

## NORWAI SAI: Audit of the Norwegian-Russian bilateral environmental cooperation - a parallel audit with the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation

Norway and the Soviet Union signed an agreement on environmental cooperation in 1988 and the agreement was renewed with Russia in 1992. According to the agreement, the cooperation aims to solve key environmental problems and to maintain the ecological balance. The cooperation should include research on harmful environmental impact and also development and implementation of measures to prevent and eliminate the consequences of such harmful impacts.

At the political level, the cooperation is managed through the Norwegian-Russian environmental commission led by the Ministry of Climate and Environment of Norway and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation. The Commission meets approximately every other year alternately in Norway and Russia. The commission decides on the overall direction of the collaboration and prepares a three-year work program that contains a list of joint activities and projects.

The aim of the investigation was to assess the implementation of the Norwegian-Russian agreement on environmental protection and to make recommendations to the authorities on how strengthening the cooperation. In the parallel audit, we developed common goals, audit questions and overall audit criteria. A large part of the data collection took place in collaboration in Norway and Russia through joint interviews with key players in the bilateral environmental cooperation. Based on independent national reports, a joint memorandum summarizing common findings and assessments was signed by the Auditors General. Both Auditors General highlight the very high importance of the cooperation.

To ensure that the goals of the bilateral cooperation is reached it is important that the Ministry of Climate and Environment establishes an efficient organizational structure where all subordinate agencies and other entities have clear mandates and are given specific tasks. The audit shows that the organization of the work both in Norway and in the Commission seems to be appropriate and efficient. In the audit we did however point out that the Parties, contrary to the agreement, still have not developed any common set of rules for the cooperation. The Norwegian audit also shows that the disbursement of funds to agencies that are responsible for carrying out the projects in the cooperation takes place unnecessarily late.

In the audit we looked at key areas in the cooperation, namely cross-border cooperation, biodiversity, pollution and marine environment, and we focused on the work programs for 2013–2015 and 2016–2018.

We found that the work programs for the most part are implemented as intended, but in some of the projects, it is necessary to strengthening the cooperation. For the projects on cross-border cooperation the audit concludes that the cooperation has generated substantial amount of shared knowledge about biodiversity and emissions. We also concluded that it is important for the Ministry of Climate and Environment in Norway to better document how the knowledge that is generated through the cooperation is being utilized in the effort to protect nature in the border areas.

In the Norwegian audit we pointed out that the problems with emissions from the nickel plants in the border area on the Kola peninsula are still unresolved. The emissions of sulfur in the border areas have been reduced over the years, but the amount of sulfur in the border areas

still surpasses the national limits in Russia and occasionally in Norway. With new regulations in Russia from 2019, the nickel plants have to introduce and start using best available technology, and through continues modernization of the plants, it is anticipated that the emissions of sulfur will be reduced considerably in the years to come.

The audit shows that Norwegian authorities share knowledge with Russian authorities amid efforts to reduce pollution in Russia. For instance, Norway has based on experience, shared knowledge on how to develop an implementation plan for the Stockholm convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

The report is available in Norwegian only: [Report](#). The joint memorandum is available in Norwegian and Russian (link will soon be available).

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