

“Welcome speech” by Dagfinn Høybråten, Secretary General to the Nordic Council of Ministers, at NEF’s Final seminar on Sustainable Energy Systems 2050, the Research Council of Norway, Lysaker on 21 October 2015, 10 am.
Det talte ord gælder/ The speech was that given at the seminar.

Dear guests, organizers and speakers,

I am delighted to welcome you to Nordic Energy Research’ Final seminar for the research programme ‘Sustainable Energy Systems 2050’.

There is much to celebrate, discuss and reflect upon, as we mark the finalization of this important research programme. I would like to give you some of my reflections.

[Energy shows the strength of Nordic cooperation]

Firstly, let me clearly state, that what we have accomplished in the Nordic region in terms of cooperation in the field of energy is unique and of great importance.

The Nordic region constitutes the world’s 12th largest and the EU’s 5th largest economy – an economy that has experienced a prolonged and dramatic decoupling of emissions and economic growth.

The Nordic countries supplement each other almost perfectly in terms of energy resources, and through the years, there has been a strong political will to expand and integrate energy cooperation in the region.

The energy systems rely heavily on each other and the high level of trust between the countries ensures a smooth operation of the common system. If the wind blows in Denmark, Norway and Sweden can draw on that and likewise, when hydropower or biomass is abundant in one area, the other partners benefit.

The Nordic energy cooperation contributes to stable and secure energy supplies, sustainable growth, and welfare for the citizens of the Nordic countries. It also helps meeting climate and environmental challenges through the growth in sustainable energy and an ever increasing focus on energy efficiency.

The Nordic countries have a long history of trading electricity and 2015 marks the 100 years anniversary of the first power cable between Denmark and Sweden.

The co-operation also serves as a tool for promoting Nordic positions of strength in the energy sector on the global arena to create energy solutions that are positive for the environment and climate on a global scale.

Together with ambitious policies over a long period of time and powerful instruments, this has made the region a pioneer in renewable energy.

Co-operation between the Nordic countries on energy is thus unique and longstanding. And a genuine example of good and useful Nordic cooperation.

[Nordic cooperation as key for development]

I strongly believe that regional cooperation is one of the keys to create more favorable conditions for sustainable solutions also when it comes to different types of policy combinations.

The Nordic Council was founded in 1952. At that time, it was a pioneer in regional cooperation among sovereign states. A common labour market and free movement across borders without passports was achieved early on.

Since then, political commitment and public support has remained high in the five Nordic countries. Over the last years the Nordic Council of Ministers has focused and worked together towards sustainable development and green growth.

To focus and strengthen our work, the Ministers for Nordic Cooperation have recently agreed on a new vision.

The vision has four pillars, one being:

An innovative Nordic region. Here we jointly manage specific challenges such as welfare, education, sustainability and research – and achieve higher quality and greater efficiency through collaborative efforts.

[The role of research]

A fine example of an innovative Nordic region is our co-operation in the area of research. The Nordic region has a long tradition of collaboration in financing and performing Nordic research programs. Due to common history, language and culture we find it easy to work together. Even though research by its very nature is international, international research cooperation is not an easy task.

In the Nordic, we have managed to establish a unique permanent platform for funding of common-pot programs.

Taken one by one, we are relatively small countries. But together we have a strong position in research and innovation and we have a political will to act.

[Nordic Research – providing guidance for Nordic energy policies]

Individually and collectively, the five Nordic countries have some of the most ambitious energy and climate policy agendas in the world, having set challenging targets and milestones along the road to create a truly sustainable energy system.

Nordic co-operation, particularly in terms of infrastructure, research, development and demonstration, is vital if the objective of a sustainable future is to be attained at the lowest possible cost. But also if the Nordic countries should continue to have a strong position within this field.

The Nordic countries have been co-operating on energy research since 1985 and, since 1999, the co-operation has taken place through the Nordic Council of Ministers' institution, Nordic Energy Research.

The co-operation supplements the national research programmes in the energy field as well as EU projects. The current main programme under Nordic Energy Research, Sustainable Energy Systems 2050 (SES2050), which we celebrate today, is focusing on renewable energy, markets and grids, and transports with low emissions.

The programme objectives have been to develop integrated solutions between renewable energy, low-carbon transport and grids & markets. The overarching objective was to develop knowledge and solutions supporting the transition towards a sustainable Nordic energy system in 2050.

Therefore, it is an important input to the development of our common integrated Nordic energy system, energy cooperation and policy.

Before I hand over the floor, let me take the opportunity to thank you all for joining us at the final seminar and sharing your insight and knowledge. I wish you all a fruitful debate.