Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

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Note that this document was submitted after the established deadline. It will be decided by the Meeting whether the document can be discussed or is postponed to the next meeting.

Background

Under Rule 11.4 of the Rules of Procedure of the Helsinki Commission, the Commission is to report on its main activities of the last calendar year.

The HELCOM Activities Report 2019 presents all major HELCOM activities that took place in 2019, along the lines of the HELCOM Action Areas.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to approve in principle the publication of the HELCOM Activities Report 2019, pending further editing (non-substantial) and layout work. The Meeting is further invited to approve the publication of the Report under the Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings (BSEP) series.

HELCOM Activities Report 2019

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1. About the Baltic Sea and HELCOM

1.1. About the Baltic Sea

The Baltic Sea is a semi-enclosed sea in the north of Europe. Overall, the sea is relatively shallow, with brackish and oxygen-low waters. Surface water temperatures vary greatly depending on the season and the geography, with sea ice in the north during winter and warmer waters around 20°C in the south during summer.

Due to its peculiar biochemical properties, the Baltic Sea contains a unique mix of marine and freshwater species adapted to the brackish conditions, as well as a few true brackish-water species. Where salinity levels are low in the Baltic's northern and eastern waters, fewer marine species thrive, and the communities of organisms is dominated by freshwater species, especially in estuaries and coastal waters.

The limited number of species – about 3,000 macroscopic species only – implies that each individual species has an exceptionally high importance within the food web. The disappearance of a single key species could have dire consequences on the entire ecosystem, possibly leading to its collapse. For this reason, the Baltic Sea is considered particularly vulnerable to external disturbances.

The catchment area, which hosts about 85 million people, is four times larger than the sea itself. Human activities therefore abound in this busy region, and so do anthropogenic pressures. Agriculture, industry and urban development have taken a serious toll on the marine environment in the past. Despite considerable efforts by all HELCOM countries, the Baltic Sea has not fully recovered and is not showing good environmental status yet.

1.2. About HELCOM and the Helsinki Convention

The Helsinki Convention

The Helsinki Convention was signed in 1974 by the Baltic Sea coastal countries to address the increasing environmental challenges from industrialisation and other human activities, and that were having a severe impact on the marine environment. The Helsinki Convention aims to protect the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution from land, air and sea. It also commits the signatories to take measures to conserve habitats and biological diversity and to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources. In 1992, the Helsinki Convention was updated to take into account the geopolitical changes and emerging environmental challenges in the region. The current version was ratified in 2000.

About HELCOM

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – also known as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) – is an intergovernmental organization (IGO) and a regional sea convention in the Baltic Sea area, consisting of ten members: the nine Baltic Sea countries Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden, plus the European Union. A platform for environmental policy making at the regional level, HELCOM works for a healthy Baltic Sea. Its mandate stems from the Helsinki Convention, whose implementation it oversees. It maintains a Secretariat, which is located in Helsinki, Finland.

The HELCOM Area

The Helsinki Convention defines the "Baltic Sea Area" – the HELCOM area –as the Baltic Sea and the entrance to the Baltic Sea bounded by the parallel of the Skaw in the Skagerrak at 57° 44.43'N. The Baltic Sea Area also includes the internal waters.

2. Change of Executive Secretary

On 1 August 2019, Rüdiger Strempel assumed the position of HELCOM Executive Secretary, after serving as Executive Secretary of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS) from January 2015 through July of this year. He has taken over from Monika Stankiewicz who led the HELCOM Secretariat from 2012 to 2019.

An international lawyer by training, Rüdiger Strempel looks back on many years of experience of environmental law, policy, and diplomacy at the national and international levels, with a particular focus on international marine conservation.

Among his previous appointments are the positions of Executive Secretary of the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North-East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (UNEP/ASCOBANS) and of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS).

He has also worked as a consultant for a number of United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Moreover, Rüdiger has a background as a journalist and professional communicator and he is the author or co-author of numerous articles and several books.

In addition to his work as Executive Secretary of ASCOBANS, his specific Baltic credentials include chairing the ASCOBANS Baltic Sea Steering Group ("Jastarnia Group") from 2009 to 2017 and his membership in the Advisory Board of the Baltic Centre of Excellence for Development, Education and Research (BALTDER), University of Gdańsk, Poland from 2003 to 2005.

