



Document title	Call for HELCOM action regarding Baltic MPAs within Russian part of the Gulf of Finland
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Background

In early September 2015, Coalition Clean Baltic approached Russian federal, regional and municipal authorities, as well as HELCOM, with a call for urgent action regarding the situation around one of the HELCOM Baltic MPAs and Ramsar sites in the Russian part of the Gulf of Finland, namely Kurgalsky Natural Reserve. With not much response received, CCB submitted this information for consideration of the HELCOM STATE & CONSERVATION 3-2015, along with another similar case in the nearby vicinity - Kronshtadskaya Kolonia Reserve. The Meeting of the Group welcomed CCB's information on the aforementioned Protected Areas (PAs) (cf. documents referred to above), invited CCB to keep the Group informed on the issue, and proposed to address HELCOM HOD about the situation.

The situation with both PAs looks very much alike, with major difference that Kurgalsky Reserve is a site of international importance, both listed as HELCOM MPA ([#166](#)) and the Ramsar Convention site ([#690](#)). Both natural areas are under severe pressure related to industrial and urban development: port facilities and settlement development in Ust-Luga nearby Kurgalsky and Bronka port development nearby Kronshtadskaya Kolonia. In addition, in between of those two PAs, the third one – Lebyazhy Nature Reserve, yet another HELCOM Baltic MPA ([#197](#)) is located, that also becomes affected by industrial and urban development activities in the vicinity. Currently, the cases are aggravated by legitimisation of respective development plans without acknowledging public opinion and research findings on potential natural values that can be irreversible lost if those development plans are implemented. No EIAs or at least international consultation and information procedures were carried out in neither case in accordance with Article 7 of the [Helsinki Convention](#) and HELCOM Recommendation [17/3](#). The case of Bronka port development has been also addressed at [HELCOM PRESSURE 3-2015](#) regarding performed dredging activities and lacking notification of neighbouring countries.

The CCB network is concerned that implementation of the abovementioned development plans will lead to negative impact on ecosystems of the aforementioned PAs through reaching critical levels of animal disturbance, habitat destruction and increased pollution. Ultimately, the proposed and already ongoing developments will not contribute to reaching GES in terms of securing sustainable use of Baltic Sea Area resources by reducing user conflicts and adverse impacts of human activities, but on contrary, there is high probability of conservation value loss relevant for the whole Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea.

CCB hopes for the opportunity to consider and resolve potential threats to Kurgalsky, Kronshtadskaya Kolonia and other PAs in the Russian part of the Gulf of Finland, at both national and the international levels (HELCOM), taking into account the need to respect relevant obligations, including e.g. EIA procedures with regards to nature protected areas of international importance. This can be *i.a.* achieved through an open stakeholder dialogue (involving local and regional authorities, port administrations, public, etc.) with a view to develop an integrated approach towards management and planning of marine, coastal and land areas of, based on ecosystem approach. A broader application of Maritime Spatial Planning in the Gulf of Finland can potentially, if properly implemented, become a solution for the issues raised above. In that respect, the HELCOM/VASAB Guidelines on transboundary consultations, public participation and co-operation in MSP are becoming even more vital and important to ensure public engagement in MSP processes.

Further detailed information on the above cases is presented in the documents submitted to STATE & CONSERVATION 3-2015 that are referred to in this document, as well as briefly presented in the attachment.

Action required

The Meeting is invited to consider presented information and to suggest the way forward in resolving these conflicts. The Meeting might be e.g. interested to discuss the lack of application of EIA and notification/consultation procedures in transboundary context stemming from the Helsinki Convention and the way to fill this clear gap.

Kurgalsky Nature Reserve

The Kurgalskiy Nature Reserve, being established in 2000, is included in the network of HELCOM Baltic Sea Marine Protected Areas and RAMSAR Convention list of protected wetlands of international importance. It is situated at the south-west coast of the Gulf of Finland, close to Estonian border and has a status of reserve ('zakaznik') of regional importance in Russia. Its total area is 60 000 ha including 38 400 ha of marine area. Kurgalskiy Reserve is an area of high conservation value for the Eastern Baltic Sea region.

