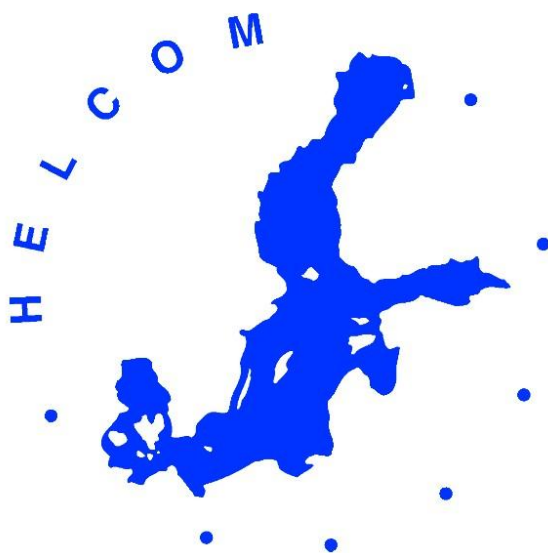


Communiqué of the high-level segment of the 32nd Meeting of the Helsinki Commission

**Progress in the national implementation
of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan
for the recovery of the Baltic Sea**

9 March 2011, Helsinki



Helsinki Commission
Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE 32ND MEETING OF THE HELSINKI COMMISSION

PROGRESS IN THE NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HELCOM BALTIC SEA ACTION PLAN FOR THE RECOVERY OF THE BALTIC SEA

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) is a globally recognized recovery plan

The development of the BSAP has been well received world-wide; this momentum is now transferred into the implementation

The actions in the Baltic Sea Action Plan adopted in 2007 have received world-wide recognition as a good example of an ecosystem-based management of the marine environment when it has been presented, e.g., in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity COP 10, the UN Framework Convention in Climate Change COP 15 and 16, and at the meetings within the Arctic region, Black Sea, Caribbean, the Sea of Japan and the US Chesapeake Bay. The plan has set an example of international management of an entire sea basin with a multinational catchment area in particular in relation to cooperation on the protection of the marine environment.

As documented in the 2010 HELCOM Moscow Ministerial Declaration, the first implementation steps have been taken showing that it is possible to turn the negative trend and restore a severely degraded marine area to a sea where we can swim anywhere, profit of good sustainable fish catches and enjoy a beautiful scenery and unpolluted environment - which only a healthy Baltic Sea environment with diverse biological components functioning in balance can provide us.

Outlook for implementation

All Baltic Sea countries have presented National Implementation Programmes and there are good actions in them

All countries have now prepared their National Implementation Programmes (NIP) for the BSAP in accordance with their national procedures and needs. The NIPs show several similarities between the countries on how they perceive and deal with challenges related to the marine environment. As an example, activities are being undertaken in many countries around the Baltic to reduce inputs of nutrients from diffuse sources, to build or upgrade wastewater treatment plants to further improve nutrient removal and sanitary standards. Similarly, a concerted action is being initiated to upgrade port reception facilities for sewage to eliminate nutrient input from passenger ships to the Baltic Sea. Some actions are being developed to enhance effective use of nutrient containing sewage sludge as well as manure from animal farms in modern biogas plants and for fertilizer use, thus reducing nutrient losses and saving valuable nutrient resources. Several countries have already, either in their legislation or by voluntary means, banned phosphorus containing laundry detergents for household use. To protect Baltic Sea biodiversity, the countries have been effective in designating more than 10% of the Baltic marine area as Marine Protected Area (MPA) (for more examples of accomplished activities see the background document).

There are also some slow- and even no-progress areas

While the NIPs list several accomplished and successful actions, less progress and fewer concerted initiatives have been presented to reduce nutrient input from diffuse sources, to control the spread of hazardous substances or to reduce the impacts from fisheries activities. In order to address these issues, adequate legislative and voluntary measures and enforcement of existing requirements need to be ensured.

Following the fact that agriculture is the main source of nutrient inputs, HELCOM needs to guarantee efficient work within the HELCOM Baltic Agriculture and Environment Forum, established by the HELCOM Moscow Ministerial Meeting, to enhance the implementation of measures for reducing phosphorus and nitrogen losses from agriculture as listed in the BSAP and legislative frameworks.

For conservation of biodiversity and to ensure sufficient knowledge-base for future management of the marine environment, scientific inventories, assessment and mapping activities need be continued. This is of utmost importance for a proper application of the ecosystem approach to management of human activities, in which maritime spatial planning is an import tool. Moreover, elaboration of management plans and measures for all Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs) is crucial for ensuring effective spatial protection by those BSPAs, including further designations of offshore BSPAs, ensuring ecological coherence of the BSPA's network.