A German national, Rüdiger studied at the University of Bonn, and the German University of Administrative Sciences, Speyer (both Germany) and successfully took the First and Second German State Examinations in law.

The former Executive Secretary, Monika Stankiewicz, had been at the HELCOM Secretariat since 2006 when she started as Professional Secretary for Maritime Affairs. She assumed the position of Executive Secretary in 2012 until 2019, for three terms.

Under her tenure, HELCOM further consolidated itself as a champion of the environmental protection of the Baltic Sea but also as a voice that is heard and sought after in the international debate on oceans and seas and undertook decisive work towards achieving the aims of the Convention.

3. HELCOM activities in 2019 by action area

3.1. Agriculture

Agriculture remains a major source of nutrient loading to the Baltic Sea, leading to eutrophication - an excess of nutrients in the sea, the root cause for algal blooms and a host of other cascading consequences impacting the marine ecosystem and food web. Nutrient recycling is a new approach to tackling the problem. The aim is to close the nutrient loops and to reduce nutrient surpluses on the local (farm) and regional level, to avoid nutrient runoff to the sea. HELCOM is currently developing a Baltic Sea Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy to enhance nutrient recycling in the Baltic Sea region.

In 2019, HELCOM agreed on the vision and objectives of the strategy, calling for the Baltic Sea region to become a global model area for nutrient recycling. Further goals of the strategy are to reduce environmental impacts, ensure safe nutrient recycling, increase knowledge on nutrients and sustainable agricultural practices, raise awareness, create new business opportunities as well as improve policy coherence across the region.

The project “Advanced manure standards for sustainable nutrient management and reduced emissions” (Manure Standards) was finalized in 2019. The project produced many tools for more efficient manure use such as calculation tools for manure nutrient content and a handbook on good manure management. The project platform “Sustainable manure and nutrient management for reduction of nutrient loss in the Baltic Sea Region” (SuMaNu) supported the elaboration of the nutrient recycling strategy.

- Manure Standards outcomes

3.2. Marine Protected Areas

The aim of the coastal and marine Baltic Sea protected areas (HELCOM MPAs) is to protect valuable marine and coastal habitats in the Baltic Sea. This is done by designating sites with particular nature values as protected areas, and by managing human activities within those areas.

Today, there are 177 HELCOM MPAs, covering about 13.5% of the Baltic Sea.

Although the Baltic Sea region has an extensive network and coverage of marine protected areas, their management and management effectiveness have been identified as an area where significant progress is needed.

MPA managers often face similar challenges across the region, and management efforts in one protected area can directly affect another, yet little transboundary infrastructure or regional level capacity building has addressed this in the past.

2019 saw a concrete milestone in the work towards improved management of the Baltic Sea MPA network, namely the establishment of the HELCOM MPA Management Network. The work of the newly established network supports the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), relevant HELCOM Recommendations and subsequent commitments

The overall aim of the network is to increase capacity building, to function as a collaboration platform, and to improve awareness of MPA management issues. By facilitating dialogue and networking between managers, experts, stakeholders and scientists the network aims to improve integration of the existing scientific and practical knowledge about key MPA issues. The network also seeks to foster mutual understanding between MPA managers and facilitate the development of an efficient, representative, connected, integrated and effectively managed network of Baltic Sea MPAs.

In 2019 the MPA Management Network arranged a regional workshop, co-financed by the EU Biogeographical Process, focused on sharing experiences on, and best practices of, stakeholder interactions.

Furthermore in 2019, Finland designated a new HELCOM MPA, and expanded some of its existing MPAs.

- HELCOM MPA map
- HELCOM MPA metadata catalogue

3.3. Species and biotopes

Due to its unique salinity gradient and high variability in habitat types, the Baltic Sea contains a greater biodiversity and variety of plant and animal life than might be expected under the prevailing conditions. According to the lasted results the Baltic Sea is home to about 3,000 macroscopic species and innumerable smaller microscopic species. A biotope is the combination of a habitat and an associated community of organisms. Baltic Sea biotopes exhibit a great diversity in both function and structure.

