

Solutions for the warming Arctic can be found from the north

Maria Ohisalo, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Finnish Government

According to the most worrying estimates, the Arctic region is growing warmer up to four times faster than the rest of the planet. Both human life and the environment are affected: reindeer herding as well as the diversity of fell habitats are under threat.

In addition to the warming climate, extreme weather conditions have also become more common. This change is also more pronounced in the north, and impacts the area, especially in winter. The season of snow and ice will become shorter and winters will become more unpredictable. Increased rainfall also increases the risk of flooding. On the other hand, dry summers will also become more common, which increases forest fires in the Arctic region.

Protected areas account for about 30 per cent of Lapland's surface area, but many of the region's ecosystems are still threatened by the combined impact of the climate crisis and the footprint of human activity. In Finland, fell tops are the habitat with largest relative percentage of endangered species: nearly 40 per cent of them are endangered.

There is some good news, too. Although climate change and its effects pose a great threat to the Arctic fox, it has returned to nest in Finland after a quarter-century break. This is the result of long-term conservation work to improve the habitats of Arctic foxes.

According to the Finnish Constitution, the Sámi people are an Indigenous people that have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. Preserving biodiversity is crucial to the continuity of Sámi culture. Environmental changes have far-reaching consequences for the culture, traditional livelihoods, health and well-being of the Sámi people, for example. On the other hand, the better opportunities the Sámi have to practise their culture, the better the community will be able to adapt to changes.

In addition to adapting to climate change, global emission reductions are the best medicine for the problem. The higher the temperature rises, the more irreversible changes will occur in the

area's ecosystems and the more difficult adapting to them will be for both humans and other species.

Companies provide solutions

Mitigating and eventually stopping global warming can only be achieved if climate actions are taken in all areas of society: governments, municipalities, associations, individuals and businesses all need to be involved.

Northern Finland has excellent examples of businesses that have turned their climate-friendly operations into strengths.

For example, EcoUp company in Oulu manufactures carbon neutral insulation materials and reuses demolition material. The company also develops technology for the reuse of construction materials and waste. In addition to the well-known Ekovilla, the company's products include blown wool made from the side streams and surpluses of the insulation slab industry.

Valtavalo in Kajaani, on the other hand, combats throw-away culture by manufacturing long-lasting products. Valtavalo's business idea also includes a service where energy-efficient lighting is designed, delivered and installed for the customer and then maintained by Valtavalo's partners.

The Tornio-based Tapojärvi company offers solutions for recycling industrial by-products and spoil materials. Tapojärvi's processes save natural resources because there is no waste to be disposed of and the need to manufacture aggregate from virgin raw materials is significantly reduced.

Infinite Fibre Company is planning an investment worth EUR 400 million in Kemi to produce new textile fibres from textile waste. This would give old clothes and other textiles a whole new lease on life.

And these companies are just a few examples. Northern Finland also has a large number of tourism companies that see sustainable operating models as a competitive advantage in attracting visitors. Conducting business while respecting the environment and residents ensures that activities can continue for decades to come.