



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Helsinki Commission
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HELCOM 41-2020

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Agenda Item	2 - High-level segment with a focus on the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and HELCOM global outreach including voluntary commitments to UN Ocean Conference 2020
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Submitted by	Executive Secretary
Reference	

Background

This document contains the outline for the high-level segment of HELCOM 41-2020, including the programme.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the document and utilise it as a guideline for the preparations for high-level segment.



HELCOM high-level segment on the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and HELCOM global outreach including voluntary commitments to the 2020 UN Ocean Conference 4 March 2020

High-level representatives of the Baltic Sea countries and EU will meet on 4 March 2020 on the occasion of the 41st Meeting of the Helsinki Commission to discuss the update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) and HELCOM's contributions and outreach on global ocean matters, including its voluntary commitments to the 2020 UN Ocean Conference.

Background for the high-level segment

For over 40 years HELCOM has provided a platform for the governments of the Baltic Sea countries and the EU to discuss and agree on measures to achieve and maintain a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea and ensuring the sustainable use of its natural resources. The substantial work done by the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention through HELCOM has focused on preventing and eliminating pollution from all sources and on promoting the ecological restoration and the preservation of the ecological balance of the Baltic Sea Area.

One of the benefits to be derived from the regional approach to marine environmental policy is that it ensures that we tackle the challenges we are facing in the manner most appropriate and best tailored to the needs of our region. The joint regional HELCOM cooperation, based on the provisions of the Helsinki Convention and involving all its Parties and a broad range of stakeholders, is therefore key to effectively implementing and monitoring the ecosystem approach and sustainable use of marine and coastal resources in the Baltic Sea area. In this context, the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) is the centerpiece of HELCOM's work towards achieving and maintaining good environmental status of the Baltic Sea and provides a concrete basis for HELCOM's work.

Adopted in 2007, the plan aimed at restoring good ecological status of the Baltic marine environment by 2021. Although the BSAP has proven to be an effective tool to address the environmental challenges pertaining to the Baltic Sea, it has, however, become clear that the goal will not be achieved by the target year projected. Since the adoption of the BSAP, it has become apparent that it must also focus on several previously unaddressed, as well as some emerging issues, necessitating an update of the plan to respond to the new needs.

Finland currently holds the chairmanship of HELCOM (July 2018-June 2020). Priorities of the chairmanship focus inter alia on updating the BSAP and on creating and helping to maintain strong synergistic links between the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development process and HELCOM work.

Update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan

The Baltic Sea Action Plan – HELCOM's strategic tool for achieving good environmental and ecological status – was initially set to achieve its objectives by 2021. Although not all the objectives have yet been reached, the BSAP has resulted in a number of environmental improvements as reflected in the HELCOM State of the Baltic Sea 2018 report. The mandate for an update was therefore given by the HELCOM Brussels Ministerial Declaration in March 2018. As a priority, the

Contracting Parties have agreed to achieve already agreed actions of the current BSAP by 2021. Furthermore, the updated BSAP should at least maintain the ambition level of agreed actions and objectives. The update is meant to strengthen the current plan, while also considering new issues currently not addressed, such as, for example, climate change, marine litter, underwater noise, loss and disturbance to the seabed, and the impacts of a broad range of sea-based activities.

The update of the BSAP will be based on the best available scientific knowledge on the state of the marine environment and environmental pressures caused by various human activities. A new approach is applied to assess the sufficiency of existing measures. The assessment will identify gaps in existing measures to reach good environmental status in the Baltic Sea and support identifying new actions needed for the updated BSAP.

The ultimate goal of the BSAP – good environmental status of the Baltic Sea – cannot be achieved solely through the implementation of marine environmental policy. This requires coordinated contribution of various policies, addressing among others land-based pollution sources, long-range transport, food production, waste management, spatial planning and other aspects of management of human activities resulting in environmental pressures. The BSAP is therefore of key importance with regard to enhancing cooperation and policy coherence.

HELCOM therefore seeks to integrate the BSAP with other (global, European and national) commitments and obligations of the Member States. While maintaining a strong regional perspective and focusing on where the organization adds value, it has been of central importance that HELCOM agreements are closely linked with and integrated into both national and global processes.

HELCOM Science Agenda

At the Annual 2019 meeting of the Helsinki Commission, the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention approved the proposal to develop a HELCOM Science Agenda aimed at providing the necessary scientific underpinnings for future HELCOM work, including the implementation of the updated BSAP. The agenda is to outline existing and foreseen HELCOM regional science needs.

The Contracting Parties further agreed that the science agenda will contribute to supporting processes under the UN Decade of Ocean Science, and already indicated that HELCOM could make a voluntary commitment on contributing to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for the next UN Ocean Conference in June 2020.

The 2020 UN Ocean Conference and HELCOM voluntary commitments

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets.

The second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) “invited Member States and regional seas conventions and action plans, in cooperation, as appropriate, with other regional organizations and fora, such as regional fisheries management organizations, to work towards the implementation of, and reporting on, the different ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals and associated targets, the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets” (Resolution 2/10 (Oceans and Seas)). Sustainable Development Goal 14 is dedicated specifically to the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and seas. The 2020 UN Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (2020 UN Ocean Conference) will be held in Lisbon, Portugal from 2 to 6 June 2020. The overarching theme of the Conference is

“Scaling up ocean action based on science and innovation for the implementation of Goal 14: stocktaking, partnerships and solutions.”