The amount of biodiversity-related data available in the Baltic Sea area is unprecedented for a marine region. However, data are often stored independently, only exist as static spreadsheets and are not available to the general public.

In 2019 HELCOM reviewed and updated the Baltic Sea Checklist of Macro Species and complemented the Checklist with the first regional Biodiversity Database.

The first HELCOM Checklist had proven to be a valuable tool for researchers and a crucial source of information on species and their distribution around the Baltic. It is of central importance that the Checklist is reviewed and updated at regular intervals, to ensure its continued usefulness and added value of the underlaying data over time. The number of species in the updated Checklist has increased from 2,732 to 3,007 species, which is a gain of 10%. This testifies to the effort by all contracting parties, national experts and the HELCOM Secretariat to increase monitoring and data exchange efforts during the last 8 years.

The use of an accessible and modernised database makes it possible to maintain and improve on the overall biodiversity information already available in HELCOM, making it accessible to the public. It also facilitates future data reporting and management. At the point of publication, the biodiversity database contained more than 1.5 million data points across species groups. It provides an essential backbone to support the needs of scientific endeavours in the Baltic Sea region, both inside and outside the organisation.

BaltiCheck

The aim of the BaltiCheck project is to consolidate and make the biodiversity data within HELCOM publicly available, link this information to the HELCOM Checklist and develop an accessible database to store the consolidated data. Collating the data in a joined database will ensure access to region-wide information with open access to the public.

- Biodiversity database
- Previous Checklist

3.4. Climate change

The Baltic Sea region is warming faster than Earth as a whole and climate change is adding more pressure to a fragile ecosystem already affected by a wide variety of anthropogenic impacts, such as eutrophication, pollution, overfishing and habitat loss.

The aim of HELCOM work on climate change is to increase the capacity of the Baltic Sea ecosystem to recover from stress and disturbance – i.e. increasing its resilience – resulting from climate change impacts. HELCOM strives to make climate change visible in marine policy making, as well as to incorporate it into the day-to-day work of the Commission.

Climate change work within HELCOM focuses on understanding and communicating what climate change means for the marine and coastal environment in the region.

In 2019, HELCOM, together with Baltic Earth, established a Joint Climate Change expert network, currently consisting of over 80 experts from the region. The network is currently preparing a Baltic Sea climate change fact sheet, to ensure that decision makers have access to the latest quality assured science on climate change and its impacts.

The fact sheet will provide key messages on what has already happened and what can be expected with regard to climate change in the Baltic Sea region. Since climate change is having a multitude of effects, the approach to it needs to be from every angle of importance to the sea and covering a wide array of topics. The fact sheet therefore is intended to over a large number of topics (42 topics are currently planned), ranging for example from how much it might rain to what is expected for seabirds and to possible impacts on maritime traffic.

This regional information on climate change may then form the basis for policy making in the Baltic Sea countries and in other international fora, supporting decision makers in tackling the transition facing the region and help underpin timely, ambitious and coordinated action.

3.5. Underwater noise

The Baltic Sea holds some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world as well as some of the largest cities in Northern Europe. There is, furthermore, a large range of offshore construction work and other human activities in this area (see e.g. Baltic SCOPE project). Increasing noise levels can be problematic to species relying on sound for most parts of their life cycle. Noise may disrupt behaviours, mask important signals and can reduce the hearing sensitivity either temporarily or permanently in an individual (Richardson et al., 1995; Southall et al., 2007). By causing disturbance to single individuals the effects of noise have the potential to decrease fitness which could lead to reduced recruitment to the next generation and thereby affect a population.

On underwater noise, several milestones were reached in 2019. The first was the publication of the "Noise sensitivity of animals in the Baltic Sea" report which improves knowledge and understanding of sources of underwater noise and their impacts on Baltic Sea species. Baltic species which have the potential to be impacted by noise based on the hearing capabilities of the animals as well as on how they use and react to sound are identified, and a prioritized list of noise sensitive species in the Baltic Sea is provided. For each of the prioritized species the distribution of species and biologically sensitive areas is presented based on available data.

