Environmental Action Plan 2009–2012

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Contents




Foreword

Well-functioning ecosystems provide us with clean air, clean water, non-toxic food and other raw materials that together are a condition for our physical and mental well-being. The Nordic landscape – our natural and cultural environment – is a positive resource for the population, and our society rests on the resources our environment provides. Protecting and improving the environment are therefore a question of maintaining and improving the living conditions of people.

This Environmental Action Plan covers the years 2009–2012 and manages the environmental cooperation realised within the Nordic Council of Ministers. The plan sets the strategic course for Nordic environmental efforts. A special strategy for the work on the climate and environmental pollutants in the Arctic also exists in the environmental sector.

Issues of importance to the environment are also addressed in an overall manner in the Nordic strategy for sustainable development and the framework programme for agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food, in the Arctic cooperation programme and the guidelines on cooperation with our adjacent areas. Guidelines on environmental cooperation are also formulated by the individual countries in the annual presidency programme in the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The 2007 globalisation initiative of the Nordic prime ministers highlights climate and energy issues. In the course of the coming years, the initiative will significantly influence Nordic cooperation significantly. Environmental issues are increasingly influenced by globalisation and are becoming progressively complex. Thus, a great need exists for more integrated work aimed at other policy areas as well as within the environmental sector.

Particular attention needs to be paid to international issues where the Nordic countries through cooperation can attend to their interests with great focus and the greatest possible benefits. The cooperation between the national governments and authorities must concentrate on matters that create value added through the exchange of experience and distribution of work, preparation of a fact basis, joint solutions and proposals and initiatives in the EU and at international level.

The plan is designed on the basis of existing conditions. There is an urgent need to develop and focus Nordic environmental cooperation to meet future challenges. Hence, the environmental ministers intend to continue analysing important future areas of cooperation where the Nordic countries together can contribute to environmental improvement.

On behalf of the Nordic ministers for the environment

Andreas Carlgren

Introduction

A large number of environmental challenges exist that must be faced in cooperation – at national, regional and global levels. These challenges are primarily climate change, the use and discharge of hazardous chemicals, protection of marine ecosystems and protection and utilisation of biological diversity. The cooperation between the Nordic countries needs to be enhanced to optimise the utilisation of available resources and find joint solutions in the Nordic region.

The Nordic countries have an ambition of making the Nordic region a pioneer region in the environmental area and sharing their experience with others. The awareness of our consumption and production patterns being decisive to the condition of the environment means that the economy and the environment must be considered together.

The Nordic countries together play a role in both European and global developments. Through coordinated efforts, the Nordic countries have thus contributed excellent initiatives and tested problem solutions to the international environmental work. This work method must be continued and developed.

The Nordic countries contribute to the EU working intensively with environmental issues. Denmark, Finland and Sweden are members of the EU and Norway and Iceland participate in the EU's environmental work through the EEA Agreement. Nordic environmental cooperation aims at improving the EU rules and international treaties in the environmental area with a view to meeting the challenges as efficiently as possible.

The solution to environmental issues in our adjacent area plays a particularly big role to the Nordic region. The Nordic Environmental Finance Corporation (NEFCO) is a successful joint Nordic project that finances a host of small and medium-sized environmental projects in Russia and the Ukraine as well as the Baltic States. The Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) is giving increasingly higher priority to environmental issues – especially climate and Baltic Sea issues. The Nordic countries also

play an active role in the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Council of the Baltic Sea States as well as in the framework of the regional conventions.

Many effects of global environmental threats are particularly visible in the Arctic environment. The Nordic countries have therefore devised a strategy for environmental pollutants and the climate in the Arctic for the purpose of protecting the unique Arctic environment. The geographical location of the Nordic region and its vast expertise of the sensitive Arctic environment make it natural to highlight the Arctic aspects in different international contexts.

Globalisation entails increased benefits in all areas between countries and may foster a more uniform view of the importance of environmental issues. Our dependence on the surrounding world grows at the same time as the demand for the earth's limited resources rises. Active participation in international cooperation has long been key to the Nordic countries. Many environmental problems are cross-border problems and may also be the cause of conflicts between countries and people. The environmental problems have bigger impacts on poor people than on others. This applies, for instance, to desertification, shortage of water and sanitation, excessive use of natural resources, floods and other extreme weather conditions and pollution in shanty towns.

The fast growing economies in the world such as the economies of India, China and Russia are gaining increasing importance to the environmental situation in the world. Through development aid and the work in international bodies, for instance, the Nordic countries work together to communicate knowledge and experience to these and other countries in the fields of water, energy, air, environmental technology, chemicals and the climate.

