

**North Sea Commission Environment Group
Minutes of the Annual Meeting
held at Ipswich, Suffolk, England
October 19, 1999**



PRESENT:

Chair Alison McInnes (NSCEG vice chair), Aberdeenshire Council, Scotland
NSCEG Coordinator Per Hörberg, Västra Götaland region, Sweden

Belgium:

Prov. West-Vlaanderen Kathy Belpaeme

Denmark:

Nordjyllands Amt Ellen Salomonsen, Jörgen Bidstrup
Sønderjyllands amt Bo Lodbjerg

England:

Norfolk County Council Graham King, Michael Halls
Northumberland C.C. Harry Fawcett
Suffolk County Council Adria Pittock, Karen Strandoo, Jerry Hindle

Germany:

Land Schleswig-Holstein Jutta Schwind

The Netherlands:

Provincie Fryslân Sylvia van Lieshout,
Provincie Groningen Mieke de Maaré
Samenwerkingsverband
Noord-Nederland Hans van Meerendonk

Norway:

Aust-Agder fylkesk. Sverre Fosse, Øivind Hugsted
Telemark fylkeskommune Lars Haukvik

Scotland:

Aberdeenshire Council Jonathan Young
Dundee City Council Alison Anderson
Highland Council Kathleen Matheson, Gordon Summers

Sweden:

Landstinget Halland Anita Persson, Sten Liljedahl

IN ATTENDANCE:

NSC secretariat Trine Sumborg, Karen Greve Somerset,
CPMR François Desrentes

1. Opening of meeting.

The chair welcomed all participants and noted that this was the first time the NSCEG AGM had representation from all NSC countries.

2. Apologies

Shetland Islands Council

Rob Terwey, Consultant, Porsgrunn Challenge implementation

3. Adoption of Agenda

The Agenda was adopted as proposed

4. Minutes of last meeting.

The Minutes of last meeting (in Porsgrunn, September 12, 1998), distributed in October 1998, were agreed as a true record.

5. Matters arising.

No comments were made as a result of last year's Minutes.

6. Annual Report 1998-99.

The Annual Report, distributed with AGM invitation in August -99, was adopted.

7. Good Practice Exchange Programme, report and evaluation.

The seminars and conference arranged were considered very interesting.

Comments were made as to the difficulties in getting sufficient participation at all six seminars:

- hard to reach the right persons with invitations,
- too many seminars, and too short time for each one,
- too much competition from other, similar, events - also on the national level ("cheaper").

Suggestions for future arrangements:

- must be continued exchange of experience - not least between NSC members!
- link seminars to other arrangements (on similar topic) taking place at the same time and place,
- seminar topics should originate from the hosting region(s),
- seminars could be longer and originate in ideas which come up locally.

8. Implementation of the Porsgrunn Challenge (PC), NSC Questionnaire on Sustainability.

Consultant Rob Terwey had compiled a report of the results from the questionnaire sent to NSC members in June -99. (Report enclosed with these Minutes.) He suggested that the AGM adopt the report, including the 15 recommendations emanating from it.

The AGM approved of the report and its recommendations, which were considered very relevant. The AGM gave the NSCEG Project Working Group a remit to try to ensure that the implementation of the PC is taken forward. Specifically for the year 2000 the PWG should find out which members have endorsed the PC politically. Priority should be given to recommendation 12 (see enclosed report!)
Action: PWG

The co-ordinator was instructed to forward the two recommendations relevant to the NSC Executive Committee. Also, it was suggested that the Executive Committee attempt to spread the PC in its international contacts.
Action: Per H

A new letter should be sent, with the PC, to those NSC members, which appear not to have received it with the first mail-out in March -99. It was considered important to get a political response from members.

Action: Per H/NSC

9. NSC Strategy paper and draft Work Programme, future tasks in the environmental field

The newly adopted NSC Strategy Paper had been distributed and the co-ordinator asked for ideas for contributions from the NSCEG to the implementation of the strategy. Few ideas were presented, although the importance of getting more active members was agreed on. The idea of the NSCEG participants "spreading the word back home" was endorsed. The value of co-operation projects already initiated, developed and run within the NSCEG framework could be emphasized.

Action: All

The idea of exchange of staff between member regions was generally endorsed, and the co-ordinator will distribute an exchange form.

Action: Per H

10. 1999 Conference, evaluation

10.1 Theme + speakers

The theme(s) were considered very relevant, although somewhat mixed. The speakers were found to have been excellent and inspiring as well as difficult to understand and at an inappropriate level of detail.

The main discussion focused on the importance of engaging politicians - and how this can be done. Two quite opposite views were presented: a) to "inform" politicians - not involve them in discussions, b) to engage all participants and stimulate contact and exchange of experience and opinions. There was strong disagreement as to what level of complexity the information presented should have. One idea on how to achieve both of the above views was introduced: to hold informal meetings during the Conference - but with a topic.