The second milestone was the development of a first draft of the HELCOM Action Plan on Underwater Noise, substantiated on the analysis of the implementation of the Regional Baltic Underwater Noise Roadmap 2015-2017. Work is on-going to fulfil the HELCOM commitment to develop an Action Plan on Underwater Noise, preferable by 2021.

Finally, in relation to monitoring activities, work is ongoing to set up a HELCOM database for hosting of indicator data for continuous noise hosted by ICES which is envisaged to be ready by the end of 2019.

- HELCOM 2019. Noise sensitivity of animals in the Baltic Sea. Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings N° 167.

3.6. Marine litter

Marine litter is not only an aesthetic problem but causes socio-economic costs, threatens human health and safety and has impacts on marine organisms. Moreover, entanglement in or ingestion of marine litter are concrete threats to marine animals and may, in some cases, lead to their death. Consumption of tiny particles – so-called microplastics – is also of concern as it may provide a pathway for transport of harmful chemicals into the food web. Additionally, marine litter is known to damage and degrade habitats – for instance through smothering – and to be a possible vector for the transfer of alien species.

Work towards achieving the regional goal agreed in HELCOM to reduce the amount of marine litter significantly by 2025 and prevent harm from litter in the coastal and marine environment is ongoing.

In 2019, the following advances are especially worthy of mention: (i) on abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded derelict fishing gear (ALDFG), through the identification and initial discussion of possible measures to address it; (ii) on the improvement of stormwater management, through the initiation of the update of HELCOM Recommendation on the topic (HELCOM Recommendation 23/5) which aims at minimising the release of microplastics to the Baltic Sea; and (iii) on expanded and extruded polystyrene (EPS and XPS), one of the top litter items found in our beaches, through the development on an overview of the most significant sources of EPS and XPS ending up in the marine environment including a catalogue of possible measures to reduce their release to the environment.

Further discussion on specific measures to address these issues is foreseen in 2020.

At the global level, following the status granted to HELCOM as Observer to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions' bodies and being aware of the establishment of the Plastic Waste Partnership working group (by the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Basel Convention in May 2019, decision BC-14/13), HELCOM Secretariat has joined such working group, which aims at mobilising business, government, academic and civil society resources, interests and expertise to improve and promote the environmentally sound management of plastic waste at the global, regional and national levels and to prevent and minimize its generation.

- Review of existing policies and research related to microplastics – Summary for Policy Makers. FanpLESStic-sea 2019.
- Survey of polystyrene foam (EPS and XPS) in the Baltic Sea, 2019.

3.7. Dredging/loss and disturbance of seabed

Dredging and depositing of dredged material at sea are the human activities significantly affecting sea floor causing disturbances and, in many cases, losses to benthic communities. In addition, these activities cause resuspension of particulate matter and associated contaminants in the water column, triggering their entry into the food chains. Dredging material is the only exemption from the general prohibition of dumping any kinds of waste in the Baltic Sea stipulated by the Helsinki Convention.

The Expert Network on dredging material is continuously working on the improvement of data on dredging and depositing operations in the Baltic Sea annually compiled in accordance with the HELCOM Recommendation 36/2. A format for an annual fact sheet report has been agreed which includes analysis of the volumes and types of material deposited at sea, spatial distribution of related activities as well as contaminants relocated or introduced to the marine waters with dredged material.

A test consolidated report on behalf of all HELCOM countries was submitted to the Secretariat of the London Convention based on the compiled data.

The expert group is continuously working on the development of recommendations on the methodology to evaluate environmental pressure caused by these activities.

- Depositing of dredged material at sea in 2017.

3.8. Industrial and municipal releases

Eutrophication remains a key environmental problem for the Baltic Sea. The main environmental pressure which causes eutrophication – nutrient load from land-based sources – remains above the limit bearable for the ecosystem. Nonetheless, remarkable progress has been achieved jointly by HELCOM countries.

HOLAS II clearly showed that the Baltic Sea is far from good environmental status in terms of contamination by hazardous substances. Despite the available data indicating constant decrease of inputs of conventional contaminants, the emerging toxins remain a cause for concern.

