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THE BARENTS EURO-
ARCTIC COUNCIL
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WORKING GROUP ON ENVIRONMENT

**Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)
Working Group on Environment
Swedish Chairmanship 2010-2011**

Adopted version

Work Programme Subgroup on Water Issues



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1. INTRODUCTION

The Water Issues Subgroup of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council's (BEAC) Working Group on Environment implements and coordinates co-operation on water management.

The Work Programme guides the Water Issues Subgroup's efforts in strengthening capacity in water management and facilitating investments during the Swedish chairmanship of the Working Group on Environment during 2010-2011.

2. BACKGROUND

WATER ISSUES IN THE BARENTS REGION

Where the state of natural waters is concerned, the most important environmental issues are acidification, heavy metals and POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants) in the Russian Barents region. All these threats are connected with industrial emissions. Because of insufficient purification of municipal wastewaters, eutrophication and hygienic pollution also cause severe problems. In the Nordic part of the Barents region, purification of wastewaters and industrial emissions is quite effective and environmental problems are usually very local. In practice non-point loading is the most challenging problem in the area. The state of the waters is considered to be mostly good or excellent, although in some small areas it can be worse. The drinking water systems are also in a good state and safe.

There is evidence to confirm that the inhabitants of many parts of the Russian Barents are exposed to hazardous pollutants in drinking water. The availability of good drinking water is an important consideration. In the Russian Barents, drinking water is usually taken from the surface water and purification is often limited to chlorination. Many surface-water supplies are clearly influenced by air- and water-borne pollution. Another important question is the replacement of drinking water piping systems. Improved drinking water quality would very quickly improve the health of most of the region's population. Infants and small children are the most vulnerable groups.

At the moment, the mining industry in the Barents Region is developing. Growing demand has increased the production rates at many sites and new technologies enable short-term operations and the extraction of relatively small deposits. Many companies pay more attention to environmental issues by introducing environmental management systems, or even making investments to reduce discharges into water. Meanwhile, other mines are closed down, leaving open wounds in the bedrock where natural processes cause unnatural migration of substances, threatening sensitive eco-systems. The closure of old or unprofitable mines is a growing problem in the Barents region and deserves attention from both the legislative and technological point of view.

Climate change related issues

Because of the evident ongoing climate change, the risk of severe flooding is increasing in the whole Barents area. River valleys are traditional places for settlements in all northern areas, whereby the risk of flood damage, especially in the future, is more and more obvious. The benchmarking and harmonization of hydrological monitoring and forecasting methods could be very fruitful. The exchange of information about flood control and prevention practices will also be important.

Transboundary water bodies and water management issues in the area are also important questions. The Barents region consists of 13 different regions. Some of the world's most important salmon rivers are shared water bodies between the co-partners in the region.

HISTORY

In Bodö, 1994, the Environmental Task Force was established to advise BEAC on objectives, priorities and actions for environmental co-operation in the Barents Region. In 1999 the Environmental Task Force was reorganized as the Working Group on Environment (WGE). Under the WGE three subgroups were established and the mandate for the Subgroup on Water Issues was given in the Declaration of the Ministers of the Environment on 9th of November 2007. During the past 20 years a lot of different projects have been carried out to improve the environment in the Barents Region.

The WGE work is closely linked to the work done by the Regional Working Group on Environment (RWGE). The WGE and the RWGE group may also in joint cooperation initiate environmental projects within the Barents Region.

3. MANDATE AND DECLARATION

The Subgroup on Water Issues has the mandate to work on sustainable management of water resources and water use, on transboundary water bodies, on improvement of drinking water quality, on study of correlation of the climate change and condition of water bodies and wetlands, on other projects on mitigation and adaptation to climate change as well as projects on prevention and reduction of the pollution of water bodies and marine environment from land based sources.

The Tromsö Declaration states the following:

The Environment Ministers

32. *emphasised* the need for improving the quality of drinking water in the Barents Region and also recognised the relation between clean water and socio-economic factors, as treated under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe/World Health Organisation (UNECE/WHO) Protocol on Water and Health;

33. *welcomed* the plans for a comprehensive water project in Archangelsk oblast, with the possibility of exchanging experience with other parts of the Barents region. The project should be developed in the subgroup on Water Issues in close cooperation with the Regional Working Group on Environment, as well as to pursue the possibility of developing the project in the framework of the UNECE/WHO Protocol on Water and Health;

34. *welcomed* the upcoming Russian governmental programme Clean Water as well as the Norwegian initiative to create a water fund in the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development with a possible window for financing projects also in Russia, and emphasized the importance of seeking good cooperation with existing financial instruments, such as the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) Support Fund;

35. *underlined* the need for further studies on the correlation between climate change and the condition of water bodies and wetlands, and *called for* strengthened cooperation in the Barents Region on sustainable management of water resources and water use with respect to mitigation and adaptation to climate change, hereunder flood risk forecasting and flood prevention, issues concerning clean drinking water, and sewage treatment;

36. *underlined* the importance of continued co-operation on transboundary waters, for harmonising monitoring and research methods according to international standards, like EU's Water Framework Directive and *welcomed* the follow up of the work with the joint monitoring and management of the Pasvik(Paz) river basin;

37. *recognised* the close interrelationship between the marine environment of the Barents and the Baltic Sea and environment on land, and *underlined* the importance of preventing and reducing pollution of the marine environment from land based sources and of terrestrial areas from the sea.

