

# A greener planet – Nordic environmental successes



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ISBN 978-92-893-2656-8  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/ANP2013-777>  
ANP 2013:777

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Text: Patrik Edman/Pop Communications  
Layout: Jette Koefoed  
Photo: ImageSelect  
Typeface: Meta LF  
Paper: Munken Polar  
Copies: 50  
Print: Rosendahls Schultz-Grafisk A/S



Printed in Denmark

**Nordic co-operation**

*Nordic co-operation* is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

*Nordic co-operation* has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

*Nordic co-operation* seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Common Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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## The Nordic Ecolabel - a world-leading ecolabel

Products labelled with a little swan, the Nordic Ecolabel, can be found in almost every Nordic home. Today the Nordic Ecolabel also serves as a model for environmental labelling systems in other parts of the world.

In the Nordic countries, nine out of ten people recognise the Nordic Ecolabel. It is one of the most successful Nordic projects ever. The Nordic Ecolabel has strengthened environmental awareness amongst consumers, and companies know that the ecolabel gives a competitive advantage.

The Nordic Ecolabel reacts quickly to the needs of society. In recent years therefore, products and services in entirely new areas, such as chemicals and the climate, carry the Nordic Ecolabel. The Ecolabel is now striving to become firmly established in the construction industry.

In recent years, the Nordic Ecolabel has also become well-known outside the Nordic countries. For the first time, the Nordic countries are actively participating in the Global Ecolabelling Network. The Nordic Ecolabel also serves as an inspiration for the development of regional ecolabelling systems in South America and Africa.



### FACTS:

- The Nordic Ecolabel was established in 1989 by the Nordic Council of Ministers with the purpose of giving consumers the opportunity to choose products which meet stringent environmental standards.
- It was developed in parallel with the EU Ecolabel.
- The Nordic Ecolabel covers more than 200 product groups and thousands of goods and services: computers, washing detergents, toys, toilet paper, hotels, shops, car washes and restaurants.
- Annual sales of Nordic Ecolabelled products amount to approximately 3.1 billion euro. Add to that sales from about 1,300 services (hotels, restaurants etc.)

## No Mercury Convention without the Nordic countries

**Mercury is one of the world's most dangerous environmental toxins. The world has now agreed on a global agreement to limit the use and emission of the metallic element. The Nordic Region played a crucial role before and during the entire negotiation process.**

Co-operation on mercury within the UN Environment Programme, UNEP, is a good example of how the Nordic countries can influence global processes. Thanks to the active role played by the countries, the first negotiation meeting for a mercury agreement was organised in Stockholm in 2010. The conference, hosted by Sweden, was financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

At the fifth meeting in Geneva in January 2013, the decision on a global agreement to limit the use of mercury was taken, the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

The Nordic role was significant, even decisive, during the entire negotiation process. It is largely thanks to the Nordic countries' efforts in the negotiations that the agreement covers so many products and has an effective control mechanism and funding for the various measures.

The world's nations met in Japan in October 2013 to sign the agreement. Once the agreement has entered into force it will ban the use of mercury in, amongst other things, certain soaps, thermometers, energy-saving light bulbs, batteries and cosmetics as well as in a number of industrial processes.

These measures also include a phasing-out of the use of mercury in gold mining and amalgam fillings in teeth, as well as measures to reduce emissions from coal-fired power stations.



### **FACTS:**

- UNEP awarded the Nordic Council of Ministers a gold certificate for the organisation's support in the mercury process.
- The Minamata Convention is named after the Japanese city where the release of mercury by industry caused hundreds of deaths in the 1950s.
- Mercury can be converted into the highly toxic form methylmercury which accumulates in, for example, fish.
- Foetus in pregnant women exposed to mercury risk damage to the central nervous system.

## Towards a global climate convention 2015

The road towards a new global climate agreement has been bumpy. The goal is now to reach agreement with all the nations of the world by 2015. The obligations should take effect in 2020. The Nordic countries are acting together to reach world-wide consensus on climate change.

Climate change has been in focus in Nordic co-operation in recent years. One of the key players is NOAK, the Nordic working group for global climate negotiations, which promotes the climate process through producing relevant research, funding concrete projects and organising workshops and seminars.

“ The group is an excellent forum for Nordic climate experts to discuss current issues related to climate negotiations. Together the Nordic countries are wiser, more cost-effective and have greater possibilities to influence”, emphasises NOAK’s chairman, Harri Laurikka

The Nordic countries have a greater chance of influencing the negotiations together. NOAK’s meetings also serve as an effective internal information channel for the countries.

The total emission reductions today are still insufficient to limit the global temperature rise below two degrees. NOAK wants to investigate, how using complimentary climate measures, it may be possible to reduce the emissions gap that will occur if not enough is done before 2020. NOAK has also addressed issues such as the global emissions market, and the forest and land use issues of importance to the Nordic Region.

The developed countries have pledged 100 billion dollars annually for climate activities in the poorer countries. Calculations have, however, shown that the need could amount to an astronomical 1.5 trillion dollars. A NOAK project will investigate how private climate funding can close this gap.

The parliamentary body, the Nordic Council, has also been active in climate matters and is calling for a global and concrete action plan, amongst other things, for how the burden of climate action should be distributed between the world’s nations. This ambition matches that of the Nordic Council of Ministers and one of NOAK’s ambitious projects will discuss this very question.



### FACTS:

- The Nordic Council of Ministers’ climate commitment was intensified in the run-up to the UN climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009 (COP15), amongst others by the Nordic COP15 group.
- This work is now carried forward by NOAK, the Nordic working group for global climate negotiations.
- A new global climate pact is planned to be adopted at the UN climate summit in 2015 (COP21).

