



Twelfth Meeting of Environment Ministers Declaration

Sortavala, Russian Federation, 24-25 November 2015

Senior representatives of Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation and Sweden met in Sortavala, Russia, on 24-25 November 2015 for the Twelfth Meeting of the Ministers of the Environment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). The meeting was also attended by representatives of indigenous peoples, regional bodies, environmental non-governmental organisations and other invited guests.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council Environment Ministers

noted that the origin of the Barents environmental cooperation lies in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council Environment Action Programme adopted in Bodø in 1994 and its continuity is followed up by subsequent meetings of the Environment Ministers, the latest in Inari in 2013;

acknowledged the importance of the Barents regional cooperation and a shift to a green, resource efficient and circular economy in seeking solutions for the common environmental challenges, such as climate change, the loss of biodiversity, pollution of the environment;

stressed the urgency of adequate measures to protect the unique and fragile natural ecosystems of the Barents Region and prevent environmental degradation and hazards in the face of growing pressure on nature resources;

noted the need for sustainable management and protection of marine areas bordering the Barents Euro-Arctic region;

acknowledged that protection of, and access to areas of natural resources is decisive for the future of the indigenous peoples' cultures, and *recognized* the right of indigenous peoples to be appropriately involved in planning and decision-making;

welcomed the Joint Communiqué of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of BEAC, adopted in Oulu, Finland, on 15 October 2015;

stressed the importance of cooperation between the national and regional levels, and the involvement of indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, and youth in addressing environmental challenges and opportunities in the Barents Region;

welcomed the renewed circumpolar commitment to Arctic environmental protection in the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Iqaluit, Canada 24 April, 2015 and the launch of the Project Support Instrument in 2014 to facilitate the Arctic Council projects related to pollution prevention, abatement and elimination;

expressed appreciation of the financial support for the Barents environmental cooperation from the Nordic Environment Financing Corporation (NEFCO), the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and INTERREG programme, and *welcomed* the results of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) projects in the Barents Region;

endorsed the Report of the BEAC Working Group on Environment and the Subgroups on the activities in 2014-2015;

expressed appreciation of the work carried out in the BEAC Working Group on Environment, its Subgroups, and the Regional Working Group on Environment.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Environment Ministers

affirmed commitment to work together with other countries to conclude an ambitious, global and legally binding climate change agreement in Paris in December 2015, and to contribute to limiting the increase in global average temperature to well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels; the agreement should be dynamic and build on a common robust transparency and accountability framework and must engage all relevant stakeholders, respect human rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, labour rights and gender equality;

noted that the Barents Region is among the areas where the effects of climate change can be most clearly detected and where temperatures are projected to rise the most, and *emphasized* that these changes will have severe impacts on the societies and ecosystems;

acknowledged that the Barents Region can contribute to mitigation of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas and short-lived climate pollutant emissions;

highlighted the possibilities to mitigate climate change and human health hazards by reducing black carbon emissions in the Arctic and Barents Regions, and *encouraged* coordination with the Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers on this issue;

acknowledged the importance to adapt to already occurring climate change that requires cooperation at national, regional and local levels;

welcomed the activities launched by the Barents Working Groups and the Barents Regional Committee to implement the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents cooperation, endorsed at the 14th Meeting of the BEAC and adopted at the 11th Meeting of the Environment Ministers in 2013;

called for updating and implementing the Action Plan on Climate Change under the active leadership of the Committee of Senior Officials and with the assistance of the International Barents Secretariat;

urged the BEAC Working Group on Environment, its Subgroups and the Regional Working Group on Environment to further intensify the work on climate change within the mandates of achieving emission reductions, improved capacity to adapt and to spread knowledge and awareness on climate change.

THE BARENTS ENVIRONMENTAL “HOT SPOTS”

The Environment Ministers

noted with appreciation the results reached in the last two years of implementation of the “hot spots” exclusion procedure, and *acknowledged* high regional engagement and the work done in the Russian parts of the Barents Region, as well as the enhanced environmental performance at many of the “hot spots”; *encouraged* continuation of the cooperation between the WGE and Russian regions;

assented to the exclusion of the Barents environmental “hot spot”: Drinking water in Petrozavodsk (Karelia K4) from the list. The ministers also *assented* to the partial exclusion of Severodvinsk heat and power plant No 2 (Arkhangelsk A3-2), and Mondi Pulp and Paper Mill, emissions to air (Komi Ko3-1) and *encouraged* continued implementation of abatement measures at the remaining 33 “hot spots”, as well as at the 2 that have been partially excluded;

encouraged the WGE to focus the further work on promoting the planning, funding and implementation of environmental action projects on Barents “hot spots” by further application of the agreed procedure. In so doing, one should exchange knowledge and practices of BAT legislation in different countries within the sectors relevant to “hot spots”;

welcomed the contribution of NEFCO and its Barents Hot Spots Facility (BHSF) and the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership in the work aimed at “hot spots” exclusion, and *encouraged* implementation of relevant investment projects and further exploration of possibilities for synergies within the framework of the BEAC WGE and the Arctic Council, including its Project Support Instrument, and other sources of financing.