Nordic cooperation is being undertaken to achieve synergies between the environmental conventions and other bodies for international environmental cooperation. The Nordic region has long been advocating efficient international environmental management. To fortify the position of environmental issues in the UN system as a whole, the UN international environment programme (UNEP) also needs to be strengthened. Cooperation has been launched in the context of synergies between the conventions on chemicals and waste. Similar cooperation should be realised as regards biological diversity.

The Nordic cooperation rests on the principles of Nordic utilisation, meaning that the countries cooperate in areas where they can increase results or save resources compared with the situation where they act alone. The cooperation may focus on dividing tasks or cooperating in an agreed direction. Based on this principle, the environmental cooperation during the period 2009–2012 focuses on the following themes:

- Climate and air
- Sea and coastal regions
- Biological diversity and ecosystem services
- Sustainable consumption and production

Environmental Action Plan 2009–2012 Climate and air

1. Climate and air

Overall objective

Serious changes in the earth's climate must be averted and the effects of climate change prevented. The content of pollutants in the air must not harm the environment or human health.

In the event that the ongoing climate change continues, humanity will be faced with vast changes in the living environment and support conditions. The conditions for animals and plant life are destined to undergo radical change in a short period of time with serious consequences for human health and activities such as agriculture, industry, housing and energy supply. The emission of greenhouse gases has the same effect irrespective of where it happens. The costs for society increase and are difficult to estimate. The responsibility for measures is joint and differentiated according to the UN Climate Convention. Every effective national climate policy is based on international cooperation. The Nordic countries share a firm belief in the importance of dismantling barriers to international cooperation. Measures and policy instruments which are based on efficiency and fairness in and between countries and stimulate the technological development and innovations must be established.

Air pollutants have an adverse impact on both the environment and health. Several pollutants cross borders, and air currents transport, for instance, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, POPs and heavy metals as well as fine particles over long distances. This being the case, international cooperation is of utmost importance in this area. The past 20 years have seen the adoption of comprehensive measures in Europe to reduce emissions of air pollutants. In spite of great progress, a large amount of work still needs to be carried out before the overall environmental objectives of protecting human health and the environment will be achieved at both European and Nordic levels.

Processes to be influenced

The Nordic cooperation can contribute to a new international climate treaty with a high level of ambition under the auspices of the UN. The measures needed depend on cooperation with the EU. The Nordic countries can play an active role in implementing the EU climate and energy package. Questions about adaptation to climate change can be highlighted through the regional organisations. Cross-border pollution can be limited via Nordic cooperation on the Arctic and through global and pan-European conventions. In the EU, joint rules on a range of air pollutants will be revised and renewed. Both the EU and the UN international shipping organisation, (IMO), will establish fuel quality standards and different types of emission to air from the shipping industry. The Nordic countries can also play an active role in improving interrelations between the conventions on the climate and biological diversity.

1.1 Climate impact

Objective
To reach agreement on a new global climate treaty at the 15th conference of parties under the UN Climate Convention (COP 15) in Copenhagen in the autumn of 2009.

Clear obligations must exist for all states and country groups for the purpose of reducing emissions in the long run and efficient and fair implementation aimed at long-term sustainability.

The global temperature rise must be limited to 2 degrees Celsius in relation to the pre-industrial temperature level.

The goal depends on the increase in global emissions of greenhouse gases being stopped by 2015 and reduced by at least 50% by 2050 compared to 1990.

The effects of climate change vary all over the world. In our part of the world, the Arctic is the most severely affected region. The reduction in emissions, however, is equally effective all over the world. Having the highest per capita emission, the industrialised world must take the lead. However, often it is most cost-effective to take measures where the lowest number of measures has been implemented so far.

The Nordic countries have set high national goals for taking the lead and showing that emissions can be reduced, while still maintaining and raising living standards. Moreover, the countries can contribute by supporting measures where they are most profitable. Together, the Nordic countries will work to render these central questions in the climate negotiations visible in different ways. The reductions in emissions needed to stabilise the content of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere mean that all the big economies and country groups assume responsibility and contribute to and take part in a binding treaty.

Priorities

- Joint Nordic analysis of key issues in the international climate negotiations and activities to pave the way for successful results at COP15 and in the follow-up on results.
- Work for an ambitious climate and energy policy in the EU.
- Development of the international emissions trading and other flexible mechanisms for reliable and efficient systems for international cooperation.
- Development of effective policy instruments for reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- Utilisation of knowledge through Best Available Techniques/(BAT), for instance, for energy-efficient solutions.
- Promotion of IMO solutions to reduce the climate-affecting emissions from marine transport and work aimed at developing a system for emissions trading.
- Influence on the development of sustainable solutions for biofuel introduction.
- Comparison of information about the role of society's structure in climate emissions.

1.2 Climate adaptation

Objective
Strong abilities to adapt and limit the adverse consequences of climate change, particularly for biological diversity.