Marine and coastal biotope complexes of the reserve are very diverse and undisturbed. Biotopes represented by sandy and moraine coasts, dunes, reed beds, reefs, coastal meadows, islets, surface boulder ridges, mudflats, underwater and surface sandbanks, with or without vegetation. Shallow areas of marine part of Kurgalskiy Reserve serve as a spawning ground for many commercial fish species, as well as a habitat for several fish and lamprey species, endangered in the Baltic Sea region. The Kurgalskiy Reserve is important breeding area for many species of marine birds and stopover for migrating birds, including those listed in the HELCOM's Red List of Baltic Breeding Birds. The Reserve is the key area for the Baltic ringed seal haul-outs in the Gulf of Finland. It is also breeding and foraging area for ringed seal and important area for the Baltic grey seal haul-outs.

The development of Ust-Luga port near to Kurgalskiy Reserve has also spurred urban development in the area, that presumes 8-fold upscaling of small nearby settlement to a city of 34,5 thousand inhabitants with expansion of the residential area and exploitation the Kurgalskiy Peninsula area as a recreational zone for local residents. The recreation development t plans so far do not show any respect to HELCOM provisions, e.g. set in Recommendation 21/3 on sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism in the coastal zones of the Baltic Sea area. In particular, carrying capacity of the environment, cultural and social capacity has never been assessed; tourism are not oriented on PA's management plan and nature conservation goals; no environmental education is planned; no management of the recreation is assumed, limits for motorized activity are not developed; tourism in the reserve is not oriented on local community's interests.

Kronshtadskaya Kolonia

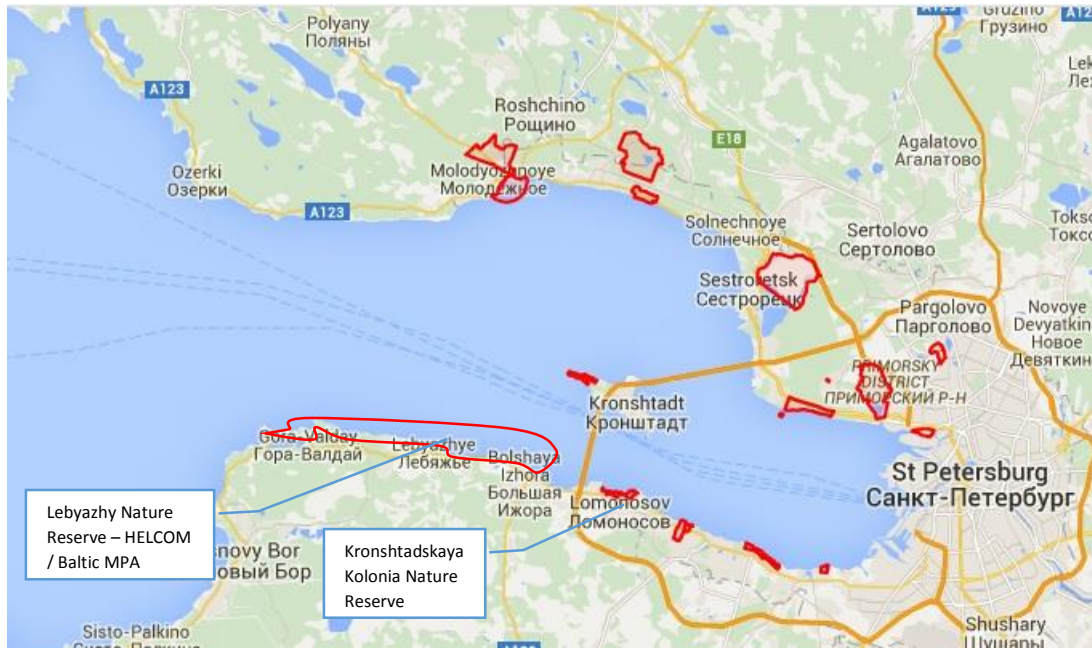
The nature values of Kronshtadskaya Kolonia wetlands were justified with scientific data in 1990-th, updated in 2000-th, and documents for establishing nature reserve with the coastal length about 4 km were prepared by the City of St.Petersburg Department of Nature Protected areas. However, in 2009 because of appearance of investor for Bronka port, the project documents of this nature-protected area were revised with cutting coastal line up to 2 km. Finally, in 2013 the nature protected area "Kronshtadskaya Kolonia" was established as a cluster of the St.Petersburg regional complex nature protected area "South shore of the Neva Bay". The official goal for establishing this nature protected area was "Conservation of the nesting and mass recreation sites of waterfowl birds on the White Sea-Baltic migration route". Kronshtadskaya Kolonia nature reserve area is sandwiched between Bronka Port on the west and Lomonosov town port area on the east, and sufficiently impacted by Bronka port activities. Nonetheless, environmental monitoring shows that wetlands play their important role for migration birds, and several Red Book species are registered there every season.

