

Ministerial declaration on adapting to climate change

The Ministers of the Environment of the Nordic countries convened in Longyearbyen on Svalbard. The Ministers were briefed on the work that has been done to map out vulnerability to and the potential effects of climate change in the Arctic and reports on what climate change may mean for nature management in the Nordic countries.

The Ministers of the Environment express great concern about how the global climate is developing and emphasize that the Nordic countries will work for a more offensive climate policy, both nationally and internationally, in order to make it possible to reduce the global emissions of greenhouse gasses, in keeping with the long-range goals of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. All of the Nordic countries will meet their Kyoto commitments. Internationally, the countries will work actively to have new emission commitments put in place after 2012 and a regime under the Convention on Climate Change that also covers all high-emission countries and can ensure significant reductions in the global emissions of greenhouse gasses.

Even with substantial reductions in emissions, climate change as a result of the increased concentration of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere is unavoidable. We can already see changes in the climate today, and the dramatic effects on the Arctic environment are especially clear. Research shows that the climate will change even more in the next 100 years even if we are able to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gasses. Climate change could take different forms in the Nordic countries and we would experience differences from one region to the next in the different countries. A common denominator would be extreme weather conditions, such as stronger winds and increased precipitation, higher average temperatures, and changes in sea level. In some areas, drought could result. Climate change will have consequences for the natural environment and ecosystems, for the basis for human subsistence, for buildings, and for public infrastructures.

The Ministers of the Environment emphasize that it is urgent that the countries begin to adapt to the effects of these changes in order to minimize damage. This means that the countries must carry out research in order to acquire more information on potential climate change and their effect on the natural environment and society. The countries must furthermore map out their vulnerability to climate change and devise and carry out strategies for adapting to it. It has been noted in this connection that, through the Convention on Climate Change, the countries have moreover committed themselves to devising strategies and carrying out measures to adapt to climate change. The provisions of the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity, in which countries are called upon to integrate a concern for biodiversity in relevant strategies for facing climate change, have also been noted.

The Ministers of the Environment, through their Environmental Action Plan, 2005-2008, have set the special goal of increasing information on the effects of climate change on the marine environment and on the significance of climate change for the natural and cultural environments in the Nordic countries.

The Ministers of the Environment will themselves work to acquire more information on the expected effects of climate change, map out vulnerability, and agree on measures in their areas of responsibility. The experience that has already been gained in the Nordic countries with devising national adaptation strategies shows that knowledge of the vulnerability of one's own sector to climate change is essential for planning and implementing measures. We will collaborate on Nordic measures where appropriate and refer in this connection to "Nordic Nature Conservation in a Changed Climate," compiled in 2004-2005 under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Ministers of the Environment will follow up on the report's recommendations in their national work. Follow-up on this report will include an evaluation of future Nordic collaboration on developing relevant indicators and an exchange of experience on e.g. the spread of species.

The Ministers of the Environment note, that the effects of climate change are felt in many areas of society and involve a number of sector authorities on all levels. Individual sector authorities will be obliged to take responsibility for studies and measures in their own spheres.

Together with other ministers, and based on national spheres of responsibility, the Ministers of the Environment will play an important role in the work of obtaining and disseminating information on climate change, adaptation, planning, and the implementation of measures within their own sectors, together with other sectors, and across national borders.

The Ministers of the Environment will support the Ministers for Foreign Affairs in placing work with the climate and adaptation strategies high on the agenda for future work in the Arctic Council, which among other things includes a follow-up on the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) from 2004 and the subsequent political declaration from the meeting in Reykjavik in November 2004. For six years beginning in autumn 2006, the Arctic Council will be headed by three Nordic countries (Norway, Denmark, Sweden). Given such a long planning horizon, the Ministers of the Environment consider it a special challenge to ensure good coordination between climate work under the Arctic Council and other Nordic work with adaptation strategies. The Ministers of the Environment will especially emphasize making the natural environment's adaptation to future climate change a special area of focus for Nordic collaboration. The Nordic Council of Ministers emphasizes the significance of collaboration on climate adaptation with the other regional organizations (the Arctic Council, the Barents Council, the Baltic Council).

The Ministers of the Environment of the Nordic countries see a need for increased focus on the work of adapting to climate change as a supplement to the important work of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gasses. Work must be done nationally, both in the environmental conservation sector and in other sectors. We also believe that the Nordic countries, despite differences, face many similar challenges when it comes to work with adapting to climate change. As a follow-up to its program for the Norwegian Presidency, Norway will arrange a Nordic Local Agenda 21 conference in autumn 2006, featuring themes that will include climate change and adaptation. The Ministers of the Environment will exchange information and experience based on national work with adaptation strategies. We will further carry out joint studies and measures that can best be accomplished in collaboration among the countries. A study will now be launched on what consequences global warming of two degrees Celsius will have for the Nordic countries, with evaluations of vulnerability, effects,

and adaptations to climate change. Partly on the basis of this work, the Ministers of the Environment will evaluate the need for further studies and joint measures.