4. GOAL AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

GOAL

The overall goal under the Swedish presidency is to strengthen multilateral co-operation in the Barents region and coordination in water management issues. This will be done by starting-up multilateral seminars for exchanging experiences between the Barents countries and regions. Special priority will be given for cooperation within the Water Management Initiative from Archangelsk on both national and regional level through capacity building activities in order to improve the drinking quality. Climate change and water issues will also be given priority.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Subgroup on Water Issues aims at contributing to fulfil the obligations of national strategies and international agreements on water related issues. The recommendations from the Conference on Climate Change in the Barents Region, the UNECE protocol on Water and Health and the European Union's Water Framework Directive are important for the work in the subgroup.

5. WORK PROGRAMME, INCLUDING PRIORITY PROJECTS

The main activities and priority projects within the Subgroup for Water Issues are described below.

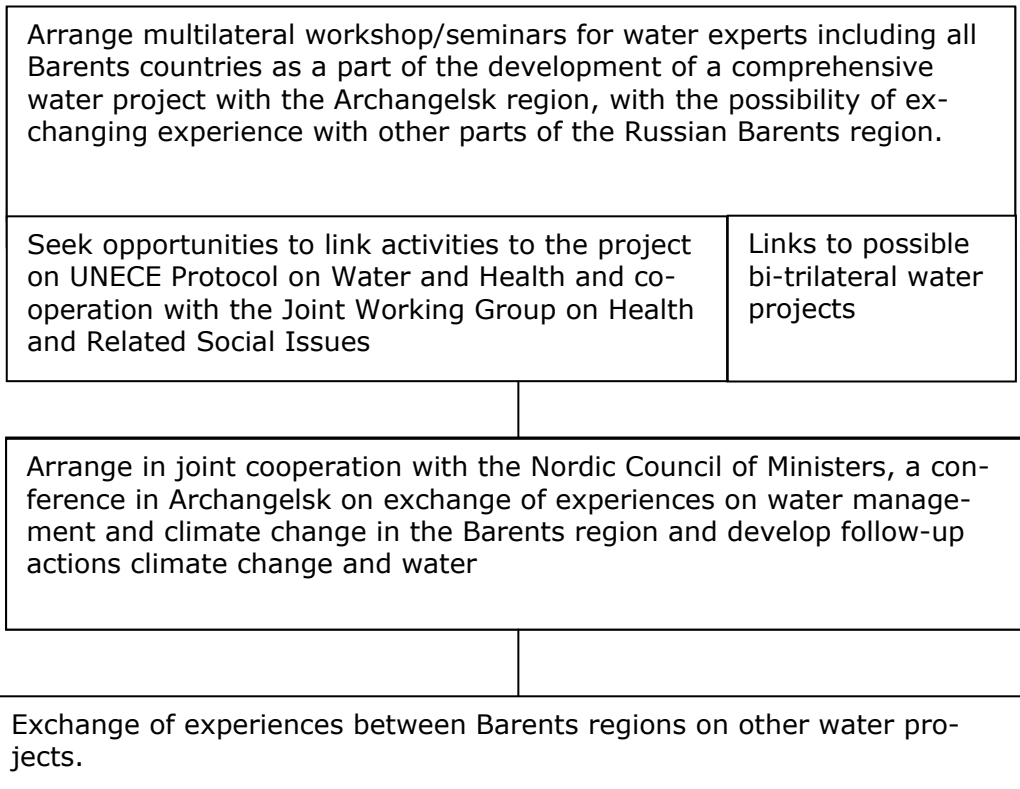
Projects and activities in the Work program will be addressed as time, resources and opportunity permit.

The work of the subgroup is carried out in close cooperation with the Regional Working Group on Environment.

PRIORITY PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

The priority projects within the Water Issues Subgroup are described in the table below. Priority projects includes all Barents countries.

Water Issues Subgroup
 Priority projects and other activities (2010-2011)



Priority projects and schedule

The following projects have been chosen as the priority projects during the Swedish chairmanship. The projects involves participation of all Barents countries:

- Water Management Initiative in Archangelsk and other Barents regions

AIM FOR 2010-2011:

Spring 2010: Seminar development

Planning for workshop seminar in Archangelsk where water experts in the Barents region, also including educational institutions, can exchange experiences on a identified topics relating to sustainable urban water systems. At the seminar further activities to improve the water quality situation in Archangelsk with authorities and other interested will be explored. Co-operation with the development of the project on the UNECE Protocol on Water and Health.

Fall 2010: Hold first multilateral seminar, back-to-back with subgroup meeting.

2011: Further activities, linking to possible work on UNECE Protocol on Water and Health, bi-lateral projects etc.

