



20 June 2018

Update on the activities of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)

Update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan

The Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) – HELCOM’s comprehensive regional programme of actions to achieve a healthy Baltic Sea – will be updated beyond its initial end date of 2021. The update was decided by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting held in Brussels on 6 March 2018 and will be based on the newest scientific knowledge, including on climate change impacts as well as the water- and ocean-related targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 14.

In addition to the current objectives on eutrophication, biodiversity, maritime activities and hazardous substances, the updated BSAP will have an increased focus on underwater noise, marine litter and circular economy, as well as seabed damage and disturbance.

The preparatory work for the update has already started in 2018. The new updated BSAP will be adopted in 2021.

Reference to A/RES/72/73; paragraph 184; 187; 196; 206; 355

New HELCOM “State of the Baltic Sea” report

The “State of the Baltic Sea” report¹ gives a holistic data-based assessment at Baltic Sea scale, covering or approaching the main themes to be considered in an ecosystem approach. The report summarizes a significant improvement to regional monitoring and assessment since the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, and covers more aspects than ever seen before in the region. The key aim for the future is to incorporate this new knowledge in the ecosystem-based management of the Baltic Sea, as well as in measures nationally, regionally and globally, towards a sustainable future.

Close to 40 HELCOM core indicators form the basis for the report, assessing the status of selected elements of biodiversity and human-induced pressures on the Baltic Sea against regionally agreed threshold values².

¹ First version of the “State of the Baltic Sea” – June 2017:

<http://www.helcom.fi/Lists/Publications/State%20of%20the%20Baltic%20Sea%20-%20First%20version%202017.pdf>

The final version has been approved by the Contracting Parties and will be published in June 2018.

² <http://www.helcom.fi/baltic-sea-trends/indicators/>



The report shows that the status of the Baltic Sea marine environment continues to be unsatisfactory and recovery is not yet sufficient to achieve the goals and ecological objectives of the Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021. Furthermore, the current state of the marine environment affects human welfare. According to the report, the losses in recreational values due to the deterioration of the marine environment are estimated to be 1-2 billion euros annually.

Ref: 296; 322

CBD Workshop on Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSA) in the Baltic Sea

The Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) in the Baltic Sea was held in Helsinki, Finland from 20 to 24 February 2018. The workshop was convened by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in collaboration with HELCOM.

Nine Baltic marine areas were described by the workshop participants as ecologically or biologically significant, including five transboundary areas covering waters of two or more countries. The described EBSAs extend into 14 of the 17 Baltic Sea sub-basins. Altogether, they cover 23% of the Baltic Sea, slightly higher than the 19% the average in other areas of the world.

As the next step, the report on the EBSA workshop will be reviewed at the CBD Twenty-second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 22) to be held 2 to 7 July 2018 in Montreal. Subsequently, the described EBSAs will be reported to the Fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 14) in November 2018.

Ref: 257; 261

Biofouling

As many as 12 new non-indigenous species or cryptogenic species have appeared for the first time in the Baltic Sea during the period 2011-2016, according to the "State of the Baltic Sea" report. Shipping and aquaculture are important vectors for the introduction and spread of non-indigenous species, since the species are easily transported in ballast water tanks or on ship hulls. HELCOM works on addressing both vectors, including via the newly established project



“Completing management options in the Baltic Sea Region to reduce risk of invasive species introduction by shipping” (COMPLETE)³.

The project seeks to minimize the introduction and spread of harmful aquatic organisms and pathogens by ships (ballast water and biofouling) through the development of consistent and adaptive management strategies and tools for the Baltic Sea region.

Furthermore, HELCOM agreed to join the proposed GEF-UNDP-IMO GloFouling Partnerships project which will focus on the implementation of the IMO Guidelines for the control and management of ships’ biofouling with particular focus on capacity building in developing countries.

Ref: 201-202

Marine litter

Marine litter including plastics is a major priority on the HELCOM work agenda. Focus is on implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter⁴, establishing a regional coordinated monitoring of marine litter and developing indicators with quantitative threshold values.

According to the “State of the Baltic Sea” report, the average number of beach litter items on reference beaches in the Baltic Sea is about 47 items per hundred meters of shoreline, and up to about 280 items per hundred meters on urban beaches. Plastics are the clearly most common litter materials. The most frequently occurring beach litter items at Baltic Sea scale are attributed to eating, drinking or smoking activities, such as food wrappings, bottles or lids, as well as plastic pieces of different sizes.

The HELCOM Brussels Ministerial Meeting re-iterated the commitment to combat marine litter through coordinated implementation of the Regional Marine Litter Action Plan and, in addition, decided to develop appropriate measures to address micro-plastics in riverine inputs to the Baltic Sea, urban waste water effluents as well as storm water.

Ref: 186-188; 208-209; 213-214; 276.

³ Regional EU co-funded project, 1.10.2017 – 30.9.2020, with participation of 12 partners including HELCOM: <http://www.helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/complete/>

⁴ HELCOM Recommendation 36/1 “Regional Action Plan on marine litter”, adopted 4 March 2015