## Nordic commitment lowers emissions in other countries

**The Nordic Region contributes with funding on many fronts through its environmental institutions. This is about supporting the countries in the adjacent areas to reduce emissions in the Baltic Sea and the Arctic, to support innovation, for example, in extracting biogas and to promote climate action in the developing countries.**

In addition, to provide the climate process with valuable research, the Nordic Council of Ministers also funds concrete projects. In practice this takes place through different institutions, such as the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation NEFCO and the Nordic Development Fund NDF.

NEFCO combines environmental investments with profitable business and facilitates an export of Nordic environmental technology and expertise to the Nordic adjacent areas.

**“ Thanks to our niche as an environmental funder we have been successful in filling a void in the financial sector in the countries in which we work. We have reduced emissions of environmentally harmful substances through over 400 projects in the adjacent areas”, says NEFCO’s CEO Magnus Rystedt.**

NEFCO is mainly active in wastewater treatment, energy efficiency and renewable forms of energy. Examples of current projects are the modernisation of the wastewater treatment plant in Sosnovij Bor, and an investment in solar power for farmers in Benin.

Last year NEFCO helped to lower carbon emissions by 3.6 million tons and electricity consumption by 8.412 gigawatt hours. This equates to 11.7 million return trips for people between Helsinki and Paris or the annual electricity consumption of 1.3 million Danes.

NEFCO is also involved in highly innovative projects, such as the development of new marine fuels with low sulphur emissions, the extraction of biogas from algae, and the conversion of chicken manure to biocoal and biogas.

NEFCO is financing, with the Nordic countries, a programme in Peru to reduce emissions from waste management. NDF, in turn, has provided the means to reduce emissions from cement production in Vietnam. These measures are part of the work to bring about national sector initiatives in developing countries.



### FACTS:

- NEFCO is an international financial institution established by the five Nordic countries in 1990.
- NEFCO has financed hundreds of projects, primarily in wastewater treatment, energy efficiency and renewable forms of energy.
- The Nordic Development Fund NDF was established in 1988.
- NDF grants soft loans to developing countries.
- NDF also grants funding for climate investments in the world’s poorest countries.
- NEFCO is mainly active in wastewater treatment, energy efficiency and renewable forms of energy.

## Better air through Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation in air quality has been going on since the 1960s and has been very successful. For example, the UN Convention on Transboundary Air Pollution came about as a result of a Nordic initiative. The convention has greatly contributed to cleaner air in the Nordic Region.

The acidification alarm in the 1970s led to intense work in the Nordic countries. The Nordic ministers for the environment proposed an international agreement to collaborate on the problems as early as 1976.

The UN Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP) entered into force almost a decade later. Since then it has been extended by eight international protocols to cut emissions of air pollutants. The Gothenburg protocol from 1999 was crucial for substantial reductions in sulphur, nitrogen and ammonia which led to strong reductions in deforestation and acid rain in Europe.

The Nordic countries have also been proactive in the EU's air pollution policies. The EU's National Emissions Ceilings Directive (NECD) will be re-negotiated with more stringent emission limits by 2025–2030. The Nordic countries' contribution to the process is important and several projects under the Nordic Council of Ministers' Climate & Air Quality Group provide direct input to the process.

The Region also co-operates to make sure air quality is given greater weight in Arctic co-operation. This has led to negotiations in 2013 for an Arctic instrument for reduction of soot.



### FACTS:

- The UN Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution entered into force in 1983.
- Emission ceilings for fine particulate matter, including soot, were included in the amended Gothenburg Protocol in 2012.
- The goal is that the EU's NECD (National Emission Ceilings Directive) will include fine particulate matter and short-lived climate agents in the future.
- The Nordic Council of Ministers is funding a report on the Nordic countries' emissions of black carbon (soot).

## Killer slugs under Nordic pressure



Thousands of unwanted organisms are flying, jumping, creeping and crawling around in the wild. They are invasive species. Increased awareness of this is important and therefore the Nordic Council of Ministers has established the NOBANIS network, which also inspired EU legislation in this area.

It is said that invasive species are amongst the greatest threats to global biodiversity. These are species that have spread to areas outside their original habitat. An invasive species can take over a native species' habitat and cause immense damage to the ecosystem. Global warming is accelerating the spread of invasive species to Northern latitudes.

Thanks to a close European co-operation called NOBANIS we are better equipped today. NOBANIS is primarily a database launched by the Nordic Council of Ministers nearly ten years ago. Information is the first step towards action and NOBANIS meets that need.

The database, the first of its kind in Europe, provides knowledge on invasive species and how they spread, as well as the ecological and economic harm they can cause.

The EU Commission presented new legislation in the autumn of 2013 on how invasive species can be controlled. The NOBANIS network has actively participated in, and inspired the EU process.



### FACTS:

- NOBANIS (The European Network on Invasive Alien Species) was set up in 2004.
- NOBANIS has 20 participating countries in Europe. The network wants to expand and include more members.
- The database contains more than 9,500 species.
- Invasive species threaten nature in many ways: they can be toxic, eat and eradicate other species, and spread parasites.
- For example, the Spanish slug and the raccoon are registered in NOBANIS. Raccoons have spread to Finland from Russia but can also be found in Sweden today.



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## Facts on Nordic Co-operation

- One of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration.
- Co-operation takes place in the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council, the inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary bodies respectively.
- The aim is to achieve added value, Nordic synergy, for all Nordic citizens.
- Nordic environmental co-operation is managed by the ministers for the environment.
- The Environmental Action Plan 2013–2018 is the basis for the environmental co-operation.
- Environmental co-operation focuses, amongst other things, on green community development, climate change, biological diversity and hazardous chemicals.

