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BFF STATEMENT AT THE 38th MEETING OF THE HELSINKI COMMISSION

To Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the Baltic Region in relation to eutrophication and climate change

Baltic Farmers Forum on Environment (BFFE) sees the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) important for all of us and for the next generations, for food security and farming opportunities and co-operation with farmers is important and should be further strengthened. BFFE expresses the following views to meet the SDGs in the Baltic Region by 2030, particularly in relation to eutrophication and climate change, and considering farm realism and practicality.

1) *Farmers are a part of the solution to protect the Baltic Sea and mitigate climate*

Efficient practices are available but they need to be supported to maintain the good land-based nutrient losses. This includes soil management practices, like buffer zones, tillage, match crops, cover by perennials, fertilization based on crop needs, slurry injection and placement fertilization. Many farmers have adapted these practices and the progress needs to be continued. Farmers cannot control microclimatic conditions in agriculture, and so they cannot totally control the diffuse load. This need to be understood, as well as the need for efficiency and co-operation. Changing climate increases the challenges.

2) *Sustainable intensification and soil fertility need to be on focus*

For point of nutrient use efficiency and climate actions, we need to highlight the soil fertility (chemical, physical, biological) and the need for sustainable intensification should be more with this focus. This should be more on different measures and investments in new technology rather than the production type means e.g. precision agriculture practices and aiming good yields.

3) *We need to recognize the role of harvest*

Harvesting is also harvest of nutrients and harvest of carbon for consumption (food, fibers, energy). Harvesting gives space for new seeding and vigorous growth to sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Carbon by producing biomass. Biomass has captured carbon, hence being carbon neutral.

Both emissions and removals need to be recognized per area, per produced biomass, and per produced proteins. This is about carbon neutrality, nutrient recycling, and sustainability.

Yours faithfully

Liisa Pietola
Head of Secretariat, Baltic Farmers Forum on Environment BFFE

Uppsala, Sweden/Helsinki, Finland, 28.02.2017

To reach the SDGs globally the Baltic-wide actions need to be implemented first!

Today, high-level representatives of the HELCOM Contracting Parties will meet in Helsinki to discuss how the Baltic Sea Region can contribute to the global goals on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources by 2030. Actions related to eutrophication, marine litter and climate change will be given special focus in the discussion.

On behalf of environmentally concerned citizens of the Baltic Sea catchment, Coalition Clean Baltic would like to share some input to this work and bring to the attention of regional decision-makers the urgent needs to be addressed in order to reach the Sustainable Development Goals, (SDGs) and, even more importantly, to save the Baltic Sea from further deterioration.

The Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), which is based on ecosystem approach, is instrumental for reaching SDG targets. However, its performance should not be measured by ticking the box of implemented actions, but rather by monitoring the efficiency of undertaken measures and finding smarter ways in reaching the goals. This can be demonstrated for each segment of the BSAP, where in spite of certain achievements plenty of loopholes are still piling up.

...in Eutrophication segment

- With the understanding that demand-driven increase of food production in the BSR is not compensated by proportional decrease of nutrient loads, it is vital that the upcoming EU CAP reform better addresses nutrient efficiency and nutrient recycling in agricultural systems.
- Industrial farming not covered by current regulations (cattle, horses, goats, sheep, fur farming) still poses significant risks to the environment, both in terms of eutrophication and emissions of greenhouse gases. Thus, HELCOM has the chance of piloting environmental abatements in this field.
- It is not acceptable that one Contracting Party is still blocking the joint process of national commitments to reduce nutrient inputs.

... in Hazardous substances segment

- Leading countries in the BSR pursuing domestic bans of microbeads use in cosmetics should first make the regional efforts and then have the courage and propose concerted global action, otherwise national measures will bring only partial effect
- The problem of pharmaceutical residues should be addressed in a more comprehensive way, focusing on both source reduction through public awareness and efficient safe disposal systems, as well as end-of-pipe measures for sewage and sludge by its tertiary treatment.
- Additionally, abatement methods such as e.g. constructed wetlands are cost-efficient and has been proven to work through decades of studies. These methods can be easily applied across the region delivering synergistic effects to trap nutrients, microplastics and pharmaceuticals.

