



Document title	Draft report on the progress in HELCOM voluntary commitments to the UN Ocean Conference 2017
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Background

HELCOM made the following voluntary commitments to the UN conference "Our oceans, our future: partnering for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14" held on 5-9 June 2017 in New York:

1. Designation and enhancement of implementation of the Baltic Sea as NOx Emission Control Area for ships and public-private partnership
2. Strengthening the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan to support ocean-related SDGs
3. Identification of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA) in the Baltic Sea
4. Regional Seas Programme for ocean-related SDGs (joint commitment with the Regional Seas Programme)

HOD 55-2018 Meeting took note of the progress in HELCOM voluntary commitments to UN Ocean Conference 2017 and suggested to update the progress also to the UN registry of voluntary commitments.

The attached document contains draft progress reports of the HELCOM voluntary commitments to be reported via [UN Ocean Conference website](#). At this stage the proposed updates concern only HELCOM's own commitments and not the joint commitment with the Regional Seas Programme. The updates of the latter could be coordinated with UN Environment.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to consider the draft progress reports on HELCOM voluntary commitments and agree they are submitted to UN via a dedicated website.

Draft progress reports of HELCOM voluntary commitments to the UN Ocean Conference 2017

1. Designation and enhancement of implementation of the Baltic Sea as NOx Emission Control Area for ships and public-private partnership

HELCOM countries have committed to cutting 80% of NOx emissions from ships operating in the Baltic Sea in order to combat the problem of eutrophication in the region. HELCOM together with its partners will promote the green shipping technology and use of alternative fuels to further reduce harmful exhaust gas emissions and greenhouse gases from ships.

The International Maritime Organization approved the Baltic Sea NOx Emission Control Area (NECA) proposal by the HELCOM countries in 2016 with an effective date of 1 January 2021. The North Sea NECA has been agreed in parallel. The final IMO agreement on the adoption of the two NECAs is expected in July 2017.

Eutrophication, caused by excessive inputs of nutrients, is a serious environmental concern and a priority for action by the Baltic Sea countries working in HELCOM. The measure will result in reduction of 22,000 tons of annual total nitrogen deposition to the whole region, as a combined effect of the Baltic and North Seas NECAs. Out of this, 7,000 tons is estimated to be reduced directly to the sea surface.

The NECA regulations target new ships built on or after 2021 and do not address existing ships. A two-decade long period of fleet renewal is needed before the regulation will show the full effect. Parallel work to promote the green shipping technology and use of alternative fuels, as means of compliance with NECA, will be undertaken by HELCOM and in the region to facilitate emission reductions ahead of the regulatory schedule.

A regional public-private partnership on green technology and alternative fuels for shipping called HELCOM GREEN TEAM has been established for this purpose. The NECA regulation brings a new momentum and a demand to intensify the public-private partnership. The new work plan of the partnership, adopted in 2017, aims to promote public and private co-operation at national and Baltic Sea levels to enhance development and uptake of green technology and alternative fuels in shipping, including LNG. The work will be undertaken jointly by HELCOM countries in co-operation with other regional governmental and non-governmental organizations, the industry and research community.

Progress report

Overall status (cancelled/completed/financial issues/off track/on track)

On track

Achievement at a glance (max 300 words)

The Baltic Sea NOx Emission Control Area was adopted by IMO in July 2017, introducing strict NOx emission limits to all new ships built on or after 2021 (about 80% reduction from current levels). One of the main benefits of these new regulations are to reduce eutrophication of the Baltic Sea due to nitrogen input, but significant health effects on the coastal populations are also expected as a result of the reduced emissions from shipping. Baltic Sea countries have jointly achieved progress for its implementation in particular within the HELCOM's group on green ship technology and alternative fuels (HELCOM Green Team), which held its first meeting in September 2017. Green Team is promoting public and private co-operation at national and Baltic Sea levels to enhance development and uptake of green technology and alternative fuels both for existing ships, but also to achieve the above mentioned NOx emission requirements for new ships. Some of the first results in this regard have been the development of a reporting mechanism to find out the main barriers, obstacles and challenges hindering the development and investments in green technology and alternative fuels in the Baltic Sea. The aim is to have structured and transparent collaboration between the public and private sector for a safer, more environmentally friendly and energy efficient transport by sea. The annual Green Team reporting will be used to share information and experiences, eliminate regulatory

