

## **Report from the NSC Environment Group to the NSC Annual Business Meeting, June 26, 1999.**



Since the previous NSC General Assembly the NSCEG has held one meeting of the full group, in Telemark, Norway (see below!). The Project Working Group (PWG) has had two meetings: in January in Göteborg, Sweden - for the first time with Belgian participation - and in April in Viborg, Denmark (the latter timed with a NSC Executive Committee meeting). These meetings were attended by a representative of the NSC secretariat, a participation which is essential for the effectiveness of the group.

- **New chairperson;** Councillor John McCormack, North of England Assembly, has resigned as member of the NSC Executive Committee and consequently as chairman of the NSCEG. His contributions to the work of the group are well known and the need for a new chairperson – hopefully appointed at the 1999 General Assembly – is strongly felt.

- **The "Good Practice Exchange Programme"**. The NSCEG had received funding from the European Commission, DGXI, to arrange one conference and six seminars on various environmental topics. The conference was successfully arranged in September '97. However, the seminars, scheduled to be held mainly during the autumn of 1998, failed to attract a sufficient number of participants (20 officers representing NSC member regions). With the exception of the one on "Protection and Management of Bogs", held in Scotland on Sept. 29-30 and Oct. 1 in co-operation with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the seminars all had to be postponed until the spring of 1999.

Then it turned out to be impossible for all of the original arrangers to hold them before the time limit prescribed by the EU. Consequently a total of three seminars were eventually held, including "Otter Promoting Measures" in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, on March 25-26 and "Regional Aspects of Environmental Policies and Legislation" in Göteborg, Sweden, on May 9-10.

A final report to the European Commission will be produced by the co-ordinator before July 31st. Since a major part of the work of the NSCEG during the past years has been to organise this Exchange Programme, a thorough analysis must be made of the reasons for its failure in parts.

- **The 1998 NSCEG Annual Meeting and Conference** was hosted by Telemark fylkeskommune in September in Porsgrunn, Norway. Topic of the Conference was "Regional Agenda 21". A full report has been distributed to all NSC members, to all participants and to other interested parties. Four workshops preceded the Conference day, dealing with "The Corporate Approach" (internal sustainability matters in a regional authority), "Public Participation" (how regional authorities can encourage the participation of various citizens groups), "Sustainable Business Development" (co-operation between business and regional authorities) and "Sustainable Spatial Development" (regional planning as a tool to minimize negative environmental impact).

When the workshops were reported to the Conference a number of measures, available to regional authorities to promote sustainable development, were identified. Those measures were formulated at the NSCEG Annual Meeting as items of "The Porsgrunn Challenge" (attached). This Challenge was consequently proposed by NSCEG chairman John McCormack to the NSC Executive Committee, which adopted it in October '98. The Porsgrunn Challenge has since been distributed to all NSC member regions by NSC President Bent Hansen, encouraging them to endorse it politically.

The NSCEG got a remit from the Executive Committee to facilitate the implementation of the Porsgrunn Challenge among NSC members. This will probably be attempted by organising exchange of experience and examples of best practice between NSC members, who wish to improve their sustainability work. To get a picture of such work carried out today, a questionnaire will be sent to all members in early June with the intention to report the results at the upcoming NSCEG Annual Meeting and Conference in Ipswich, Suffolk, England on October 21-22.

- **Member Profiles.** Updated versions of the NSCEG Member Profiles are now available on the NSC Home Page. The purpose is to facilitate for colleagues in various fields and in all NSCEG regions to find each other directly. All NSC members are invited to supply information to Fife Council, Scotland, for inclusion in future updates!

- **Projects.** The Integrated Coastal Zone Management project, jointly initiated by the NSCEG and the NSCFG, has developed into two separate projects, NORCOAST and SEAGIS, which both were approved for Interreg IIc funding. So was the Transnational Ecological Network project.

- **Observership status at the North Sea Conference.** CONSSO met in Oslo, Norway, in November. (CONSSO is the group of Senior Officials preparing and following up on the North Sea Conferences.) The NSCEG coordinator presented two resolutions adopted at the 1998 NSC General Assembly (on Discharges from Nuclear Reprocessing Plants and Reduction of Oil Pollution in the North Sea). The connection between the latter and the proposed EU Directive on Shore Reception Facilities for Ship-Generated Waste was pointed out (see below!). As for the resolution on radioactive discharges, it can be said to have received a satisfactory response through the adoption by OsPar of new principles for radioactive substances.

- **Service to the NSC Executive Committee and secretariat.**

The NSCEG assisted in the preparation of various letters:

- One sent jointly with SAVOS (the organisation of southern and western Norwegian counties) and other organisations of local and regional authorities to the British Minister of the Environment, requesting a meeting to present their views on discharges of radioactive substances to the sea. A meeting was declined by the Minister. The NSC then sent a new letter deploring this fact and insisting that the views of regions affected by discharge permits be heard in the future.

- One sent, partly as a consequence of the 1998 resolution on the Reduction of Oil Pollution in the North Sea, to the Environmental Ministers of the North Sea states encouraging them to support a proposed EU Directive on Shore Reception Facilities for Ship-Generated Waste. This proposal prescribes that all ports should have such facilities, all ships should be obliged to use them, and ships should be able to use them without paying any special fee. If adopted as proposed, this Directive could lead to there being less incitement for ships to dump waste illegally into the sea. This, in turn, could considerably improve the present situation, where constant waste dumping from ships poses a great threat to the environment of all coastal regions. So far, the NSC has received replies stating that Germany is prepared to support the entire proposal and the UK is not.

Aalborg, May 31st, 1999.

Per Hörberg, co-ordinator of the NSCEG