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Coalition Clean Baltic is a network of environmental NGOs sponsored by:

• Ecohome, Belarus • IPO Ecopartnership, Belarus • Danish Society for Nature Conservation • Estonian Green Movement • Finnish Association for Nature Conservation • Finnish Society for Nature & Environment • Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland, BUND • Environmental Protection Club of Latvia, VAK • Latvian Green Movement • Lithuanian Green Movement • Lithuanian Fund for Nature • Polish Ecological Club, PKE • Green Federation - GAJA, Szczecin, Poland • Friends of the Baltic, St Petersburg, Russia • Green World, St.Peterburg, Russia • Swedish Society for Nature Conservation • WWF Sweden • The Western Center of the Ukrainian Branch of the World Laboratory

... in Biodiversity and nature conservation segment

- Concurrent with the designation of new offshore MPAs to protect critically endangered harbour porpoise we are seeing plans for large infrastructure projects threatening the existence of already established MPAs, for example the routing of Nord Stream II across Kurgalskiy Peninsula and the construction of the Navigation Canal across the Vistula Spit.
- While aiming at halting overfishing and prohibiting harmful fisheries subsidies by 2020, the Baltic Sea states keep on allowing cod fisheries even if part of the stock is already at the edge of collapse, as well as fishing on the endangered population of European eel.

... in Maritime activities segment

- Baltic ports should address other, earlier considered negligible sources of pollution, e.g. through development and implementation of BAT for ports facilities handling fertilisers to avoid losses of nutrients during loading operations.
- New knowledge on the impact of underwater noise on biota and especially on endangered species may require other management measures to avoid impact of shipping, e.g. changing deep-sea routes in the vicinity of offshore MPAs

... in Development of assessment tools and methodologies

- The joint HELCOM monitoring and assessment system loses its credibility if its application is constantly derogated by one or several Contracting
- With the Baltic Sea being fed by several major and numerous medium and small rivers it is impossible to underestimate the significance of riverine inputs of marine litter and particularly microparticles; a common harmonised methodology for its monitoring needs to be developed and implemented within pollution load compilations for other major contaminants, in order to efficiently address its sources.

... in Awareness raising and capacity building

- Public participation in the decision-making process, as well as transparency and accountability of public authorities, still remains unsatisfactory with concerns ranging from EIAs and permitting procedures to allocation of public money.

... in Financing segment

- There is an obvious need for regional financial institutions, including IFIs, to re-consider the term of 'sustainable investments' in order to ensure that environmental pillar of sustainability, especially in the BSR context, is not overtaken by purely economic short-term considerations. This applies to various projects e.g. contributing to increased food production (agriculture of aquaculture) or blue/green economy initiatives. Even more importantly, public money should never be spent on environmentally questionable projects (e.g. by investing into curbing internal loads and at the same time promoting pig production); and perhaps, it is even time to start implementing nutrient divestment initiatives, when alike carbon divestments, funders withdraw/avoid eutrophication-generating assets?

Summing up, at this stage with only a few years left before the original BSAP deadline in 2021, HELCOM Contracting Parties should strongly focus on implementation of already agreed commitments, instead of shifting the deadline towards 2030, relying on SDG process to solve all the Baltic problems.

The 2018 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting will demonstrate whether the countries are serious in stating that "protection and enhancement of the marine environment of the Baltic Sea Area are tasks that cannot effectively be accomplished by national efforts alone" as recognised by 1992 Helsinki Convention.



WWF Statement at HELCOM 38 Commission Meeting

Helsinki, Finland 28 February 2017

On behalf of WWF, thank you for the opportunity to address this HELCOM 38 Commission Meeting. We would like to acknowledge with appreciation the valuable discussions which took place during the hi-level segment on the Sustainable Development Goals. Oceans are, of course, at the centre of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as we know that ensuring healthy oceans that can provide for people at their full potential will both contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda and require implementation across virtually all SDGs¹. This is a message that it is as critical here in the Baltic Sea region as it is elsewhere across the globe.

We also know that delivery of the SDGs will require regional commitment and cooperation. The Baltic region has a tremendous opportunity, as discussed earlier, to lead the way. This will require, however, that Contracting Parties redouble their efforts to actually deliver the actions they have already committed to and which provide the solid basis from which the SDGs can be achieved – e.g., control the spread of hazardous substances, reduce the impacts from fisheries, achieve a sufficient reduction of nutrient input from agriculture and protect biodiversity. In other words - to ensure the successful delivery of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and other relevant HELCOM and EU recommendations and policies.