bottlenecks and to find common, workable and sustainable solutions. A revised HELCOM Recommendation on economic incentives has also been developed by the Green Team and approved by the HELCOM Maritime Working Group for adoption by HELCOM 40-2019. The HELCOM Maritime Working Group is also regularly following up matters related ships' emissions in the Baltic Sea, including national enforcement of MARPOL Annex IV and other instruments in order to enhance their implementation. Furthermore, regional projects have been launched that can support the implementation of the commitment, such as EU co-funded Environmental Impact of Low Emission Shipping: Measurements and Modelling Strategies (EnviSuM), which has e.g. developed an overview of alternative fuels for shipping in the Baltic Sea region.

Challenges faced in implementation (if any) (max 300 words)

The HELCOM Maritime Working Group is continuously working towards meeting any possible challenges with implementation for shipowners, authorities and other stakeholders with e.g. the establishment of the Green Team reporting mechanism as a notable result in this regard.

Next steps (max 300 words)

HELCOM will continue its work on the implementation of the Baltic Sea NO_x Emission Control Area, in particular in its Maritime Working Group and Green Team Sub-Group, beyond the 2021 entry into force of the new NO_x emission limits. In addition, the Clean Shipping Project Platform (2018 - 2020) brings together projects and organisations focused on enhancing clean shipping in the Baltic Sea region. In this context, HELCOM is leading the work related to drafting policy recommendations as well as developing an online dissemination tool to share information related to shipping in the Baltic Sea Region.

Beneficiaries & Actions

Who are the beneficiaries? (max 300 words)

The Baltic Sea coastal states are the main beneficiaries of the commitment, as a result of the expected reductions in NO_x emissions from ships. This will have an impact on the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea, but also health benefits to the populations. The health benefits are expected to be most notable in port cities, although emissions may typically extend widely inland as well, and even to countries without a Baltic Sea coastline. In addition, shipowners and industry involved in maritime technologies and alternative fuels benefit from the promotion of public and private co-operation at national and Baltic Sea levels to enhance development and uptake of green technology and alternative fuels in shipping.

What specific actions have been taken to positively impact beneficiaries? (max 300 words)

Engagement of the Contracting Parties in HELCOM in all processes is a fundamental principle of the HELCOM work. The achievements and actions mentioned above, have consequently all been undertaken together with, and guided by, the Contracting Parties in HELCOM, who are also the beneficiaries of this commitment. By involving all Baltic Sea States, observer organizations (IGOs and NGOs), as well as relevant industry stakeholders, concrete measures can be taken in order to jointly meet the goals of this commitment.

2. Strengthening the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan to support ocean-related SDGs

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan is an ambitious programme to restore the good ecological status of the marine environment by 2021, adopted in HELCOM in 2007. The commitment is to strengthen the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, based on the ecosystem approach, to fulfil the 2030 Agenda in the Baltic Sea.

Until 2016, about 60% of the agreed joint regional actions in the Plan had been carried out, with successes in setting up a nutrient reduction scheme, curbing airborne emission and discharges from shipping, tackling some hazardous substances, piloting ecosystem approach in maritime spatial planning, and

covering 11.8% of the Baltic with marine protected areas. All these examples showcase the added value of a regional approach, addressing more than one target of SDG 14 in a coherent way. Policy making based on commonly agreed principles and best available science, paired with a transparent and participatory stakeholder involvement, as well as partnerships for integrated management of human activities, are proven factors underlying these HELCOM achievements.

40 regional actions are still to be completed. Between 30 and 65 percent of the national actions of the Baltic Sea Action Plan have been accomplished by the countries.