The 2020 UN Ocean Conference is an opportunity to provide an update on the implementation of the voluntary commitments made at the previous edition of 2017, and for announcing new voluntary commitments in support of Goal 14. At the 2017 UN Ocean Conference, HELCOM made four voluntary commitments: 1) to establish a NOx Emission Control Area (NECA) in the Baltic Sea, 2) to strengthen the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan to support ocean-related SDGs, 3) to identify Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) in the Baltic Sea jointly with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and 4) as a joint commitment with the UN Regional Seas Programme (RSP), to collaborate on the ocean related SDGs with the RSP.

The NOx Emission Control Area was adopted by IMO in 2017 and entered into force on 1 January 2019, coming into effect on 1 January 2021. Nine Biologically Significant Marine Areas were identified in 2018, covering 23 percent of the Baltic Sea area, and HELCOM work in support of the ocean-related SDGs is ongoing, including cooperation with the RSP.

For the 2020 UN Ocean Conference, the Contracting Parties have already tentatively identified the following voluntary commitments: 1) the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021, 2) the development of a HELCOM Science Agenda to contribute to the UN Decade of Ocean Science 2021-2030, and 3) strengthened cooperation with other Regional Seas Organisations, 4) strong support for global efforts to address the marine litter problem on a global level and 5) organizing a workshop on ecosystem-based management in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science.

The voluntary commitments are part of HELCOM’s concrete efforts on global outreach and on advancing the global ocean agenda.

Aim of the high-level segment

The high-level representatives are invited to exchange views on the following questions and formulate joint guidance on future work.

1. On the update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, what current action and measures could be strengthened and which potential new added, to at least maintain the current level of ambition or possibly increase the level of ambition and ensure its relevance for achieving good environmental status of the Baltic Sea? Further, how could HELCOM’s work on the BSAP update be displayed in the 2020 UN Ocean Conference?
2. On the HELCOM Science Agenda, what steps do the Contracting Parties feel will be required for its successful implementation, especially in light of both the update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and the possibility of the Science Agenda to be one of the HELCOM voluntary commitments to the 2020 UN Ocean Conference?

The high-level segment is expected to mainly focus on the first question about the BSAP. The second question could link – in brief – to the first, mainly highlighting the need for a Science Agenda in the Baltic Sea region to reach the environmental objectives set out by HELCOM, possibly also signalling/reiterating the willingness, at a higher political level, to support the establishment of such Science Agenda. The Parties could also acknowledge the role of strong scientific underpinnings in HELCOM work and the possible benefits a Science Agenda could provide for addressing the environmental challenges of the future.

The HELCOM high-level segment is expected to agree on accelerating the implementation of existing HELCOM agreements as well as on evaluating and developing new actions and measures within the framework of the updated BSAP, both in order to reach good environmental status of the Baltic Sea.

The HELCOM high-level segment is further expected to agree on the HELCOM Voluntary Commitments to the 2020 UN Ocean Conference.

Provisional agenda of the high-level segment:

The high-level segment will be held on Wednesday, 4 March 2020, in Helsinki, Finland, at the Marina Congress Center (Katajanokanlaituri 6, FI-00160 Helsinki), as part of the annual 41st Meeting of the Helsinki Commission (4-5 March 2020). The segment will start at 10:00 and close at 12:00.

The meeting will be chaired by Ms. Saara Bäck, Chair of the Helsinki Commission.

In addition to Contracting Parties also HELCOM Observers may take part in the discussion. Interested Observers are invited to contact HELCOM Secretariat (laura.meski@helcom.fi) and in case of high interest organize themselves into groups to present their views.

A leaflet on implemented HELCOM actions and recommendations will be prepared for the high-level segment, to serve as background information (document to be submitted to HELCOM 41-2020).

The segment will be finalized with the adoption of an outcome document (draft document to be submitted to HELCOM 41-2020).

Input provided by the high-level representatives will form conclusions in the Outcome of HELCOM 41-2020.

09:15	Morning coffee and treats served
10:00 –10:15	<p>Opening words <i>Mr. Rüdiger Stempel, Executive Secretary of the Helsinki Commission</i></p> <p>Recap of the HELCOM Stakeholder Conference 2020 <i>Ms. Gun Rudquist, Moderator of the Stakeholder Conference, Baltic Eye, Baltic Sea Centre, Stockholm University</i></p> <p>Presentation on BSAP update and status of implementation of already existing agreements and introduction to HELCOM voluntary commitments to the UN Ocean Conference 2020 <i>Ms. Saara Bäck, Chair of the Helsinki Commission</i></p>
10:15 – 11:30	<p>The high-level representatives of the Contracting Parties exchange their views on the questions above to formulate joint guidance on future work.</p> <p>The high-level representatives are invited to take the floor and contribute in a few rounds of discussions. First discussion round will be on question no. 1, followed by discussing question no. 2.</p>
11:30-11:45	Statements by HELCOM Observers
11.45 – 12:00	Adoption of the outcome of the high-level segment

12:00 – 12.10	Joint photo session
12:10 – 13:30	Buffet lunch for all participants (<i>a restaurant at the venue, a separate table reserved for the high-level representatives</i>)

Registration for the meeting

The Meeting is open to the Contracting Parties of the Helsinki Convention and HELCOM Observers.

For registering to the meeting and accessing meeting documents, please refer to the information as provided in the HELCOM invitation letter.