Climate change may lead to more extreme weather in the form of a higher frequency of storms, increased precipitation intensity and increased risk of floods. A warmer climate affects ecosystems and biological diversity in numerous ways. Sea levels rise, the distribution areas of many species change and some habitats disappear. The adverse consequences of climate change may be considerable even if the overall objective of limiting global warming to two degrees Celsius is achieved. In the Arctic areas, the effects will certainly be extensive and the consequences serious.

The Nordic climate means that global warming can trigger changes that may be useful in the short term through, for instance, increased forestry productivity. The Nordic countries are seen as having great adaptive capacity compared to many other countries and regions. Climate adaptation measures are being implemented in many sectors such as the transport and energy sectors and must not harm nature or the environment.

Priorities

- Development of tools to meet climate change in the Nordic region.
- Increased knowledge about the relationship between climate change, climate measures and biological diversity as regards the Nordic landscape and types of nature.
- Mapping out of the effects of climate change on ecosystems, natural resources, sea currents and biological diversity – particularly in the Arctic.
- Mapping out of the effects of changed precipitation and drainage conditions and sea level changes.

Environmental Action Plan 2009–2012 Climate and air

1.3 Air quality, health and the environment

Objective

Air pollution must not exceed the permitted threshold limit values and international requirements.

The realised international air protection work must lead to reduced emission of acidifying and over-fertilising substances and heavy metals, organic environmental pollutants and fine particles.

Nordic cooperation in terms of air protection has served as a guide for the design of international air protection work. The EU is today the key player when it comes to air protection legislation. The UN air protection convention (LRTAP) broadens the perspective to include non-EU member states, which is important from a Nordic point of view.

The EU Thematic Strategy for Air Pollution from 2005 serves as a guide for the air protection work until 2020. The strategy is based on the effects on health of air pollution as the main driver for measures. Studies demonstrate comprehensive excess mortality caused by air pollution, above all related to fine particles. The air quality in several big cities in the Nordic region sometimes fails to observe the threshold limit values permitted.

Other problems caused by air pollution such as acidification and over-fertilisation are far from being solved. The problem of acidification still exists in large parts of the Nordic region, but the precipitation of nitrogen outweighs that of sulphur today. The precipitation of nitrogen influences biological diversity, and nitrogen dioxides reduce forestry production via ground-level ozone. Long-distance transport of organic environmental pollutants and heavy metals poses an existing problem that requires action.

The EU law to be introduced in this area in the course of the next few years is set to take another step to reduce emissions. It will take additional measures to meet the objective until 2020. In this work, it becomes increasingly evident that air pollution cannot be considered separately from the climate issue.

Priorities

- Establishment of a basis for decision to prepare EU directives and establish international treaties to reduce the emission of fine particles from traffic, biofuels and heating.
- Work to reduce emission and effects of acidifying and over-fertilising substances.
- Prevention of and reduction in cross-border emission of mainly mercury, polyaromatic hydrocarbons and dioxins.
- Attention must be paid to the relationship between climate and air measures.
- Cooperation to facilitate international negotiations and reduce the emission to air for the purpose of reducing the emission of cross-border pollutants.

Environmental Action Plan 2009–2012 · Sea and coastal regions

2. Sea and coastal regions

Overall objective

The Nordic waters must have a good ecological status by 2020.

The Nordic waters must be utilised sustainably.

The Nordic countries are surrounded by large sea regions rich in varieties of great importance to biological diversity and the well-being of populations. Fishing, outdoor life and tourism all depend on the sea having a good ecological status. Hence, it is important to take measures to protect the sea and reduce the threat to ecosystems in the form of over-fertilisation, over-fishing and toxins. Pollution caused by land-based sources must be given special priority.

The situation in the Baltic Sea is serious. Over-fertilisation is a threat not only to ecosystems, but also to regional economic development. New EU directives, especially the marine directive and the water framework directive, pave the way for more effective action programmes.

HELCOM has adopted an action plan for the Baltic Sea (Baltic Sea Action Plan, BSAP), containing a number of specific measures and national programmes aimed at reducing the environmental impact of nitrogen and phosphorus on the sea. The phosphorus requirements are stricter than the ones imposed by the EU. Participation by all Baltic Sea countries, not least Russia, is paramount. International finance institutions such as NEFCO and NIB as well as the EU funding instruments should play important roles in the protection of the Baltic Sea environment.

Environmentally harmful substances, which often travel from afar, concentrate in the food chain and pose a threat in the north-east Atlantic. These are long-lived organic pollutants, heavy metals and radioactive substances. The work to identify and limit the use and improve the handling of such substances is urgent and must be regulated by international treaties.