Huge challenges are ahead but there is also available funding dedicated to the restoration of the Baltic Sea

To invest in the restoration of the health of the Baltic Sea is also an investment in the future. Based on the NIPs, a suggested way forward is to further develop project ideas covering all segments of the BSAP and match it with the funding from the international funding community, in particular the BSAP Trust Fund managed by NEFCO and NIB. Much more focus must be directed towards the implementation and there is no doubt that countries need to make their own national budget allocations. In order to be successful in this process, the NIPs must be complemented with concrete measures to reach the BSAP targets, be given increased political support and be a priority by the international financiers. This will be the focus of the next phase of the NIP Project implementation which will be carried out in dialogue with countries, project owners and potential financing institutions.

Building partnerships for cooperation

BSAP contributes to global processes

There is a need for countries to cooperate and coordinate their work to achieve national environmental objectives and their commitments under international agreements. The on-going designation of the Baltic Sea area as a Special Area for sewage under the MARPOL Convention provides an example of how the Baltic Sea countries have influenced and enhanced international policy developments. Similarly, ratification of the IMO International Convention for Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments by the remaining eight Baltic Sea countries, following the example of Sweden, would bring the Convention very close to entering into force. Likewise, safety of navigation has considerably increased in the Baltic Sea following the willingness of the Baltic Coastal States, based on IMO work, to undertake more efforts and establish a land-based monitoring system for ships, ensure coverage of the Baltic with Electronic Navigational Charts and the use of the safer Electronic Chart Display and Information Systems (ECDIS) in the Baltic. This in turn has promoted the recent adoption within IMO of the mandatory use of ECDIS globally.

The Baltic Sea countries' coordinated aerial surveillance has shown to be an effective preventive means to reduce the numbers of illegal oil spills. And the response and emergency cooperation in the Baltic ensures a swift and operational national as well as transnational response to accidental pollution from ships.

Furthermore, the Baltic Sea Action Plan and the NIPs serve as an example of a regionally coordinated implementation of the UN Global Programme of Actions.

BSAP implementation and national and EU processes interact positively

The Russian Federation has adopted and updated a number of strategic documents in the field of the protection of the marine environment to rehabilitate and recover the Baltic Sea ecosystem, such as the Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation till 2020 adopted by the President of the Russian Federation on 27 July 2001, the Water Strategy of the Russian Federation till 2020 adopted by the Government of the Russian Federation on 27 August 2009, and the Climate Doctrine of the Russian Federation adopted by the President of the Russian Federation on 17 December 2009.

Notwithstanding the importance of the cooperation among all Baltic Sea States to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea Area, for those HELCOM countries which are also EU Member States the on-going legislative work under EU with a bearing on the marine environment is of particular importance. Due to its legal obligations and requirements of regional coordination, EU processes are highly prioritized in coastal EU Member States. The BSAP relates positively to the implementation of EU legislation, HELCOM being the coordinating platform for the regional implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) in the region. The BSAP facilitates cooperation in the Region for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which requires the EU Member States to accomplish a range of measures to achieve good environmental status of marine waters by 2020. By consequently implementing the BSAP the Baltic Sea States are already undertaking important supportive actions directly relevant to this Directive which also support the efforts made to improve water quality under the Water Framework Directive and to protect marine habitats and species under the Birds- and Habitats-Directives.

Having the BSAP objectives and approaches included as part of the environmental component of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region clearly shows the added value of the cutting edge work in HELCOM. Integration of environmental concerns in different EU regulations/policies and the alignment of sources of funding with the protection of the marine environment are crucial future challenges. Bearing in mind the particular importance of the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) for the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea and being aware that the CFP will be revised by 2013, HELCOM will observe this process and further contribute by feeding in the environmental objectives of the BSAP, as appropriate.

Everyone must be involved

Awareness and willingness to contribute to the restoration of the health of the Baltic Sea is increasing at all levels. Today, the citizens of the Baltic Sea riparian states are concerned about the health of the sea and demand action. Sectorial cooperation organizations and environmental protection NGOs, as well as parliamentary and financing cooperation organizations have actively participated and contributed to the work on the BSAP.

To focus the political attention on the implementation of the HELCOM BSAP, in Helsinki on 10 February 2010, Heads of States and Governments met with representatives of public-private partnerships, such as business leaders, companies, institutes, NGOs, several private foundations and persons in the Baltic Sea Action Summit. This shows that the private sector is equally willing to support the work for a healthier Baltic Sea together with the highest political level. The follow-up and reporting of the status of commitments issued at the Action Summit show that some progress has been made, although one year is a short time to demonstrate major achievements. The Summit as such offers a unique platform for all those actors who want to act side by side and to influence on the state of the Baltic Sea.

All along the coastlines, there is nothing more encouraging than seeing concrete actions by local actors. Cutting edge projects, as well as daily hard work by farmers, local river basin groups, port and marina operators, municipalities, etc. are setting examples to follow.

The good scientific knowledge-base we have in the Baltic is partly the reason for the general acceptance of the BSAP objectives. The continuous involvement of ICES is essential and also stimulates the exchange of data and information between the Baltic Sea States' scientists. The cooperation of HELCOM decision makers with the scientific community is of utmost importance. The Baltic region is furthermore in an advantageous position by having the BONUS Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme for Baltic Sea science, and numerous relevant projects, which also supports the implementation of the BSAP.