HELCOM will continue implementation of these agreed actions that will contribute to the implementation of SDG 14. For instance, this includes:

- speeding up the implementation of the marine litter regional action plan, continuing its battle against eutrophication and planning towards the elaboration of a regional action plan on underwater noise, to fulfil SDG 14.1,
- ensuring close cooperation on any maritime spatial planning in the Baltic Sea area and management plans for all marine protected areas, to fulfil SDG 14.2 and 14.5,
- supporting sustainable agricultural practices, to contribute to SDG 2.4, and ecosystem-related fishery measures, towards SDG 14.4 and 14.6.

More generally, HELCOM will strive for more resilient marine ecosystems to be better prepared for human-induced climate change challenges. It will also promote further regional development of socio-economic analyses to create tailor-made connecting points between implementation of different SDGs.

For years, HELCOM has developed regional indicators and assessments to measure the environmental status of the Baltic Sea, which can also be used for the future regional work on the implementation of SDGs.

The adoption of the Baltic Sea Action Plan was the first bold attempt by a regional marine protection convention to implement the ecosystem approach. The protection of the marine environment in the Baltic Sea is no longer seen as an event-driven pollution reduction approach to be taken sector-by-sector. Instead, the starting point is the ecosystem itself, and a shared concept of a healthy sea with a good ecological status. This vision determines the need for further reductions in pollution loads, the extent of various human activities, as well as the conservation of marine biodiversity, and where needed and possible, the restoration, of the ecosystem of the Baltic Sea Area. The cross-sectoral plan identifies the specific actions needed to achieve agreed targets within a given timeframe for the main environmental priorities.

Progress report

Overall status (cancelled/completed/financial issues/off track/on track)

On track

Achievement at a glance (max 300 words)

The work to strengthen the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) to support ocean-related SDGs is ongoing in line with the decisions of the 2018 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting. The HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, held under the EU chairmanship in HELCOM, re-affirmed the strong commitment of the Contracting Parties to strengthen the implementation of the BSAP by 2021. The Meeting re-iterated their determination to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular its water- and ocean-related goals and targets, and committed to using those goals and targets as a framework in updating the BSAP. New commitments have also been made by the Contracting Parties to support reaching the goals and objectives of the BSAP, in relation to SDG 14.1 and 2.4 such as:

- to elaborate by 2020 a Baltic Sea Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy;
- To develop and apply a risk assessment framework in HELCOM for measures aiming at managing internal nutrient reserves in open sea;

- To combat marine litter through coordinated implementation of the Regional Marine Litter Action Plan,
- To develop an action plan and regionally coordinated actions on underwater noise by 2021.

In relation to SDG 14.2 and 14.5, such as:

- To take actions to improve the status of species, biotopes and habitats that are threatened according to the 2013 HELCOM Red List;
- To strive for full achievement of Aichi Target 11 regarding the management, ecological representativeness and connectivity of the HELCOM MPA network;

In relation to 14.4 and 14.6, such as:

- To strengthen coordination and cooperation mechanisms with fisheries bodies active in the Baltic Sea Region, in particular Baltfish, and the Baltic Sea Advisory Council.

Challenges faced in implementation (if any) (max 300 words)

The process is ongoing in HELCOM to identify the reasons for lagging behind with the implementation of BSAP and to have as many of the actions implemented by 2021.

Next steps (max 300 words)

For regional (joint) actions of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan forward planning or stock taking is being carried out with the aim of accomplishing the actions by 2021. For national actions, the working groups discuss how HELCOM could support further efforts of the countries to achieve a more uniform implementation of the BSAP. The discussion aims at supporting the strengthening of efforts to implement BSAP by 2021 and beyond.

Beneficiaries & Actions

Who are the beneficiaries? (max 300 words)

HELCOM Contracting Parties (Denmark, Estonia, European Union, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden) work jointly to implement the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

According to the HELCOM "State of the Baltic Sea" report (2018) there are clear economic benefits of the improved marine environment. Reducing eutrophication would increase citizen welfare by 4 billion euros annually. With improved state of the marine environment, recreation values would increase by 1.5 billion euros annually.