The new stress situation for this area emerged in 2015: the Ministry of Defence, owner of the neighbour area 16 ha on the North-West corner of nature reserve, initiated exclusion of the 4 ha coastal part of the nature reserve, adjacent to the Bronka port. The very likely scenario is that this 4 ha together with 16 ha of military area to be transferred to the Bronka port. This port expansion will create new risks for the Gulf of Finland, destruction of extracted wetlands and degradation of remaining area of the nature reserve.

The Comprehensive Environmental Survey of changing borders of Kronshtadskaya Kolonia nature reserve (where South-Western part of the reserve with Klyuchinskaya Spit is proposed to be cut) was performed by the City of St.Petersburg Committee for Nature Use – to be presented for the State Environmental Expertize. This investigation was done with many shortcomings, without authentic methods, didn't cover all migration periods, and can't adequately show the nature value of the area, which is planned to be excluded from nature reserve.

Kronshtadskaya Kolonia nature protected area with its Klyuchinskaya Spit and wetlands is one of the very few such unique areas in the Neva Bay. Its removal from the reserve area will cause sufficient worsening conditions for important breeding area for many species of marine birds and stopover for migrating birds, including those listed in the HELCOM's Red List of Baltic Breeding Birds. The extracting the Western coastal part of the nature reserve will create conditions for further expansion of Bronka multifunctional marine cargo port area (exceeding its officially approved area). It will sufficiently increase its negative impact to the Gulf of Finland environment, through increasing water turbidity, destruction of fish and birds food supply, reaching critical levels of animal disturbance. In addition, dredging, noise and other activities performed during construction of the port pose a threat to another HELCOM/Baltic MPA – Lebyazhy Nature Reserve that is located southwest from Bronka development site: satellite/aerial images confirm that plumes of suspended sediments from dredging operations can be spreading both along the southern coast and other parts of the Gulf of Finland.

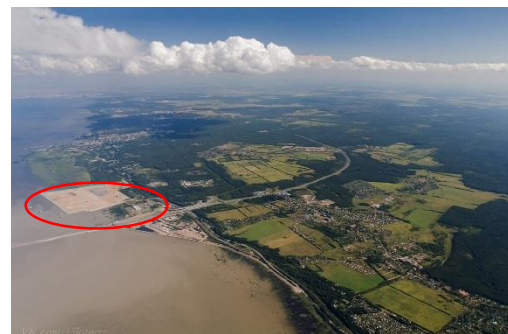
Map of locations of Nature Protected Areas within the City of St.Petersburg



Satellite image of Kronshtadskaya Kolonia Nature Reserve area and its vicinities



Nature reserve in front of the construction site



Bird-eye view of the construction site

Uppsala, Sweden
5 September 2015

**Your Excellence, President of the Russian Federation
Mr. Vladimir Putin**

**Your Excellence, Chairman of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission
Mr. Harry Liiv**

**CC: Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation
Mr. Dmitry Donskoy**

**Acting Governor of the Leningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation
Mr. Alexander Drozdenko**

**Committee for Natural Resources, Nature Use and Ecology of the State Duma of the
Russian Federation**



**Permanent Commission on Ecology and Nature Use of the Legislative Assembly of
Leningrad Oblast**

**Administration of the Kingisepp Municipal District of Leningrad Oblast of the Russian
Federation**

Coalition Clean Baltic, an NGO network with over 800000 members from all Baltic Sea countries, would like to raise your attention and call for urgent action regarding the alarming situation being reported around Kurgalskiy State (Regional) Nature Reserve, located in Leningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation.