Shrinking sea ice opens new areas to shipping, fishing and other exploitation increasing the risk to the environment, particularly in the Arctic. International cooperation is therefore needed to protect the environment in these sensitive areas.

Processes to be influenced

The Nordic countries play an important role in regional marine environment protection conventions (HELCOM and OSPAR) and in the Arctic cooperation (PAME) to protect the sea. International standards for the shipping trade environmental impact are prepared by the UN shipping organisation (IMO) where the Nordic countries share interests in reducing emissions and protecting waters. In the work undertaken within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), protection of waters is an agreed work programme. The coming EU Baltic Sea strategy, the EU marine directive and the HELCOM action plan for the Baltic Sea are important tools for improving marine environments. The ongoing change in EU agricultural and fishing policies will affect the marine environments.

2.1 Ecosystem-based management

Objective

The value and resources of sea and coastal environments must be addressed through management from a holistic perspective.

Ecosystems in sea and coastal regions are sensitive and human activities materially affect them. Moreover, a large number of people depend on the sea for their livelihood and living environment. This being the case, management needs a firm hand. All biological resources must be utilised sustainably with a view to protecting ecosystems and biological diversity. The EU water framework directive and the marine directive introduce a holistic view that applies the ecological status as a basis and assesses all measures together. Sea and coastal region planning becomes increasingly important when the pressure on exploitation for different purposes increases. The utilisation of the Nordic waters must be preceded by environmental impact assessments.

Priorities

- Harmonisation of the Quality Status Report within OSPAR with the EU water framework directive and the marine directive.
- Work to develop and use policy instruments and financing mechanisms.
- Cooperation through completion of action plans for the EU water framework directive.
- Cooperation on an international scale aimed at regulating the shipping trade discharge of ballast water, emissions to air and drainage water in consideration of the sensitivity of the marine ecosystems.
- Promotion of the establishment of a network of protected areas in Nordic waters.

Over-fertilisation poses a major

2.2 Over-fertilisation

Objective

Over-fertilisation must be reduced so ecosystems can be maintained and a fine ecological status be achieved.

problem in the Baltic Sea, the Kattegat, the Skagerrak and their coastal regions due to too high an input of nutrient salts. Over-fishing has also disturbed the balance in the marine systems. Algal concentrations destroy coastal regions and returning algal blooms in open sea exist. Comprehensive measures are needed to reduce the emission of nitrogen and phosphorus from large and small communities, agriculture, forestry and industry. The HELCOM action plan for the Baltic Sea sets out goals that over-fertilisation must be reduced to a level allowing the sea to recover.

Priorities

- Cooperation on action plans according to the EU water framework directive and marine directive and the HELCOM action plan for the Baltic Sea.
- Increase in knowledge and information about how the input of nutrients affects the sea and its ecosystems.
- Increase in knowledge about the relationship between over-fertilisation and climate change.
- Preparation of strategies, measures, policy instruments and development of cleaner technologies to limit eutrophying discharges.
- Work aimed at preparing the EU agricultural policy, including environmental support programmes, in consideration of the effects on the aquatic environment.

Hazardous substances affect and

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2.3 Hazardous substances in the sea

Objective

The discharge of harmful and slowly degradable pollutants must be so small that it does not disturb ecosystem functions. It must be safe to eat fish and other sea food.

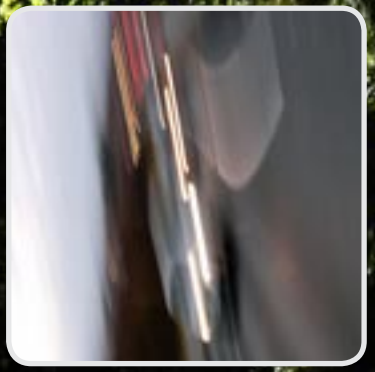
harm the aquatic ecosystems through direct impact in the vicinity of discharge or through indirect environmental and health effects via concentration in food chains. The environmental impact on ecosystems of hazardous chemicals can be alleviated by limiting the use of slowly degradable, bioaccumulative and toxic chemicals and through effective treatment of discharges ending in the sea and streams and through enhanced treatment of environmentally harmful waste. Poor and stressed ecosystems are particularly sensitive to the existence of toxic substances. Ecosystems in the North Atlantic and the Arctic are influenced by organic environmental pollutants and heavy metals transported over long distances. New environmental pollutants such as halogenated organic pollutants require special attention.

As the IMO has classified the Baltic Sea as particularly sensitive waters, protective measures were introduced which contributed to reducing the risk of collision between vessels. Ship traffic, not least oil transport, rises sharply. Discharges from ship traffic, including oil spills, are thus a growing problem.