According to the latest available information compiled by PLC-7 project and published in 2019, input of nitrogen and phosphorus to the Baltic Sea in 2017 was reduced by 14% and 24%, respectively, since the reference period (average 1997-2003). The reduction of phosphorus input since the mid-nineties is almost 30%. Nevertheless, neither limit value for the inputs has been reached for the whole Baltic Sea in 2017.

HELCOM also embarked on the work of developing a regional risk assessment framework for the measures to manage internal nutrients reserves in the sea. It was tasked to do so by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting of 2018 to prevent potential adverse effects of measures to manage nutrient load caused by the reserves, mainly phosphorus, accumulated in the ecosystem. A HELCOM expert group dedicated to this task was launched in 2019.

HELCOM constantly works to improve knowledge on nutrient loads, its sources and pathways. This effort has led to the realization that there is a need to start revision of the national input ceilings for nutrients, to make them fit-for-purpose for the follow up of the effects various measures may have. An initial proposal integrating also input ceilings for transboundary rivers has been presented to the HELCOM community in 2019. The proposed approach also seeks to facilitate dialogue between HELCOM and river basin management authorities, and to engage them in a joint effort to reduce nutrient loads on the Baltic Sea. The dialogue with the authorities was initiated during a workshop held in Riga in September 2019, where mutual interests and objectives were identified.

Furthermore in 2019, the HELCOM PRESSURE Group started the development of a regional policy document on the update of the HELCOM framework for hazardous substances, to address the current challenges and Ministerial Commitments of 2018. The HELCOM framework was developed more than 10 years ago and has not been revised since then.

Another achievement in 2019 was the removal of one of the oldest HELCOM hot spots – the wastewater works of Kaliningrad – from the hotspot list after two years of showing satisfying monitoring results.

Also of interest is the work, in 2019, of the HELCOM Seventh Pollution Load Compilation project (PLC-7), one of the largest HELCOM projects related to input of nutrients and hazardous substances and aimed at following up on regional environmental targets. The project compiles information on all sources and pathways of nitrogen and phosphorus to the Baltic Sea and assess the progress achieved by the HELCOM countries towards national input reduction targets.

- Input of nutrients by the seven biggest rivers in the Baltic Sea region
- Inputs of hazardous substances to the Baltic Sea
- PLC-6 Executive Summary

3.9. Maritime Spatial Planning

Maritime spatial planning (MSP) is a tool utilized for integrated management of sea based human activities. In applying an ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities at sea, MSP contributes to reducing the anthropogenic impacts on various components of the marine environment, safeguarding biodiversity, promoting the sustainable growth of maritime economies, and the sustainable use of marine resources.

During 2019, significant progress was achieved in the implementation of the Regional Baltic Maritime Spatial Planning Roadmap (2013-2020) and its main interregional goal of including the ecosystem-based approach to MSP. Furthermore, almost all Baltic Sea countries significantly advanced their national maritime spatial plans.

This year, the HELCOM-VASAB MSP group – a joint working group between HELCOM and VASAB which coordinates regional MSP related activities and facilitates cross-border dialog on MSP – developed a regional guideline on output data to be utilized for cross-boundary consultations. HELCOM and VASAB also approved the Recommendation on integrated coastal management.

- Implementation of integrated coastal management and maritime spatial planning in the Baltic Sea area.
- Guidelines on transboundary MSP output data structure in the Baltic Sea.

Pan Baltic Scope

HELCOM has been an active partner in the EU-funded Pan Baltic Scope project on advancing maritime spatial planning (MSP) in the Baltic Sea region, where it led the work on economic and social analyses, as well as on cumulative impacts. In the project that ended in December 2019, HELCOM also collaborated on a data sharing activity to support regional cooperation and transboundary coherence in MSP, that, together with the Interreg project Baltic LINes, led to the development of BASEMAPS, a web-based tool showing decentralized MSP data through open standard services meant to facilitate the development of coherent plans across the Baltic Sea region.

3.10. Fisheries

Fisheries contribute substantially to the economy and are central in the cultural heritage of the Baltic Sea. However, Baltic fisheries are not yet entirely environmentally sustainable, and some fish stocks are declining.

Through its Group on Ecosystem-based sustainable fisheries (Fish Group), HELCOM deals with fisheries in relation to the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach. Moreover, the Fish Group works towards finding solutions as to how the sector could further contribute to reaching good environmental status (GES) of the Baltic Sea by 2021.