BSAP is good for the economy and development

The implementation phase of the Baltic Sea Action Plan calls for the participation of all players (governments, international processes, civil society, local actors, and the private sector). Saving the Baltic Sea is not only for scientific and emotional purposes, but it is also of economic interest and of interest in balancing the benefits attainable from the Baltic among the members of the society. Environmental economists around the Baltic are working to estimate the potential threats to economic and social development and well-being of further degradation of the marine environment and the benefits that can be gained by protection measures. From the climate change orientated Stern report we know that it is cheaper to act now rather than wait. Similarly, the report on economics of ecosystems and biodiversity (TEEB report) shows how natural capital supports economies, societies and individual well-being but is at the same time undervalued, unaccounted and in need of immediate protection.

Concerted action for the continued BSAP implementation

HELCOM has generated the Action Plan with the ultimate goal of achieving a Baltic Sea in good environmental status by 2021. In addition to HELCOM's work in the field of science and policy developments, HELCOM will serve as the forum for the exchange of experiences, identifying synergies, developing cooperation networks and facilitating dialogue with potential financing mechanisms. In this regard HELCOM Contracting States will also ensure that their activities are consistent with already accomplished or ongoing implementation processes under other legally binding requirements, such as EU legislation.

To support the continued implementation process, we, the high level representatives will ensure a continuous and increased political support for the successful implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, which will require a range of activities: from increased knowledge, awareness building, policy development, pilot studies to large scale investment projects.

Depending on the country, some of the major focus areas are:

- Upgrading of wastewater treatment plants in compliance with HELCOM Recommendation 28E/5 "Municipal wastewater treatment";
- Promoting wastewater treatment in scattered housing, following HELCOM Recommendation 28E/6 "On-site wastewater treatment of single family homes, small businesses and settlements up to 300 Person Equivalents (P.E.) "
 - establish good examples of cost-effective solutions, with use of various effective technologies for wastewater management;
- Supporting implementation of effective measures to diminish impacts from agriculture especially in areas with high area-specific nitrogen and phosphorus inputs to the sea which could comprise:
 - specific legal and voluntary measures supported through an established advice system at farm-by-farm basis, ensuring a more comprehensive approach,

- establish the list of Agricultural Hot Spots represented by installations for intensive rearing of cattle, poultry and pigs not in compliance with part 2, Annex III of the Helsinki Convention; for those HELCOM Member States being also EU Member States realizing that implementation of respective EU legislation may not comply fully with Annex III,
 - further identify areas, sources or activities that are critical for nutrient inputs to the sea;
- Recycling of nutrients, which could comprise:
 - integrated utilisation of sewage sludge and animal manure for biogas and fertiliser production,
 - increased utilisation of nutrient reclaiming in water ecosystems through e.g. wetlands, mussel culture and harvesting/usage of plants and fish,
 - application of nutrient-balanced fertilization in agriculture practices in the Baltic Sea Region to fulfil the provisions in Annex III of the Helsinki Convention Part II: Prevention of Pollution from Agriculture;
- Developing further clean and safe shipping especially in view of the increasing volume of traffic in the Baltic Sea
 - installing/upgrading port reception facilities for the delivery of sewage from passenger ships, necessary for the entry into force of Annex IV of MARPOL in ports on the HELCOM list of prioritized ports;
- Addressing and reducing transboundary pollution by supporting measures in installations on the list of priority installations in the field of wastewater treatment and agriculture in Belarus contributing to transboundary pollution of the Baltic Sea and for future relevant actions in Ukraine;
- Habitat restoration and measures to protect migratory fish species, and coastal fish populations including the development of appropriate plans and transboundary management, in cooperation with ICES in relevant cases
 - salmon and sea trout in prioritized Baltic salmonids rivers following the recommendations of the HELCOM SALAR project,
 - address studies/measures that improve Baltic fish species stock compositions;
- Developing and implementing management plans for existing Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs) and designating off-shore BSPAs, to achieve an ecological coherent network of BSPAs
 - identify needs and develop, in cooperation with ICES and to be implemented through the EU Common Fisheries Policy, for those HELCOM member States being also EU member States, fisheries management measures in BSPAs in the Baltic Sea, to ensure achieving their conservation objectives;
- Developing and enhancing the use of the information in registers for chemical products or releases for an improved overview of quantities and flows of chemicals to the marine environment
 - develop national registers where lacking, including the legislative frameworks required;
- Implementing rehabilitation measures in prioritized and potential risk landfills, including “old sins”;

- Developing and promoting application of cost-effective means to measure pollution by hazardous substances from effluents of municipal wastewater treatment plants, from storm waters and from landfill leachate;
- Working towards focusing increasingly on hazardous substances in the environmental permits, in addition to other threats, and make use of the monitoring associated with environmental permits;
- Strengthening the monitoring of hazardous substances and their effects in the Baltic Sea to guide policy making by providing trends of concentrations of hazardous substances and their impacts and indications of effectiveness of measures, and most importantly, alert for new substances of concern, following first findings in the marine environment.