10.2 Workshops

It was agreed that the workshops had the right length and that there was no need for a feedback gathering afterwards, since most people had been able to attend the two workshops of their choice. Workshop themes were found to be a bit disparate. One idea for future workshops was to let them follow up on a presentation made earlier at that same Conference.

Exchange of experience should be even more prominent in future workshops than this time. It was agreed that the role of the workshop facilitator/chair is extremely important and demands much flexibility to allow participants to develop their own contributions. Introductions should be brief.

Workshop participants should be encouraged to contact each others afterwards. Lists of participants' addresses should be distributed to all.

Action: Suffolk C.C/Per H

10.3 Arrangements

The arrangements were found to be excellent in every way.

10.4 Invitations

Continued efforts should be made to invite persons/organisations outside the NSCEG.

11. Next Conference.

11.1 Host.

Aberdeenshire Council's offer to host the Conference in 2000 was gratefully accepted.

11.2 Time

September 14-16 or 21-23 were preferred. Aberdeenshire will get back with final proposal.

Action: Aberdeenshire Council

11.3 Theme(s)

Alternatives such as "Integrated Coastal Zone Management", "Sustainable Consumption" and "Water Management" were suggested. After discussion it was agreed that a "water" theme could be acceptable for several reasons; the EU framework directive for Community Action in the Field of Water Policy, Aberdeenshire's (and other UK members') experience of work on catchment areas, the North Sea connection, the political interest, etc. It was remitted to the PWG and Aberdeenshire Council to develop a proposal further.

Action: Aberdeenshire Council/PWG

12. Projects

Bo Lodbjerg introduced a Danish proposal, according to which the NSCEG work "should, to a greater extent, develop from a common political framework". This would be in line with ongoing work to develop a "North Vision" for the North Sea region, and would also offer a scope for the developing of co-operation projects. The NSCEG should also increase its efforts to influence the implementation of relevant EU directives. In the discussion some fear was expressed that this more "political" direction would weaken project efforts. However, it was agreed that the NSCEG should try to work in both ways - which to a large extent had been the case before.

Action: PWG

A number of project ideas had come up during the "Envisioning exercise" of the morning session, before the AGM. It was decided that some of them could be acted upon immediately:

- Establish a group for exchange of information on "Resources/Waste Minimisation"

Action: Per H/Hans van M

- Draft a proposal for a project modelling the effects if the staff of a regional authority reduces its working hours (with the purpose of investigating ways of achieving greater public participation in sustainability issues).

Action: Gordon S

The need for a network for persons working with Agenda 21 is still existent. NSCEG members will be asked by the co-ordinator to supply contact persons, etc.

Action: Per H

13. Work Programme 2000.

From the discussions under several items above, it was agreed that the PWG should formulate a Work Programme including the implementation of the Porsgrunn Challenge, development of lobbying efforts, creation of various networks - all focusing on the funding potential of the upcoming Interreg IIIB Programme.

Action: PWG

It was agreed to try to engage more NSC members in the Environment Group work. Country Representatives in the PWG have a special responsibility to keep colleagues informed and - if possible - active.

Action: PWG Country Reps

14. Reports.

14.1 NSC General Assembly

Trine S reported that the NSC Strategy Paper had been adopted and encouraged the NSCEG to give its views to the NSC secretariat.

14.2 IVth Conference of "Regional Environmental Ministers"

Per H emphasized - in addition to what had already been said by the Conference speaker Mr. Pätzold - that the DGXI ("Environment") strongly encourages an intensified dialogue between European regions and the European Commission.

14.3 Resolutions

Per H reported on the NSC statement on Hazardous Substances being presented at a recent CONSSO meeting in Oslo. It was agreed that the co-ordinator should make further efforts to spread this statement.

Action: Per H

14.4 Efforts to influence UK decision on Sellafield discharges

Sverre F reported that still no decision had been made on new permits for radioactive discharges from Sellafield. It was agreed that the co-ordinator should propose to the NSC Executive Committee on October 20th to - again - contact the UK government on this issue.

Action: Per H

14.5 CONSSO

Per H reported that CONSSO - preparing the next North Sea Conference of Environmental Ministers in 2002 - wants input from the NSC and other observers as to how the representation/participation of organisations outside national governments could be achieved.

Action: PWG

15. Any Other Competent Business

Hans van M informed on the good progress of the Water Cities project, initiated within the NSCEG framework. (Partners in UK, Sweden, Germany and The Netherlands)

Trine S informed on the proposed "Standing Committee" on North Sea fisheries, intended to bring fishermen and scientists together on a more permanent basis. This committee will most likely be financed by EU DGXIV ("Fisheries") The success of the NSC Fisheries Group in developing this idea and getting wide acceptance for it could serve as an inspiration to all NSC Technical Groups, she said.

Minutes by
Per Hörberg
NSCEG co-ordinator
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