

International Conference on Water Resource Management in the Barents Region

Welcome words by Ms Ida Reuterswård, Chair Working Group on Environment

Dear Vice Governor, Dear Barents friends,

Today's conference gathers water experts from Archangelsk and many Barents regions. It is a clear manifestation of the strong need, interest and commitment to raise knowledge and competence in water management in the Barents region.

Only one year ago the Barents Working Group on Environment held its Working Group meeting here in Archangelsk. The Barents subgroup on water issues then met with Archangelsk water experts, who presented a concrete proposal for cooperation.

In June Archangelsk Oblast once again showed great commitment to environmental issues in arranging the Habitat Contact Forum on biodiversity and nature protection. The meeting gathered many, and gave important energy to the development of the Barents Protected Area Network, BPAN.

The strong commitment from your side on water issues, shown last fall, gave a direct response in the water subgroup. Furthermore, the Barents Environment Ministers, in their Declaration in February 2010, welcomed the plans for a comprehensive water project in Archangelsk oblast, with the possibility of exchanging experiences with other parts of the Barents region.

The ministers' response was based on the fundamental understanding that

- 1) water management is and will be even more – not at least considering the future impact of climate change - *fundamental* for creating a sustainable development in the Barents region;
- 2) that concrete investments in water technologies must go hand in hand with the raising of knowledge and human resources in water management sector;

After the ministerial meeting in February the Swedish Chairmanship and the subgroup members, together with the committed partners in Archangelsk, have worked hard to plan for this event.

With this conference we want to strengthen knowledge and competence on

- international frameworks such as the UNECE Protocol on Water and Health;
- the experiences from EU water management and innovative solutions in the Nordic countries;
- the current developments in Russia on clean water and initiatives taken in Archangelsk oblast;
- link regional exchange and capacity building with investments in environmental water management technologies.

From the Swedish Chairmanship side we also see it as very important that this conference is seen as

- 1) complementary to other ongoing investment initiatives in Archangelsk region, for example the ongoing investment programmes by EBRD, it is therefore very welcome that NEFCO is here as representative of Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP),
- 2) will be followed up with different capacity-building initiatives, for example on the UNECE Protocol on Water and Health, or within water subgroup or through activities arranged by

Nordic Council of Ministers. We would very much like to see this initiative carried forward to other Barents regions.

We therefore welcome that the subgroup on water issues, in close cooperation with the Regional Working Group on Environment, will have follow-up discussions on further cooperation projects the day after tomorrow. The aim will be to discuss, on an expert level, how the outcome of this event can be carried forward, to further strengthen our cooperation.

In the audience today we have several experts from the Nordic countries, working with research and water management, who look forward to share their knowledge and ideas, and learn about the challenges and opportunities in Archangelsk.

Tomorrow we will have special sessions allowing for experts to focus on

- 1) sustainable urban water systems
- 2) water monitoring
- 3) waste water treatment and discharge

Indeed, the Barents cooperation has its strength in people-to-people exchange of knowledge.

To build the network of contacts is necessary not only to address the challenges of today, but also prepare for the challenges of tomorrow. Climate scenarios show that this region, the Barents region, will warm with about 5 degrees within the 21st century. It is difficult for us to understand what this will mean on the impact on our societies, but let me just say as one climate expert said: wetter. More water. It will impact precipitation, permafrost, flooding and wetlands. The Barents region needs strategies for adaptation, it is about risk management.

To address water and climate change the Nordic Council of Ministers, and here represented by Ms. Khoroshkina, will together with Archangelsk government and the Barents environment cooperation, hold a conference next spring here in Archangelsk. That will be one of the important follow-up actions from this conference.

Dear Barents friends,

We hope that this conference will give inspiration to take further action and strengthen our cooperation, between experts on regional level. I look forward to the three days, and once again, on behalf of the Swedish Chairmanship I thank our committed and professional co-operation partners in Archangesk.

(Leaflet of Swedish Chairmanship)