CLEANER PRODUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND CONSUMPTION

The Environment Ministers

acknowledged the work to integrate aspects on sustainable consumption and production into education programs at universities in the Russian part of the Barents Region in cooperation with the BEAC Joint Working Group on Education and Research;

supported the inclusion of integration of environmental issues and corporate social responsibility aspects in economic cooperation, such as organisation of the Cleantech Innovations in Minerals Production event in September 2015 by the BEAC Working Group on Economic Cooperation;

called for further work to disseminate knowledge and enhance capacity on Cleaner Production and Best Environmental Practices (BEP) in all economic sectors in order to improve environmental performance and resource efficiency in the Barents Region.

NATURE PROTECTION

The Environment Ministers

welcomed the work done to develop the Strategy for Protection of the Intact Forests in the Barents Region, which was asked for at the 11th Meeting of Environment Ministers in Inari, Finland, on 4-5 December 2013, and *acknowledged* the Strategy as an important contribution to preserve the Region's last pristine forests, and to meet the Aichi biodiversity targets of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD);

noted the successful completion of the first phase of the BPAN project (Barents Protected Area Network) providing a comprehensive analysis of protected areas in the Barents Region and measures to strengthen the network and *welcomed* the launch of the second phase of the project, which focuses on preservation of high conservation value forests and coastal areas;

noted with appreciation the work done within the Green Belt of Fennoscandia (GBF), creating opportunities for environmental, economic, social and cultural cooperation in the border areas between Finland, Russia and Norway, and *welcomed* the finalization of the Strategy for the Development of the GBF;

encouraged further steps for transboundary cooperation on the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services;

acknowledged the progress in establishing new protected areas and *stressed* the need for prompt implementation of planned protected areas as an important measure for achieving the Aichi biodiversity targets by 2020;

acknowledged the work of the Habitat Contact Forum (HCF) as a platform for cooperation on habitat issues in the Barents Region, *welcomed* the results of the HCF in Petrozavodsk in 2015, and *looked forward* to the next HCF meeting in 2017 in Finland.

WATER ISSUES

The Environment Ministers

recognized that economic activities and climate change put pressure on water resources and induce changes in aquatic ecosystems in the Barents Region;

welcomed the finalization of the projects Trilateral Cooperation on Environmental Challenges in the Joint Border Area (TEC), Ground Water Supply in Sortavala and Forestry Impact, and Water Management in Torne International River Basin implemented at the regional level;

encouraged continued cooperation on transboundary waters and river basin systems, such as the Monitoring mercury (Hg) in the Border Area of Norway, Finland and Russia, to achieve sustainable use and sufficient protection of water resources from pollution and other pressures, and to restore water bodies;

stressed the need for improving the quality of drinking water, especially in those parts of the Barents Region where poor drinking water quality is still a major health problem for the local people;

called for development of integrated water resources management, as well as continued investments and capacity building, in order to improve water quality in the Barents Region, and to prepare for harmonized monitoring and the effects of climate change.

REGIONAL LEVEL COOPERATION

The Environment Ministers

welcomed regional activities on water issues, climate change, environmental monitoring, biodiversity conservation, and environmental awareness including with regard to minerals and mining;

welcomed the finalization of the regional Atlantic salmon project Kolarctic Salmon, aiming at merging modern science with traditional knowledge in order to improve the future management of Atlantic salmon resources in the Barents Region;

noted with appreciation the work to handle cross-border environmental challenges such as climate change, and *recognized* the regional climate strategies as a tool to develop regional and local approaches to these challenges;

emphasized the value of regional cooperation projects in seeking solutions for Barents Environmental “hot spots”, for instance in the field of water supply, and other appropriate sectors.

FUTURE WORK

The Environment Ministers

encouraged the Working Group on Environment to continue its efforts in the fields of climate change, cleaner production, mitigation of environmental pollution and human health hazards, exclusion of “hot spots”, nature protection, and water issues, and *requested* the WGE to consider the most appropriate structure of Subgroups needed for this work;

underlined the importance of outreach communication as a tool for attaining the objectives of the environmental cooperation;

recognised regional cooperation as a unique quality of the Barents cooperation and *encouraged* further measures to promote active participation of regional representatives in WGE activities as well as *supported* close cooperation between the WGE and the Regional Working Group on Environment;

encouraged cooperation with other working groups under the BEAC;

encouraged the Working Group on Environment to continue to seek cooperation and coordination with relevant regional environmental and financial organizations in the North;

noted with appreciation the contribution of the International Barents Secretariat (IBS) in strengthening the cooperation in the Barents Region;

emphasized the need for Barents region countries to contribute to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in a suitable way, including Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to the global 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production;

expressed gratitude to the incumbent Russian Chairmanship of the BEAC Working Group on Environment and to the regions in the Russian part of the Barents region for their active involvement, and *were pleased* to accept the offer by Norway to assume the chairmanship of the Working Group on Environment for 2016-2017.