WWF is deeply concerned that while Contracting Parties speak strongly about their commitment to achieving the SDGs, the political will, commitment and actions needed to actually deliver their existing obligations are still lagging behind. According to the European Environment Agency, “one of the biggest challenges [to the health of Europe’s seas] remains the full and timely implementation of existing policy.” Even the EU’s own assessment of the implementation of its MSFD came to this conclusion, noting that coordinated efforts to achieve the policy goals set by the region are largely lacking, and that countries need to step up their efforts. WWF concluded similarly, in its assessment of the implementation of the BSAP, that action itself was seriously delayed.

This is in part why WWF has been so supportive of the stated priorities of the EU Chairmanship of HELCOM namely:

1. Reaching a healthy ecosystem in the Baltic Sea by 2021.
2. Innovation for a sustainable blue economy and healthy ecosystems.
3. Tackling the challenge of regional governance.

These priorities, and the work program outlined to support it, coupled with the imperative of the SDGs, provide an important opportunity to work towards securing effective regional coherence and coordination across EU directives and HELCOM recommendations. We are confident that the Baltic Sea Region could become the first truly sustainable Blue Economy in the world, where both land-based and sea-based economic activities are transformed into “circular economies” that operate within the framework of ecosystem boundaries, relying on clean technologies, renewable energy, and closed-loop material flows. This requires, however, that countries not only recognize and honor their existing responsibilities but raise their ambition level in order to ensure that the Baltic region can become a model where people and businesses prosper amidst healthy, well-managed ecosystems. We are aware that countries are facing different challenges at home with your counterparts from other Ministries responsible for agriculture, fisheries, shipping, enterprise and finance. Unfortunately, it is still easier to talk about the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sustainable Blue Economy

¹ In particular, 1,2,3,4,5,6 8,9,10,12,13,15,17 and, of course, 14.

and the Sustainable Use of Marine Resources in New York and Brussels than taking the actions needed to ensure their delivery at home.

We all are looking forward to long, nice and warm summer in a couple of months. We all love to enjoy the Baltic Sea during the long, warm and sunny days at the beach, in our sailboats or at our summer cottages. However, we know that the blue waters will likely turn green when we enjoy the sea at most.

The Baltic will turn green because it is unwell. It is turning green because it is in need of our help. This is our responsibility and has happened on our watch, during our generation. Many of us have with our own eyes seen how the coastlines and water quality have changed since we were kids.

However, other things have also changed during our generation. Our knowledge, awareness, technology and willingness to cooperate on Baltic Sea issues have also increased. In this region we are today better off than most other to address the degradation of the marine environment. We know what to do, but we know Contracting Parties face difficulties in getting it done.

Yet, we also know what is possible when Contracting Parties honor their commitments and stay the course. Important milestones and progress has been achieved through our joint efforts which we should celebrate and build upon. NECA and phasing out sewage discharges under MARPOL are just two such examples but there are others. These successes and the lessons they provide should be extended to other areas that the region still struggles with such as eutrophication, unsustainable fishing for cod, eel and salmon; and securing sufficient protection of other threatened species and habitats. WWF therefore urges Contracting Parties who are also EU Member States to prioritize their effective implementation of important EU regulations such as the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the Nitrate Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive – something we know is unfortunately not happening today. We also find it unacceptable how some countries continuously refrain from following the scientific advice for setting the fisheries quotas within the Common Fisheries Policy despite the worst ever situation for the Baltic cod. We also find it reprehensible that some countries allow the continued fishery for eel which is a red-listed species at the edge of extinction.

WWF believes that investing in a healthy Baltic Sea and a truly Sustainable Blue Economy is a vital part of securing our future. We at WWF stand ready to work with all stakeholders to ensure that the stated ambitions from contracting parties from New York, Brussels and from here in Helsinki become reality, and sound policies turn into effective actions, benefiting ecosystems and biodiversity, our communities, economies, as well as the millions of people who are today Baltic Sea citizens – as well as the many generations still to come. Our collective aspiration is that we can support you to ensure that by 2021 your efforts will be catalytic to ensuring that the Baltic Sea is once again able to support abundant fish stocks, viable populations of marine life and thriving coastal communities through sustainable ecosystem-based management – a global role model for a truly sustainable Blue Economy.

Thank you.