Priorities

- Contribution to international treaties to limit environmental risks caused by slowly degradable, bioaccumulative and toxic chemicals.
- Preparation of a basis for as well as increase in and communication of knowledge about the prevalence, spreading and effects of environmental pollutants in Nordic waters and the Arctic environment to take more effective measures to reduce spreading.
- Identification of the origin, modes of spread and exposure of certain hazardous substances such as dioxin, mercury and PCB for the purpose of taking targeted measures.
- Preparation of knowledge about how climate change affects the discharge, transport and conversion of chemicals in the marine environment.

Nature and its ecosystems are an



Environmental Action Plan 2009–2012 Biological diversity and ecosystem services

3. Biological diversity and ecosystem services

Overall objective

Sustainable management must be achieved of the natural environment for the purpose of protecting natural processes and the value of the cultural landscape to maintain ecosystem services.

important life-giving web whose stability is material. People's living conditions are influenced by our ability to live together with the ecosystems and utilise them without destroying them. Working ecosystems are a condition for well-being and prosperity as they provide clean air, clean water, clean food, pharmaceuticals and other biological raw materials at the same time as they contribute to physical and mental well-being. The ecosystems can also break down and neutralise discharges and emissions from human activities.

Globalisation contributes to making it increasingly clear that incidents in one part of the world can affect the environment in a completely different part. Man's influence on ecosystems is now so severe that it will be very difficult to overcome the consequences. The ability of stressed ecosystems of adapting to climate change has also declined. It is therefore important to focus on protecting the values that ecosystems offer and may offer.

The Nordic countries attach great importance to the findings of the UN study known as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which highlights ecosystem services and the need to maintain ecosystem functions.

Processes to be influenced

The Nordic countries are eager to achieve ambitious and specific goals in global UN conventions and regional cooperation for the protection of biological diversity, unique ecosystems, landscapes and endangered species. EU cooperation – particularly Natura 2000, but also the European landscape convention – is another important area to influence. Moreover, the Nordic countries contribute shared expertise and experience in international cooperation on protection and sustainable and fair utilisation of genetic resources.

Environmental Action Plan 2009–2012 Biological diversity and ecosystem services

3.1 Biological diversity

Objective

The loss of biological diversity must be stopped.

The building of species and populations is a very slow process and today species disappear at a rate that is far from being natural. The task of protecting biological diversity during rapid climate change is an unknown task to man. It may mean that populations, species and ecosystems maintain the possibility of adapting in a changing world. But it may also mean that some species move north and to higher altitudes while other species arrive.

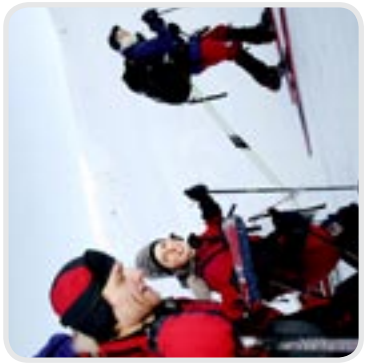
Biological diversity improves the conditions for species for coping with adaptation. A combination of protection and adaptation to new conditions should form the basis of Nordic cooperation to meet the objective of stopping the loss of biological diversity by 2010. Nordic cooperation on genetically modified organisms must continue, e.g. the cooperation between the Nordic authorities on biosafety and risk assessment in conjunction with permission and supervision.

Genetic resource work rests on successful Nordic cross-sector cooperation that concentrates on protecting genetic resources and fair distribution of their use. The cooperation must help implement international treaties in the field of genetic resources. The work to protect genetic resources will remain in focus with an eye on fulfilling the UN millennium goals until 2010.

Species and ecosystems in the Nordic mountain regions and the Arctic are particularly at risk. Water environments are another important type of ecosystem in the Nordic region. Alien species seriously disturbing the existing biological balance pose an enormous threat to biological diversity – a threat that is likely to increase given advanced climate change.

Priorities

- Preparation of joint Nordic contributions to the new Convention on Biological Diversity goals beyond the year 2010.
- Preparation of knowledge about the significance of climate change to biological diversity.
- Cooperation on protective measures to save endangered species and ecosystems.
- Clarification of the consequences for biological diversity, landscapes and ecosystems of increased biomass use, including the consequences of greater use of biofuels in the transport sector.
- Development of and increase in the use of policy instruments, especially economic policy instruments, to help protect biological diversity.
- Work to prevent the import of invasive alien species.
- Enhancement of the implementation of international treaties through Nordic cross-sector cooperation and determination of the legal status of wild genetic resources.



3.2 Landscape, cultural environment and outdoor life

Objective

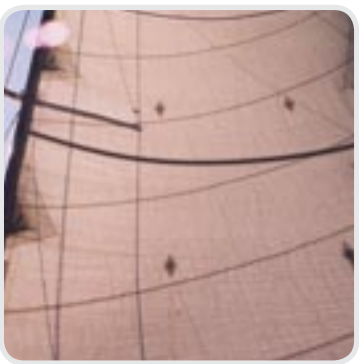
To ensure the Nordic natural and cultural heritage.