What specific actions have been taken to positively impact beneficiaries? (max 300 words)

Engagement of the Contracting Parties in HELCOM in all processes is a fundamental principle of the HELCOM work. The achievements and actions mentioned above, have consequently all been undertaken together with, and guided by, the Contracting Parties in HELCOM, who are also the beneficiaries of this commitment. By involving all Baltic Sea States, observer organizations (IGOs and NGOs), as well as relevant industry stakeholders, concrete measures can be taken in order to jointly meet the goals of this commitment.

3. Identification of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA) in the Baltic Sea

The commitment is to identify Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA) in the Baltic Sea. A regional workshop will be organized in 2018 for this purpose.

The EBSAs are expected to contribute to fulfilling the regional goal of drawing up and applying maritime spatial plans throughout the Baltic Sea region which are coherent across borders and apply the ecosystem approach.

Marine protected areas in the Baltic Sea are taken into account in maritime spatial planning. The areal coverage of HELCOM Marine Protected Areas reached almost 12% of the Baltic Sea in 2016.

EBSA can provide further useful information that can be used for actions to safeguard the species and habitats in these areas including within spatial planning processes as may be decided individually or collectively by the countries concerned. Other potential benefits of EBSA are new possibilities for bilateral collaboration and protection of transboundary marine areas.

Identification of EBSAs will be done according to the established scientific criteria adopted by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The EBSA workshop will be hosted by Finland and convened by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity in cooperation with HELCOM.

Progress report

Overall status (cancelled/completed/financial issues/off track/on track)

Completed

Achievement at a glance (max 300 words)

The Baltic EBSA workshop was held on 20–24 February 2018, in Helsinki, Finland, hosted by Finland and with financial support by Finland and Sweden. The workshop was convened by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity in collaboration with HELCOM. The workshop was attended by experts from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and Sweden, as well as from a number of organizations.

Nine EBSAs in the Baltic Sea were described by the workshop. Five of these areas are transboundary areas, covering waters of two or more countries. Altogether, the described EBSAs cover 23% of the Baltic Sea waters.

The report of the Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of EBSAs in the Baltic Sea (EBSA workshop) was reviewed at the CBD Twenty-second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 22), 2-7 July 2018 in Montreal. Subsequently the report was forwarded to the Fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 14), 17-29 November 2018, Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, where the identified areas was considered and the meeting requested the Executive Secretary of the CBD to include the summary reports in the EBSA repository, and to submit them to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and its relevant processes, as well as Parties, other Governments and relevant international organizations.

Challenges faced in implementation (if any) (max 300 words)

Next steps (max 300 words)

The spatial information on the areas will be included in the HELCOM Map and Data services.

In the Baltic Sea Region, the results of the EBSA process provides important information which can be used in the national and transboundary Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) processes in the region, to fulfil the regional goal of drawing up and applying coherent transboundary maritime spatial plans which apply the ecosystem approach by 2020,.

It is also provides important information on green infrastructure features which can be used to support the conservation and increased resilience of biodiversity in the marine ecosystem, as well as improve its functioning while promoting ecosystem services. Access to the information from the EBSA process

contributes to facilitating the implementation of the work of the joint HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group.

It is also expected that the results can be used to contribute to other processes, such as the red listing of threatened species and biotopes, evaluation of effectiveness and coherence of Marine Protected Areas networks, and future HELCOM Holistic Assessments.

Beneficiaries & Actions

Who are the beneficiaries? (max 300 words)

HELCOM Contracting Parties who work to jointly implement national and transboundary measures in the region, including Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) processes and conservation efforts.

What specific actions have been taken to positively impact beneficiaries? (max 300 words)

Engagement of the Contracting Parties of the Convention in all HELCOM processes is a fundamental principle of the HELCOM work. The achievements and actions mentioned above have consequently all been undertaken together with, and guided by, the Contracting Parties in HELCOM, who are also the beneficiaries of this commitment. By involving all Baltic Sea States, as well as observer organizations (IGOs and NGOs), concrete measures can be taken in order to jointly meet the goals of the Convention and the Baltic Sea Action Plan: A healthy Baltic Sea environment, with diverse biological components functioning in balance, resulting in good environmental/ecological status and supporting a wide range of sustainable human economies and social activities.