BACKGROUND: The Archangelsk region suggested to the Norwegian chairmanship in 2009 a Water Management Initiative to address the water quality situation in the Barents Euro Artic Region. The initiative was supported and addressed in the 9th Ministerial Declaration from Tromsø, Norway. The Swedish chairmanship aims to develop the proposed project and stimulate cooperation between the Barents countries in order to improve the water quality in both Arkhangelsk and the North-West Russia. The subgroup will be a reference group to the project lead by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to develop the work of the Russian Federa-

tion under the UNECE Protocol on Water and Health, to seek opportunities to link activities to the project.

- Conference on water management and climate change

AIM OF 2010-2011:

Spring-Fall 2010: Plan, together with the Nordic Council of Ministers, a conference in Archangelsk on exchange of experiences on water management and climate change in the Barents region and develop follow-up actions.

Spring 2011: Hold the conference in Archangelsk, inviting experts from all Barents countries.

BACKGROUND: The water sector is constantly facing problems of variability and uncertainty, and there is also a new dimension - increasing the level of uncertainty due to climate change. The conference will examine issues such as climate change impacts on water systems and ways to reduce vulnerability of water sector. The seminar will be based on the experiences from Barents regions, for examples see climate projects below.

- Other experience-sharing projects where two-three Barents countries are participating include:

Environmentally sustainable small enterprises in the Barents region; Promote implementation of environmentally safe and cost effective operations in small and medium sizes enterprises. Identify rules and regulations, environmental conditions and analyse risk and vulnerability. Promote implementation of sustainable cost effective technologies to control discharge of contaminants. (NO-FI-RF)

Information Change on Water Management (WFD) issues and Water Laboratory cooperation; The aims of increasing the quality assurance level of the water quality monitoring laboratories and information change on water management activities. Quality control and analytical method development, international comparability and a significant improvement of the reliability of the results of environmental analyses. The activity strengthens also the capabilities of local environmental authorities. (FI-RF)

Flood forecasting and modelling to meet with the challenges of climate change; Develop cooperation on flood risk management. Exchange of information and harmonisation of hydrological monitoring, develop models and management plans, flood forecasting and undertake flood protection measures. (FI-RF)

Climate change and airborne pollutants in the Pasvik River Basin: Three year joint project on studying mitigation of the harmful effects of climate change, water level, flow regulation and contamination in the Finnish, Norwegian and Russian border regions. Knowledge and information on environmental impacts and strategies on adaptation to climate change and other anthropogenic effects on regional level. (NO-FI-RF)

Trilateral cooperation on our common resource the Atlantic salmon in the Barents region: Develop and enhance the management of the shared Atlantic salmon resource in the Barents region; enabling a future adaptive sustainable and knowledge-based harvesting regime, conservation of the rich fishing traditions and coastal culture and indigenous traditions. By merging traditional, local knowledge with new ecological, and genetic salmon research in Norway, Russia and Finland. (NO-FI-RF)

More detailed descriptions of the projects will be developed in fact sheets.

6. MEMBERS and OBSERVERS

The following persons are appointed members of the Water Issues Subgroup.

Mattias Lindgren, Chair, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten
Bente Christiansen, County Governor of Finnmark
Demyan Smilevets , Water Agency of the Russian Federation
Jari Pasanen, Lapland Regional Environmental Centre

Regular observers are:

Tiia Kaalske, County Governor of Finnmark,
Ida Reuterswärd, Swedish Ministry of the Environment,
Roar Høgsæt, County Governor in Nordland,
Asbjørg Fyhn, Troms fylkeskommune,
Tero Väisänen, North Ostrobothnia Regional Environment Centre
Tatiana Tiupenko, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Komi Republic,
Ingrid Andersen, Ministry of Environment, Norway

Other relevant organisations and institutions may participate as observers in the subgroup.

APPENDICES

PROJECT LIST

ACHIEVED RESULTS IN 2007-2010

Issues discussed in the reporting period include: state of natural waters in the Barents Region, pollution by heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants due to industrial emissions and long transported pollutants to the Arctic, insufficient purification of municipal waste waters and other drinking water sources, UNECE/WHO Protocol on Water and Health, harmonizing monitoring and research methodology, mining issues in the Barents Region, climate change and flooding issues, and transboundary water management.

Information has been provided about work on water issues in the EU-Russia Environmental Dialogue. Results and status on new and ongoing water projects have been disseminated at the subgroup meetings.

Ongoing projects in the subgroup include: implementation of groundwater based, small- and medium-scale drinking water projects in the Russian Barents, water laboratory co-operation with the aims of increasing the quality assurance level of the water quality monitoring laboratories and methods in the Barents Region, project on flood forecasting and modelling to meet with the challenges of climate change, pre-project on knowledge and competence exchange in water management sector and pre-project study on development of sewage systems.

The water subgroup has initiated contact with the other two subgroups under the Working Group on Environment in order to identify joint areas of interest and new project ideas. Mining issues, prevention and reduction of pollution and contamination of water resources, mitigation and adaption to climate change, and wetland issues have been identified as possible joint areas between the three subgroups.

The Subgroup on Water Issues has followed closely water related activities in the Regional Working Group on Environment, in particular the regional initiative on implementing the pre-project on environmentally sustainable small enterprises in the Barents region.