



BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC COUNCIL
WORKING GROUP ON ENVIRONMENT
Russian Chairmanship 2014-2015

ANNUAL REPORT FOR WORKING GROUP ON ENVIRONMENT AND ITS SUBGROUPS

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

In 2014, the Working Group on Environment convened two times. The meetings were hosted by the regional ministries for natural resources and environmental issues in the Republic of Karelia and in Arkhangelsk oblast. The meetings were organised back-to-back with the Subgroups and the Regional Working Group on Environment and they both gathered over 50 participants. In addition, separate meetings of Subgroups and projects as well as seminars on climate theme were organised during the year.

Cooperation between the WGE and the Regional Working Group on Environment, other working groups under BEAC and other regional organisations (Nordic Council of Ministers, Arctic Council etc.) is promoted by organising back-to-back meetings, by inviting sister organisations to WGE events and by presenting WGE work in events and publications of other working groups and organisations.

Hot Spots Exclusion and Cleaner Production

The Work on Barents Hot Spots aims to further exclusion of Hot Spots from the Barents list, defined in 2003. To facilitate this work, a new format to conduct Hot Spot meetings was introduced in 2014: that is the extended Hot Spot meetings with the attendance of the Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion (SHE), Subgroup on Cleaner Production and Environmentally Sound Consumption (CPESC), Hot Spot owners and international financing institutions (NEFCO, NDEP) to facilitate relevant environmental investment projects. Altogether eight new exclusion proposals (two of them partial) as well as proposals for new projects have been received in connection with the meetings

organised in Petrozavodsk in April and in Arkhangelsk in December 2014. In 2015, the group continues with the evaluation of the proposals and with organising similar extended meetings in other Russian regions.

The Hot Spots can be excluded from the List either by fast track or by ordinary eight-step procedure. So far, all six exclusions have been done by the fast track procedure, on the basis of improvements that have occurred at these Hot Spots mainly thanks to companies' own investments. In 2014, the Hot Spot group has worked to facilitate the third step (defining of the exclusion criteria) of the ordinary procedure at those Hot Spots that implies carrying out relevant measures in order to make the hot spot "green". A template for the third step was prepared in 2014 and will be piloted with selected hot spots.

SHE has agreed to promote sectorial approach in the further work and plans to conduct meetings on the most acute environmental issues to facilitate the introduction of Best Available Technologies and Best Environmental Practices. As first sector to receive specific attention in 2015 has been preliminarily selected to be waste. Co-operation with CPESC is foreseen in this work.

Nature Protection

A flagship project for the Nature Protection Subgroup (NPS) is BPAN, Barents Protected Area Network, which promotes the establishment of a representative protected area network in the region. The project has mapped the coverage and representativeness of the conservation area network from the point of view of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), and it was presented in several international fora during 2014, including the 12th Conference of Parties to CBD in the Republic of Korea and in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Parks congress in Australia. Planning and application of funding for the continuation of the work, with a focus on high conservation value areas and coastal areas has taken place in 2014. An exhibition highlighting the values of the Northern nature has also been prepared.

Habitat Contact Forum is the regular meeting under NPS, organised every two years. It gathers the representatives of administration, academia and NGOs to discuss the current themes of biodiversity conservation in the region. The preparation of VII Habitat Contact Forum, to be organised in Petrozavodsk on September,29 – October, 1 2015. has started. Green Belt of Fennoscandia in the Finnish-Norwegian-Russian border area is an initiative closely followed by the Barents experts. Many of them participated e.g. in the GBF dialogue forum in Kuusamo in November 2014.

Water Issues and Regional Projects

There have been many projects going on in the Water Issues and Regional Work, both bilateral and multilateral, financed by several (EU) instruments. The background organisations of the Subgroup and the Regional Working Group implement the projects that are described in more detail in the annual report of the Regional Working

Group on Environment. In 2014, the following projects ended: Ground Water Supply in Sortavala District, Forestry Impact and Water Management in Torne International River Basin as well as Trilateral Cooperation on our common resource the Atlantic salmon in the Barents region. Project Trilateral co-operation on environmental challenges in the joint border area will end in 2015. Preparation of new projects has been started, e.g. a project at the Finnish-Swedish border on river restoration.

Climate Change

WGE has proceeded with the Implementation of the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation in the activities, recommended for the group in the Action Plan. This includes:

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 on www.climatesmart.fi. Arkhangelsk oblast has produced an activity plan, hosted two seminars and prepared a project for further development of climate change strategies for the Russian part of the Barents region.
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.
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.
4. Discussing the need and possibilities to launch activities on permafrost in the Barents region.

Awareness raising is one of the recommended field of activities for Barents co-operation on climate. To contribute to this goal, in 2014 a Russian-English version of a climate change exhibition from Finnish Lapland was produced under the lead of IBS in co-operation with the Lapland Regional Museum and WGE. The exhibition has started its tour in Russia in early 2015.

A two-year position of a Climate, Environment and Hot Spots Adviser was established in the International Barents Secretariat (IBS) in the beginning of 2014 with funding from NEFCO, Finland and Sweden.