

Commissioner
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Energy and Transport
Brussels

Cornerstone of energy and infrastructure in Norrbotten and Europe

Energy is a crucial factor to business in Norrbotten and to the county's development. Access to reasonably priced, environmentally sound and quality assured energy is prerequisite to sustainable growth. Energy supply is also a requirement for good quality of life for the citizens of Norrbotten and Europe.

The energy sector in Norrbotten is strong, not least thanks to the plentiful supply of hydropower and forest, and the energy expertise that has been built up in the county. Hydropower supplies almost half Sweden's electricity. In a normal year, the county's hydropower contributes about 11 per cent of Sweden's total electrical power production. With just under half the electricity produced used outside the county, the county has high per capita energy consumption. Indeed, there are a high proportion of energy-dependent companies and operations in the county. According to previous industrial estimates by Statistics Sweden, over 4,000 people are employed in energy-related jobs in Norrbotten. This means that production, distribution, sales and consumption of energy produced in the county are highly significant employment factors. One example of the enormous potential for new jobs is the county's ability to utilise bioenergy. Norrbotten County is well-positioned to become a pioneer in the use of biofuels.

Norrbotten is described in many contexts as a strong energy producer in an international perspective. It is less often mentioned that the energy needs to be transported to the end users on reasonable terms. The field of energy means more than production and consumption, and we face major changes which require a well thought-out future strategy.

In an international perspective, energy consumption is increasing dramatically, at the same time as deregulation of the market means that the trade in energy is now a global phenomenon. The demand for energy is steadily growing. In the next three decades, the demand is expected to increase by 60 per cent. This development is taking place at the same time as 80 per cent of the world's resources are being consumed by 20 per cent of the world population. This means that the energy debate is not merely about environment and technology, but just as much about how growth and prosperity are to be distributed.

The ongoing debate on oil prices and the debate over what is to follow the Kyoto Protocol are putting energy in focus. In this perspective, Norrbotten's rich assets in the form of renewable energy sources and high-level energy expertise are invaluable.

The EU's post-2013 financial perspective is currently under discussion, and there, decisions will be made on the strategy for assistance given to work with renewable energy sources. The Commission is interested in the regions' energy policy priorities and the strategic considerations mooted for the future. It is vital that, as a strong energy producer – and energy consumer – Norrbotten should produce a programme that aims, with its assembled know-how in the field of energy, to contribute towards long-term sustainable growth and distribution of the prosperity created.

Norrbotten County Council is an active participant in the work of the Assembly of European Regions (AER) to build a European platform for sustainable energy. The organisation comprises 230 regions from all over Europe. Within the framework of this commitment, the county council organised an international energy conference in Porjus on 1–2 July 2005. The conference assembled political representatives, scientists and engineers from 12 countries to exchange experiences connected with renewable energy sources. Mrs Mariangels Perez-Latorre represented the Commission, DG Energy.

One concrete outcome of the conference was the establishment of an energy working group within AER, "The Porjus Energy Group for a sustainable society", PEGASUS, where as chair of the county council executive in Norrbotten, I am vice president.

An inaugural meeting was held in Exeter in England on 19-21 October 2005.

In addition, the county council has been invited to participate in the energy working group of CPMR (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe).

To fulfil this work, all significant players in the field of energy in Europe and Norrbotten should collaborate to produce a regional strategic platform on energy. This will both stimulate debate and start consultative processes at national and European level, and will also provide a basis for drafting a European strategy document. The aim is to make the expertise and experience existing in the county available to all the European communities. Energy issues will be decisive to future growth, and for that reason energy should be regarded as an infrastructural cornerstone in precisely the same way as transport, IT solutions, etc. Growth requires energy, and energy requires a long-term sustainable strategy.

Summary conclusion

- Energy should be regarded as an infrastructural cornerstone in the development of Norrbotten and Europe.
- Energy is prerequisite to growth and good quality of life for the citizens of the county and Europe.
- The energy-dependent companies in the county need a long-term sustainable supply of energy that is satisfactory as regards quality and cost.

- Norrbotten is uniquely positioned as regards potential for developing alternative energy sources.
- There is broad energy expertise in the county which can be coordinated to achieve long-term sustainable development in the field of energy in Europe with a large element of networking, dissemination of information and raising awareness.
- Competence supply through continuous investment in R&D is a necessity.
- An energy programme focusing on the production chain in its entirety should be produced in close cooperation with the players in the energy sector.
- International energy work within the framework of AER (Assembly of European Regions) and CPMR (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe) should be given priority.
- Energy as a growth factor in the county, Sweden and Europe shall be underscored in the work.
- The expertise and experience residing in the county shall be made available to the rest of Europe.
- Norrbotten shall be well prepared for the new programme period in the EU, where energy issues are a priority area.

To further discuss this issue and obtain the views of the Commission on the work to be carried out within AER and CPMR, a meeting would be valuable, at which we might coordinate our joint efforts to strengthen the work towards long-term sustainable energy solutions for the good of the European communities.

Kent Ögren

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