Safe and increased access to natural and cultural environments.

Outdoor life must promote human health and quality of life and form an integral part of societal developments.

The Nordic landscape is affected by fast and drastic societal changes. The use of land has also affected biological diversity and widely contributed to the living environments, species and ecosystem services existing in today's landscape. Recognising the landscape and its importance to man in the different laws governing land use, development, planning and households with natural resources and the cultural environment represents an important step in the implementation of the European Landscape Convention.

Increasing travelling and tourism are the cause of new environmental problems, but also offer new possibilities for people to live an outdoor life. Access to natural areas, cultural environments and outdoor life close to densely populated areas is important to the well-being of people. Outdoor life leads to good quality of life and better health as well as enhanced environmental consciousness and understanding of the significance of natural and cultural resources being sustainably managed. The general public must be informed of these values.



Priorities

- Increase in knowledge about and rendering visible the significance of landscapes and the cultural heritage to good quality of life.
- Stimulus of environment-friendly outdoor life for new and old user groups.
- Recognition and documentation of the link between outdoor life and health.
- Cooperation to help implement the European Landscape Convention.

Environmental Action Plan 2009–2012 Sustainable consumption and production

4. Sustainable consumption and production

Overall objective

Consumption and production must take place in such a manner that environmental and health conditions can be improved and resource utilisation is efficient and sustainable.

A central part of the adverse environmental impacts stems from the existing patterns of consumption that waste natural resources. The majority of production methods can be innovated to rest on economical utilisation of natural resources and minimised emission and discharge. An active environment-oriented product policy reduces both the adverse impacts of chemicals and the adverse environmental impacts of waste management at the same time as the use of non-renewable natural resources can be minimised.

The ecological footprint is getting bigger and bigger, making it increasingly urgent to disconnect the link between economic growth and adverse environmental impacts. In many respects, the Nordic countries form a joint market with the same product range and similar patterns of consumption. Hence, the countries can together contribute to developing environmentally adapted production methods and stimulating the interaction between environmentally conscious consumption and an environment-oriented product range. Another new area is the use of new materials such as nanomaterials, requiring both new knowledge and new rules.

Processes to be influenced

The Nordic countries still need to encourage development, application, implementation and co-ordination of international chemicals and waste conventions as well as other central treaties. International cooperation on sustainable development, including strategies for sustainable consumption and production (the Marrakech Process) and international chemicals management (SAICM), will still be developed and completed. Through coordinated efforts in this work, the Nordic countries can increase their influence and support results at global and regional levels.

The implementation and application of the new EU regulation on chemicals (REACH) have started. A new waste framework directive will be implemented during the plan period. EU strategies for sustainable consumption and production and green public procurement outline the direction of EU work. It is also important to influence proposals for new or revised directives on eco-design, Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC), environmental certification (EMAS) and the EU eco-labelling. The experience gained from the Nordic eco-label known as the Swan should be applied in the development of the EU eco-label known as the Flower.

Environmental Action Plan 2009–2012 Sustainable consumption and production

4.1 Chemicals and circular flows

Objective

Minimisation of adverse effects on health and the environment of chemicals in products, emissions, discharges and waste.

Chemicals exposure may harm the environment and health. Many efforts have been targeted at reducing these risks, but they are far from being sufficient. A great challenge lies in limiting discharges from production, products and waste management of health-impairing and hazardous chemicals that concentrate in the food chain and finally harm our health through the food we eat.

Knowledge about the impact of discharges and the use of chemicals must be enhanced as regards synergies and considered in a life cycle perspective. Above all, the content of health-impairing and hazardous chemicals in processed products is often unknown. The Nordic countries' experience and knowledge base pave the way for continued contribution to international cooperation.

Hazardous substances can be transported over long distances by air, sea currents and migrating species. This means that the Nordic countries and particularly the Arctic are affected by emissions and discharges in other parts of the world.

Priorities

- Cooperation on implementing the REACH EU regulation, especially in the formulation of EU guidelines.
- Contribution to revising the EU regulation on biocides and plant protection products.
- Initiatives aimed at adjusting test methods, risk assessment and existing legislation to nanomaterials and at increasing knowledge about environmental risks of cosmetics and pharmaceuticals
- Continued work on binding international treaties on mercury.
- Strengthening of existing international chemicals treaties and the global strategy for sustainable chemicals management (SAICM).
- Influence on formulating and implementing the EU waste framework directive and other waste-related directives and a new land framework directive.
- Contribution to the international work under the Montreal Protocol and renewal of the EU regulation on substances that deplete the ozone layer.
- Facilitation of synergies between policies on chemicals, products and waste for the purpose of making circular flows and recycling of waste materials safer and more efficient.

