



THE BARENTS WORKING GROUPS ANNUAL REPORT

Name of the Working Group: **Working Group on Environment (WGE)**

The current Chair and the Chairmanship period: **Sweden, November 2017 – January 2020**

1. Priorities of the Chairmanship

The priorities of the chairmanship are: To enhance cooperation on climate change; to continue work to exclude environmental hot spots according to the exclusion procedure; to promote progress at the hot spots through supporting activities; to finalize the strategy for protection of intact forests; to cooperate on biodiversity preservation, wetlands and water protection; as well as to facilitate knowledge exchange on tourism's impact on Barents ecosystems.

See full Swedish chairmanship programme [here](#).

2. Meetings (meetings held, main topics and outcomes of the meetings)

Two WGE meetings were held in 2018. The first meeting was held at Storforsen, May 24th. At the meeting, the work progress in the two subgroups of Nature and Water (SNW) and Hot Spots Exclusion (SHE) was discussed and their work programmes under the Swedish chairmanship were presented and later adopted. A representative of the Swedish Sami Parliament presented a report on the role of traditional knowledge for conservation and use of biodiversity. The WGE discussed climate change issues as expressed by two projects: the cooperation project on regional climate strategies led by Norrbotten and Archangelsk regions and the Barents 2050 study conducted by VTT under the Norwegian chairmanship. Organization of work and a new proposal for a mandate were discussed and the WGE decided to reduce the number of subgroups to two – Nature and Water (SNW) and Hot Spot Exclusion (SHE).

The second meeting was held in Skellefteå on November 14th. Representatives of the Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY) and Barents Forest Sector Network (BFSN) held presentations and possible areas for cooperation between the groups were discussed. Synergies with the work of the Arctic Council and its working groups were discussed during two presentations: a presentation

on work on marine litter under the Arctic Council, as well as during a message by the Finnish Chairmanship. Outside experts provided information on regional climate change strategies and OECD's work on BAT (Best Available Techniques). The group discussed organization of work, agreed on a new mandate for the group and subgroups and agreed to change the order of Chairmanship rotation to be in line with that of BEAC. The Strategy for protection of intact forest in the Barents region was discussed and Russia informed the group that they want work on the Strategy to be paused, due to a current revision of the Russian forest legislation.

In the Subgroup on Nature and Water (SNW), subgroup meetings were held back-to-back with the WGE-meeting on May 23rd and November 13th. The work in the group has focused on sharing experiences on activities and initiatives in the Barents countries and regions, how to address the increasing problem of tourism in sensitive ecosystems, wetlands and the arrangement of the Habitat Contact Forum (HCF) that will be held in Murmansk in June 2019.

Back-to-back meetings on May 23rd and November 13th were also held in the Subgroup on Hot Spot Exclusion (SHE) and another 9 meetings were held during the year; most of them as telephone meetings. The work in the group has focused on the development and implementation of support activities for the hot spots. The ambition is to build capacity for hot spot owners and regional authorities regarding the new Russian legislation on BAT.

3. Other activities (projects, events, programmes etc.)

Three waste related seminars and a comprehensive study tour for representatives of all Russian Barents regions have been organized within the Finnish-Russian Arctic-Barents Waste Project.

The chair of the WGE participated in the meeting of the Barents Forest Sector Network to inform about work in the WGE and discuss possible areas for cooperation.

4. Results of the year (decisions, new initiatives, improvements)

A new mandate for the WGE was adopted at the meeting of November 14th. The WGE also decided to change the order of rotation to be in line with the BEAC. The transitional period, that will last until 2025, is attached to the new mandate.

5. Evaluation of the work (What went well, what needs improvement)

The WGE has successfully revised its mandate, the mandates of the subgroups and the order of chairmanship rotation.

The work on the Strategy for protection of intact forests was launched already in 2013 and in the ministerial declaration in Vadsö in November 2017, ministers called for its finalization under the Swedish chairmanship with strong involvement of relevant Russian authorities. As work now needs to be paused, the group needs to find other ways to cooperate on intact forests.

Participation from the regional level is key for successful cooperation under the WGE. Low attendance from some regions hampers cooperation.

6. Other