban water systems.
- Mitigation of the harmful effects of climate change, water regulation and contamination have been studied in the Finnish, Norwegian and Russian border area through trilateral cooperation on the Environmental Challenges in the Joint Border Area project. Information will be produced on environmental impacts and adaptation to climate change and other anthropogenic effects on a regional level.
- In the project “Kolarctic Salmon” (“Trilateral cooperation on our common resource the Atlantic salmon in the Barents Region”), management of the shared Atlantic salmon resource in the Barents Region has been developed and enhanced for enabling a sustainable harvesting regime and conservation of the salmon stocks and fishing traditions.
- Construction designs for ground water intake, treatment and pipelines have been developed for two pilot areas in Kaalamo and Ruskeala, located in the Sortavala district, for a project on ground water supply in the Sortavala district.