Environmental Action Plan 2009- 2012 Sustainable consumption and production

4.2 Resource efficiency and environmentally driven markets

Objective

Minimisation of the adverse environmental impacts of goods and waste in a life cycle perspective.

The Nordic region is a pioneer when it comes to environmentally adapted procurement. Achievement of sustainable and efficient households with natural resources.

It is important to create market conditions that stimulate eco-innovation and eco-design and provide an incentive to the business sector and consumers to make investments and purchases contributing to reducing and preventing future environmental problems. Legislation must promote environmental technology innovation and development, allowing Nordic companies to make greater use of the market opportunities generated by increased demand for environment-friendly products.

The relationship between trade, the environment and information technology, not least in the light of globalisation, must come into focus. The use of economic policy instruments should be increased.

Environmental information is a vital tool in the efforts to promote sustainable consumption. The Nordic countries undertake successful cooperation with the Nordic Swan eco-label and the evaluation of the Swan after 2008 points to several possibilities of development.

Public procurement accounts for a considerable share of the market in the Nordic region and the EU. Green public procurement is an area given high priority in all Nordic countries and international cooperation. The Nordic cooperation with joint procurement criteria for public procurement is a success. The role of the public sector as a pioneer is of special importance to development of green technologies.

The global market for environmental technology and environmentally adapted solutions is growing rapidly. The Nordic countries work actively on environmental technology separately and jointly in the implementation of the European Environmental Technologies Action Plan (ETAP). Large environmental gains can be achieved by spreading the environmental technology already existing in the market.

Priorities

- Development of policy instruments and creation of conditions for increased material and energy efficiency through, for instance, Nordic contributions to the implementation of the EU directive on eco-design and to the new waste framework directive.
- Improvement in coordination and use of various environmental information instruments, for instance, between the Swan, the EU Flower, environmental and other labels.
- Stimulus of continued development of technology purchases and public procurement contributing to increasing the share of eco-innovative and cost-effective goods and services in the market.
- Development of climate aspects within the framework of the Swan label.
- Promotion of sustainable consumption and production through creation of legal conditions and economic policy instruments.
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Implementation and follow-up

The Nordic ministers for the environment (MR-M) hold overall political responsibility for environmental cooperation. A Committee of Senior Officials for the Environment (EK-M) exists under MR-M with responsibility for implementing the Environmental Action Plan. An executive committee assists the committee. The Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat (NMRS) coordinates the various levels in concert with the country holding the presidency as well as other countries and autonomous territories. The budget of the Nordic Council of Ministers is prepared by the Nordic ministers for cooperation. EK-M allocates the environmental sector share.

A number of working groups and networks are responsible for implementing in practice this Environmental Action Plan. The implementation mainly takes place through project cooperation, and a task force exists in the organisation to answer new questions initiated during the term of the action plan. Initiatives may be taken by the ministers for the environment and the committee of senior officials as well as the working groups themselves.

Focused and specific projects that can be efficiently and flexibly implemented are an important element in Nordic environmental cooperation. Examples of already completed projects with great visibility and influence in the broad Nordic project cooperation are the development of criteria for green public procurement, the development of emissions trading in greenhouse gases in the Baltic Sea region, biodiversity indicators, work on invasive alien species (NOBANIS) and the convention catalogue on nature and the cultural environment and preparing factsheets on mercury prior to global UNEP negotiations.

The working groups comprise experts from the Nordic authorities and administrations with the needed competences. Knowledge gained through the Nordic cooperation is communicated also to the national work through the groups.

The annual follow-up on the Environmental Action Plan and its priorities is ensured through work programmes and annual reports approved by EK-M. In addition, EK-M must monitor the need for large evaluations of the plan and in that context aim at predicting future environmental challenges.