A meeting between HELCOM and the Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum (BALTFISH) took place in January 2019 in Tallinn, Estonia, with the objective of strengthening the coordination and cooperation between HELCOM and BALTFISH. This, as well as working together with the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) in 2019, are concrete steps towards fulfilling the agreement in the 2018 HELCOM Ministerial Declaration to increase cooperation

with fisheries bodies active within the Baltic Sea, ultimately aiming to ensure coherence between marine and fisheries management measures.

The HELCOM Expert Group on fisheries data for operationalizing indicators used for the purposes of assessment of the marine environment (EG Fishdata) finalized the development of a draft Roadmap on collection of fisheries data in order to assess incidental bycatches and fisheries impact on benthic biotopes in the Baltic Sea. The roadmap was approved for possible adoption in 2020.

Work also continued, *inter alia*, on the development of best available technologies/best environmental practices (BAT/BEP) for sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic Sea, with several workshops organized on seal fisheries interactions, sufficiency of measures as well as on by-catch, the latter being organized jointly by HELCOM and OSPAR.

In 2019 HELCOM also continued its efforts in the RETROUT Project (Development, promotion and sustainable management of the Baltic Sea Region as a coastal fishing tourism destination 2017-2020), co-funded by Interreg. HELCOM is a project partner leading a work package on assessment of status and management of sea trout rivers and stocks, with major focus on river restoration activities and assessment of sea trout river and stock status.

3.11. Response to spills

HELCOM has a longstanding cooperation on and coordination of response to pollution incidents involving oil and hazardous or noxious substances (HNS) as per Annex VII of the Helsinki Convention. The cooperation framework is further detailed in the HELCOM Response Manual volumes 1-3 and a number of HELCOM Recommendations.

It involves, among other things, joint assistance in response operations where vessels and equipment are deployed by other Contracting Parties (including reimbursement procedures), notification of suspected incidents, information sharing, aerial surveillance and regular exercises – such as the annual BALEX DELTA exercises, one of the largest response exercises in the world.

In 2019, the annual BALEX DELTA exercise was held around Bornholm, Denmark from 27 to 29 August. An alarm exercise (BALEX Bravo) was held two weeks before BALEX DELTA 2019 which included oil and chemical combatting exercises both at sea and on shore.

Furthermore, the full revision of the HELCOM Response Manual volumes 2 and 3 commenced in 2019, aiming to make it more user friendly and up to date. The Response Manual is continually being kept up-to-date by the HELCOM Response Working Group by all Contracting Parties in order to ensure the best possible joint response capacities in the Baltic Sea.

The HELCOM Response Working Group, at its 26th Meeting, agreed that HELCOM Recommendation 24/7 “Further development and use of drift forecasting for oils and other harmful substances in the Baltic” should be withdrawn as its provisions have been accomplished. HOD 56-2019 endorsed the proposal to withdraw the Recommendation agreed to submit the proposal to HELCOM 41-2020 for approval.

Other activities in 2019 related to response to spills include *inter alia* the publication of the HELCOM Annual Report on discharges observed during aerial surveillance in the Baltic Sea 2018, further development of the HELCOM Assessment on submerged hazardous objects and agreement to develop a HELCOM Response Exercise Plan (HREP).

HELCOM engagement in the West MOPoCo project a on updating regional response manuals on chemical spills continued in 2019 in partnership with, for example, the Mediterranean (REMPEC) and North Sea (Bonn Agreement). Through this project, an inter-regional response manual for chemical spills will be developed, thereby also renewing the HELCOM Response Manual Volume 2.

- HELCOM Annual report on discharges observed during aerial surveillance in the Baltic Sea, 2018

3.12. Shipping

The HELCOM Contracting Parties work together in the implementation of commitments made under global sectoral bodies dealing with maritime affairs, thereby contributing to progress with regard to maritime transport issues, which are of considerable significance for the Baltic Sea with its heavily used shipping lanes.

In accordance with the provisions of Annex IV of the Helsinki Convention, the Contracting Parties cooperate within the International Maritime Organization (IMO), in particular in promoting the development of international rules, and regionally to promote the harmonized implementation of such rules.