The Kurgalskiy Nature Reserve, being established in 2000, is included in the network of HELCOM Baltic Sea Marine Protected Areas and RAMSAR Convention list of protected wetlands of international importance. It is situated at the south-west coast of the Gulf of Finland, close to Estonian border and has a status of reserve ('zakaznik') of regional importance in Russia. Its total area is 60 000 hectares including 38 400 hectares of marine area. Kurgalskiy Reserve is an area of high conservation value for the Eastern Baltic Sea region.

Marine and coastal biotope complexes of the reserve are very diverse and undisturbed. Biotopes represented by sandy and moraine coasts, dunes, reed beds, reefs (Kurgalskiy reef, Tiskolskiy reef), coastal meadows, islets, surface boulder ridges, mudflats, underwater and surface sandbanks, with

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E-mail: secretariat@ccb.se; mikhail.durkin@ccb.se **www.ccb.se** **Org. number:** 802015-1281 **CCB is a member of The World Conservation Union (IUCN)**

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

• Ecohome, 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 • Ecodefense, Kaliningrad, Russia • Neva River Clearwater, St Petersburg, Russia • Green World, St Petersburg, Russia • The Guide Environmental Group, Kaliningrad, Russia • Greens of Karelia, Petrozavodsk, Russia • Friends of the Earth, Sweden
• Swedish Society for Nature Conservation • Swedish-Polish Association for Environmental Protection • WWF Sweden • The Western Center of the Ukrainian Branch of the World Laboratory

or without vegetation. Unique Lipovskoe Lake, the only brackish lake of the region, a lagoon connected by artificial channel to the Gulf of Finland, is located on Kurgalskiy Peninsula. Marine area of Kurgalsky Reserve is the place of natural cleansing processes of the Gulf of Finland waters.

Shallow areas of marine part of Kurgalskiy Reserve serve as a spawning ground for many commercial fish species. The following fish and lamprey species, endangered in the Baltic Sea region, occur in the reserve: European river and sea lampreys, European eel, twaite shad, Atlantic cod, blenny, striped seasnail. Southern border of the Reserve overlaps with Luga River that is the only river in Russian part of the Baltic Sea catchment still inhabited by breeding population of wild salmon.

Kurgalskiy Reserve is important breeding area for many species of marine birds and stopover for migrating birds. Some species from HELCOM Red List of Baltic Breeding Birds nest there. They are dunlin (*Calidris alpina schinzii*), greater scaup (*Aythya marila*), common eider (*Somateria mollissima*), velvet scoter (*Melanitta fusca*), lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus fuscus*), caspian tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*), tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*), ringed plover (*Charadrius hiaticula hiaticula*), lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), redshank (*Tringa totanus*), common sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*).

Kurgalskiy Reserve is the key area for the Baltic ringed seal haul-outs in the Gulf of Finland. It is also breeding and foraging area for ringed seal and important area for the Baltic grey seal haul-outs. Population of the Baltic ringed seal in the Gulf of Finland now consists of only several hundred individuals. Seasonal fast ice usually forms in coastal zone of the reserve what allows ringed seal to breed there in mild winters, leaving it one of the few safe breeding areas for seals in changing climate conditions.

Kurgalsky Reserve has been historically a part of Border Security Zone of Leningrad region, which restricts its visiting, but this restriction was abolished since recently. In the end of 2000s recreational impact from tourists in the area has grown noticeably. It reveals in unregulated campings on sea and lake coastline, using aquabikes at Lipovskoe lake, using ATVs on the beaches and shoals. It is more evident in summer, less in spring and fall seasons. In winter fishermen uses snowmobiles and hovercrafts for movements across the ice cover.