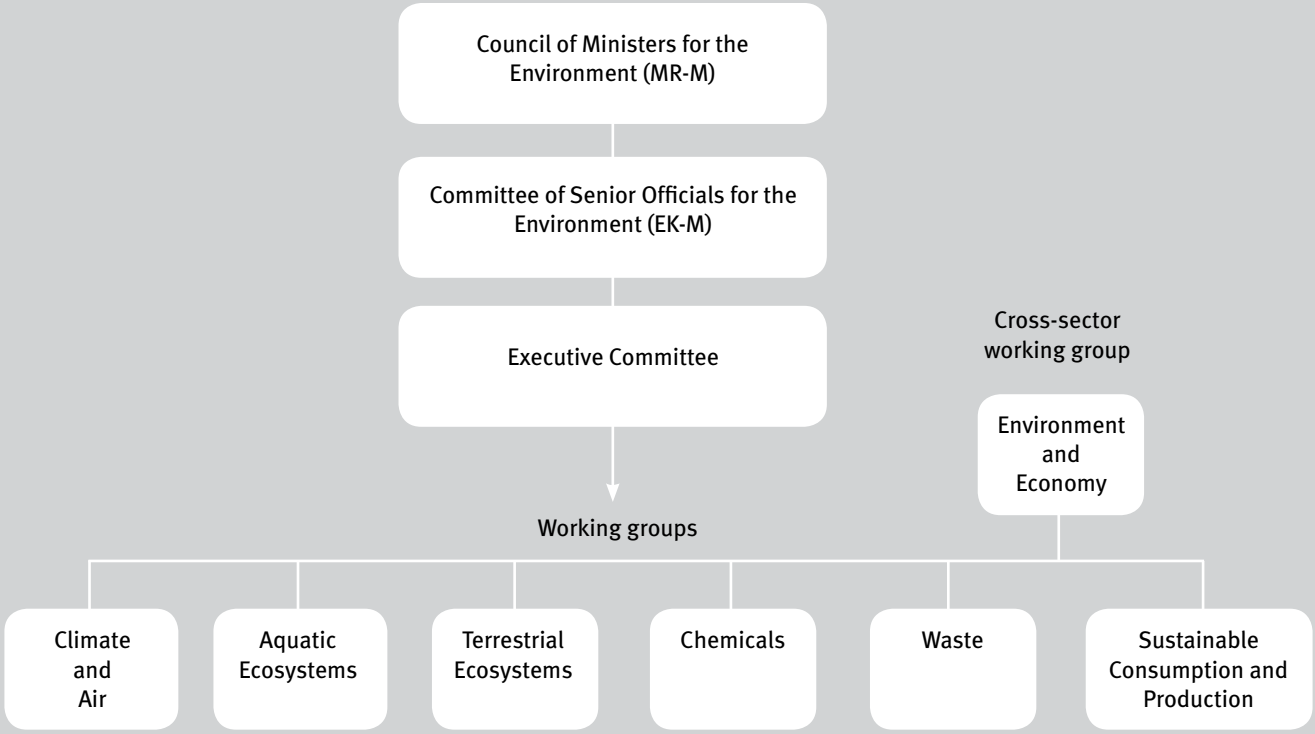
An information strategy has been devised for the Nordic environmental cooperation (ANP 2001:748). Already in the preliminary phase of a project, all players must consider how to communicate results and to whom. The project results must be rendered visible internally as well as externally. New methods for utilising results of the Nordic environmental cooperation should be tested. The information aspect should be highlighted in the working group work programmes and integrated into projects.

As environmental issues must be considered in a holistic perspective, cooperation between the working groups and cross-sector cooperation are essential. Cross-sector cooperation must under normal circumstances take place through the establishment of projects with a fixed-term mandate.

It would be beneficial if Nordic institutions participated in the projects. Furthermore, cooperation

with environmental and consumer organisations, the business sector, local authorities and the general public is a must. Cooperation with the research world is material to accumulate relevant environmental knowledge. NEFCO and the Swan are particularly important partners in the environmental sector.

Organisation chart



Abbreviations

- **BAT** Best Available Tecniques
- **BSAP** Baltic Sea Action Plan
- **CBD** Convention on Biological Diversity
- **COP 15** United Nations Climate Change Conference 2009
- **EEA** European Economic Area
- **EMAS** Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
- **ETAP** Environmental Technologies Action Plan
- **EU** European Union
- **FAO** Food and Agriculture Organization
- **HELCOM** Helsinki Commission
- **IEG** International Environmental Governance
- **IMO** International Maritime Organization
- **IPPC** Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control
- **RTAP** Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution
- **NEFCO** Nordic Environment Finance Corporation
- **NIB** Nordic Investment Bank
- **NOBANIS** North European and Baltic Network on Invasive Alien Species
- **OSPAR** Oslo-Paris Convention
- **PAME** Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment
- **PCB** Polychlorinated biphenyls
- **POP** Persistent Organic Pollutants
- **REACH** Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals
- **SAICM** Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management
- **UN** United Nations
- **UNEP** United Nations Environmental Programme

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Environmental Action Plan 2009–2012

A large number of environmental challenges exist that must be faced in cooperation – at national, regional and global levels. These challenges are primarily climate change, the use and discharge of hazardous chemicals, protection of marine ecosystems and protection and utilisation of biological diversity. The cooperation between the Nordic countries needs to be enhanced to optimise the utilisation of available resources and find joint solutions in the Nordic region.

The Nordic countries have an ambition of making the Nordic region a pioneer region in the environmental area and sharing their experience with others. The awareness of our consumption and production patterns being decisive to the condition of the environment means that the economy and the environment must be considered together.

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