The Maritime Working Group agreed on and HOD 57-2019 approved the revision of HELCOM Recommendation 23/3 “Enhancing the use of pilots in route T and the Sound”. Also, Maritime agreed and HOD 57-2019 approved the new HELCOM Recommendation “Deep-Sea Pilotage in the Baltic Sea”. Both recommendations are expected to be adopted by HELCOM 41-2020.

Among other matters related to shipping, progress was made inter alia on the revision of the Joint Harmonised Procedure for the Contracting Parties of OSPAR and HELCOM on the granting of exemptions under the Ballast Water Management Convention, and considering the first results from the HELCOM GREEN TEAM reporting mechanism, which has been established to identify the main barriers, obstacles and challenges hindering the development on green technologies and alternative fuels in the Baltic Sea shipping.

The publication of a *A Technical Guidance for the handling of wastewater in Ports of the Baltic Sea Special Area under MARPOL Annex IV*, as well as approval of the *Annual HELCOM report on shipping accidents in the Baltic Sea area in 2018*, were other notable achievements in 2019.

HELCOM has continued its efforts in the project COMPLETE, which is an EU INTERREG Baltic Sea Region project aimed at minimizing the introduction and spread of harmful aquatic organisms and pathogens by shipping through the development of consistent and adaptive management strategies and tools for the Baltic Sea region by addressing both major vectors: ballast water and biofouling.

Work has also continued in the CSHIPP project platform which brings together projects and organisations focused on enhancing clean shipping in the Baltic Sea region. The objective of CSHIPP is to increase the impact of and connect the dots between the various projects working for clean shipping. As the projects involved in the platform look at the shared topic of clean shipping from different angles, CSHIPP synthesises the project results to provide a more holistic perspective in a concise and easily comprehensible format.

- A Technical Guidance for the handling of wastewater in Ports of the Baltic Sea Special Area under MARPOL Annex IV

3.13. Baltic Sea Action Plan

The Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) is HELCOM's strategic programme of actions and measures for achieving GES in the Baltic Sea. Since its inception in 2007, it has resulted in a number of environmental improvements such as a reduction in nutrient inputs to the sea, an improved state of biodiversity and a reduction in maritime incidents and spills.

Despite extensive efforts to reduce pressures and improve the state of the marine environment, the objective of the BSAP – to reach good environmental status for the Baltic Sea area by 2021 – is unlikely to be reached. Nevertheless, due to the tangible results attributed to the BSAP, the HELCOM Contracting Parties reaffirmed their strong support for the BSAP and, during the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2018 in Brussels, decided on its update and committed to maintaining the high ambition level of the original BSAP.

The update is meant to strengthen the current plan, while also considering new issues currently not addressed within HELCOM. The update will carry over already agreed actions of the current BSAP, strengthen existing commitments, as well as include new actions and measures to respond to previously unaddressed or significant environmental challenges, such as: underwater noise, seabed integrity, pharmaceuticals and climate change.

In 2019, work on reviewing the BSAP's ecological and management objectives started, leading to the conclusion that the structure of the BSAP will maintain its original overall approach but be updated to encompass new aspects of relevance.

Furthermore, HELCOM started an assessment of the sufficiency of existing measures, carried out by the SOM Platform (ad hoc HELCOM Platform on sufficiency of measures) and the EU co-financed HELCOM ACTION project.

The revision of the HELCOM Explorer, a database displaying the progress by the HELCOM Contracting Parties made on the 177 actions agreed on in the BSAP and helping to monitor implementation, was also initiated in 2019.

Also related to the BSAP update is the work, started in 2019, on the development of a HELCOM Science Agenda. The agenda is meant to identify science knowledge gaps and to outline existing and foreseen HELCOM regional science needs. It will serve the development of activities in HELCOM as well as to inform external funding mechanisms on the research needs of HELCOM.

BSAP UP project

The BSAP-UP project functions at an operational level to support and facilitate the work of the Contracting Parties to update the BSAP. The work within the project is carried out by: 1) the HELCOM Secretariat and a dedicated project manager, 2) Contracting Parties taking lead roles for specific topics or themes, and 3) any additional resources that may be mobilized to carry out the work.