All kinds of entertainment mentioned above are illegal since they are prohibited by the Provisions of Kurgalskiy Reserve set by the Ordinance of the Governor of Leningrad Oblast (N 309-pg from 20.07.2000). Staff of the reserve consist of only one inspector with no enforcement authority. Lack of enforcement has not been resolved till today.

The development of multipurpose Ust-Luga merchant sea port near to Kurgasky Reserve has led to preparation of the “Draft Master Plan of Municipal Unit of Ust-Luga Rural Settlement, Kingisepp District of Leningrad Region”. The draft presumes expansion of Ust-Luga Rural Settlement to a city of 34,5 thousand inhabitants (36,3 thous. inhab. for the entire settlement including subordinate administrative-territorial formations). Two main assumptions of the draft document important for Kurgalskiy Reserve are: (1) exploitation the Kuralskiy Peninsula area as a recreational zone for the local residents; (2) 8-fold increase of the peninsula settlements’ population.

The recreation is going to be developed by the way of ‘conventional’ tourism with no respect to Helsinki Commission’s (HELCOM) Recommendation 21/3 on sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism in the coastal zones of the Baltic Sea area. In particular, carrying capacity of the environment, cultural and social capacity has never been assessed; tourism are not oriented on PA's management plan and nature conservation goals; no environmental education is planned; no management of the recreation is assumed, limits for motorized activity are not developed; tourism in the reserve is not oriented on local community and traditions (representatives of two small ethnic groups still reside on Kurgalskiy peninsula: Izhorians, Ingrian Finns and Vod’).

Certain provisions of the “Draft Master Plan...” are aiming at development of beaches, tourist

facilities (restaurants, yacht tourism facilities, motorboating clubs) and sport grounds in several points of Kurgalskiy peninsula including Lipovskoe lake, Luga river and seacoasts; development of parking on coastal terrace for tourists near marine bird breeding colonies and ringed seals' most abundant haul-out in the Gulf.

Most of the planned facilities as well as new housing construction sites are going to be arranged within areas which are *de jure* not a part of Kurgalskiy Reserve. But those are located within villages situated in the core of Kurgalskiy peninsula. At present time the villages are compact and do not significantly influence on marine ecosystems. The CCB network is concerned that implementation of the draft Master plan will lead to negative impact from recreational activity and population growth on ecosystems of Kurgalskiy Reserve through reaching critical levels of animal disturbance, poaching (hunting, eggs collecting and illegal fishing), habitat destruction, increased pollution (including waste generation). Ultimately, the proposed development will not contribute to reaching Good Environmental Status in terms of securing sustainable use of Baltic Sea Area resources by reducing user conflicts and adverse impacts of human activities, but on contrary, there is high probability of conservation value loss of the Kurgalskiy Reserve/Peninsula. This will be a real shame, especially in light of the 2017 being declared the year of Nature Protected Areas in the Russian Federation!

Since this development project mostly belongs to the territory of Ust-Luga Rural Settlement and not the territory of Kurgalskiy Reserve, the Leningrad Regional Committee on Natural Resources does not have the competence to influence the document. Despite negative feedback to the “Draft Master Plan...” provided by the local community, it is now prepared for adoption.

CCB hopes for the opportunity to consider and resolve potential threats to Kurgalskiy Nature Reserve at both Russian federal and the international community levels (HELCOM), taking into account the need to respect relevant obligations, including e.g. Environment Impact Assessment procedures with regards to nature protected areas of international importance. This can be i.a. achieved through an open stakeholder dialogue (involving local and regional authorities, port administration, public, etc.) with a view to develop an integrated approach towards management and planning of marine, coastal and land areas of the Kurgalskiy Nature Reserve, based on ecosystem approach.

The “Draft Master Plan of Municipal Unit of Ust-Luga Rural Settlement, Kingiseppskiy District of Leningrad Region” is attached to this letter (in Russian). Controversial points being addressed in this letter are marked in the attached tables.

We would appreciate your attention and interest for resolving this urgent matter.

Yours faithfully,

Jakub Skorupski
CCB Chair

Mikhail Durkin
CCB Executive Secretary

Oleg Bodrov
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Location of the Kurgalskiy Peninsula/Natural Reserve

