



## 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 – February 2020**

### **1. Priorities of the Chairmanship**

The priorities of the Swedish chairmanship are: To enhance cooperation on climate change; to continue the work to exclude environmental hot spots according to the exclusion procedure; to promote progress at the hot spots through supporting activities; to finalise 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 the full Swedish chairmanship programme [here](#).

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

The WGE held three meetings during 2019. The first meeting was in Stora Sjöfallet, March 28<sup>th</sup> back-to-back with subgroup meetings in the Subgroup on Nature and Water (SNW) and the Subgroup on Hot Spot Exclusion (SHE). The WGE discussed climate change, including a status report on the implementation of the Action Plan on Climate Change and a proposal to intensify the cooperation on regional climate and energy strategies. The work of the subgroups was presented and discussed as well as the possibilities to increase cooperation between the WGE and the Arctic Council. The meeting had a focus on sustainable tourism with participation from the Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT). The meeting also included an excursion in the National Park, where a representative from Sirges Sami Village informed the group about reindeer herding and how it is affected by climate change, predators and tourism.

The WGE held its second meeting in Skeppsvik, Umeå, September 25<sup>th</sup>, also back-to-back with subgroup meetings. The Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) and the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) participated and possible cooperation was discussed. The WGE also

discussed on-going work on Nature and Water, Hot Spots and Climate Change as well as the upcoming environment minister's meeting.

The WGE held its third meeting in Stockholm on November 27<sup>th</sup>. It focused on summing up work under the Swedish Chairmanship and to prepare for the environment minister's meeting in Luleå, February 4-5<sup>th</sup>.

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

In June 2019, the 10<sup>th</sup> Habitat Contact Forum (HCF) was arranged in Murmansk, Russia. The meeting gathered around 100 participants to discuss the protection of habitats, conservation of wetlands and coastal areas, forest preservation and prospects of ecotourism. A resolution was adopted ([accessible here](#)). Several university students participated in the Forum as part of WGE's work to involve youth.

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

The WGE decided to exclude hot spots *A5 Koryazhma branch of Ilim Group JSC (Old name of the Hot Spot: Kotlas Pulp and Paper Mill)* and *A 9-1 Enterprises of pulp and paper as sources of dioxin pollution in the Arkhangelsk region* and to ask environment ministers to assent to the exclusion.

As a result of the Habitat Contact Forum, cooperation on invasive alien species (IAS) was initiated.

In November 2018, the WGE decided to revise its mandate and to reduce the number of subgroups to two. This new work structure is now fully operational and is an improvement.

### **5. Youth involvement (how has the working group included young people or worked with youth issues during the year)**

The WGE decided to invite students to participate in the Habitat Contact Forum in Murmansk. Several students participated.

BRYC participated in the WGE-meeting on September 25<sup>th</sup> and areas of cooperation were discussed.

### **6. Evaluation of the work (What went well, what needs improvement)**

The cooperation in the WGE works well with interesting discussions and concrete results. Substantial cooperation and many activities are taking place under the subgroups of SNW and SHE.

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

### **7. Other**

The 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Barents Environment Ministers will be held in Luleå on February 4-5<sup>th</sup> 2020. The chairmanship will be handed over to Finland.