HELCOM ACTION project (Actions to evaluate and identify effective measures to reach GES in the Baltic Sea marine region)

Co-financed by the EU and coordinated by HELCOM, the ACTION project is designed to contribute to the update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021 and can also be used by those HELCOM Contracting Parties that are EU Member States in updating and implementing their MSFD Programme of Measures. Running from January 2019 to December 2020, ACTION develops a regional approach for

evaluating sufficiency of measures (SOM) to identify potential gaps in achieving GES, and estimates the cost-effectiveness of tentative new measures to fill these gaps. The project focuses on several pertinent topics, such as: by-catch of mammals and birds, impacts on the seabed, marine protected areas, and eutrophication. In addition, the project analyses the natural conditions that influence the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) in the Baltic Sea region, including impacts of projected changes in climate. The project also takes a role in providing suggestions on potential new measures, based on the work within these technical work packages, that can support the update of the BSAP.

SOM Platform (ad hoc HELCOM Platform on sufficiency of measures)

The aim of the SOM platform, together with the HELCOM ACTION project, is to carry out the regional analysis of sufficiency of measures (SOM), to assess what kind of improvements in environmental state and pressures can be achieved with existing measures by 2030-2035, and whether these are sufficient to achieve good environmental status for the Baltic Sea. The information will be used to support the update of the BSAP and identification of new measures.

3.14. Monitoring and assessment

Monitoring in the Baltic Sea region is implemented based on commonly agreed monitoring approaches, supported by HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Guidelines. The guidelines themselves form the basis of common methodologies and data collection that provide the foundation for regional and harmonised assessments. These assessments, carried out at regular intervals, are the main way to understand progress towards achieving Good Environmental Status in the Baltic Sea, for instance via assessment against commonly agreed threshold values or targets.

Furthermore, assessments of individual components can be combined in thematic and holistic assessments to address the objectives of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, including its broader ecosystem-based overall aim. The HELCOM core indicators, with their quantitative threshold values, provide an approach to measuring the state of a variety of ecosystem components, and pressures, affecting the sea. These constitute the main focus for the assessment and are designed and developed to suitably assess the status of the Baltic Sea and progress towards achieving Good Environmental Status.

To improve monitoring at the regional level, including to support those HELCOM Contracting Parties that have national obligations under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (EU MSFD), a review process for common monitoring in the Baltic Sea was initiated by HELCOM in 2019. The aim of the process is to improve the regional coordination for each HELCOM monitoring sub-programme and ensure that opportunities to improve monitoring, address gaps and harmonise monitoring were developed.

Also, to ensure that existing and future HELCOM indicators meet the various commitments of HELCOM Contracting Parties, a review of the HELCOM indicators was launched in 2019 to carry out a policy matching (e.g. to the BSAP, EU MSFD) and gap analysis, and consider other linkages such as to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Two workshops were held in 2019 to facilitate the review of the indicators and to ensure that they fulfil the future needs of HELCOM and its Contracting Parties. The focus was both on identifying policy priorities for future development as well as on technical work required to achieve operational indicators in the identified priority areas. Work plans per indicator topic were developed by experts with a view to what could be achieved by the Third Holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III).

3.15. International processes

Global frameworks and international processes such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Aichi targets have long been important factors in HELCOM work to conserve the global marine environment.

UN Regional Seas Programme

Although not administered by the UN Regional Seas Programme (UN RSP) , HELCOM closely collaborated with the UN RSP throughout 2019. HELCOM co-hosted the Annual Meeting of the UN Regional Seas Programme in Berlin in October 2019, sharing general experiences on ocean conservation as well as informing on the progress on the Voluntary Commitments made during the UN Ocean Conference 2017. In November 2019, as a follow-up, HELCOM hosted a workshop on the oceans and seas related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 14) organised by the UN RSP and facilitated by the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC). The workshop attracted 16 regional sea organisations from all over the world. It also marked the start of preparations for the UN RSP's joint outlook report to be presented at the Ocean Conference 2020.

Other global and international processes

In 2019, HELCOM continued its involvement in various other global and international processes, as outlined in the respective sections above.