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Background

On 1 July 2020, Germany took over the HELCOM chairmanship from Finland. At HOD 58-2020, Germany presented the priorities of its chairmanship to the Contracting Parties as attached to this document (HOD 58-2020 doc 2-1-Rev.1).

This document gives an overview of initiatives taken by Germany since July 2020 and initiatives still under preparation to kick off discussion and implementing actions on specific German chairmanship priorities at HELCOM working level for uptake in Working Groups' workplans.

Given the dynamics in determining HELCOM future work based on the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and other HELCOM work strands (e.g. update of Regional Action Plan for Marine Litter, adoption of a Regional Action Plan on Underwater Noise), Germany seeks a bottom-up approach in placing its priorities on the HELCOM agenda and allow them to be taken up and collectively formed in the ongoing multiple discussions in HELCOM, whilst offering particular input where deemed adequate.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to note the initiatives taken or planned by Germany as a guidance for future HELCOM activities under the German chairmanship.

Priorities of the German HELCOM Chairmanship (1 July 2020 – 30 June 2022) – Initiatives taken and planned

Strengthening ocean governance

Collaboration with Baltic Sea Political Cooperations

Proposals for taking this topic forward are presented to HOD 59-2020 in a separate document for discussion.

Economic benefits of a healthy marine environment

Germany presented results from a German valuation study on the benefits of a North and Baltic Sea in good environmental status to EN ESA 10-2020 ([presentation 5](#)). The study follows closely studies conducted in Finland and Sweden. It is intended to support HOLAS III assessments of the cost of degradation of the Baltic marine environment and to provide Germany with a comparable study for the North Sea.

Communication celebrate

Germany organized a livestream meeting on 2 July 2020 to mark the handover of the chairmanship from Finland to Germany in the presence of the Finnish ambassador in Berlin, the German Minister for the Environment, the Prime Ministers of the two German Federal Laender bordering the Baltic Sea and the incoming Chair of HELCOM. The Environment State Secretary and seven representatives from policy, science and NGOs attended physically and online to discuss the environmental challenges for the Baltic Sea and HELCOM's role in tackling these.

Germany will work with the HELCOM Secretariat and HOD to continue good communication of HELCOM work in relation to identified target groups. Communication of the economic value of marine protection and good status for sustainable uses of the sea, the role of Baltic Sea resilience in the face of climate change and mutually supportive actions for marine and climate protection, or the role and need of science in marine protection and sustainable use (Science Agenda) are examples of specific topics for which to increase interinstitutional communication. Underwater noise and dumped munitions are examples of specific topics for which to increase public awareness raising.

Updating and implementing the BSAP – making progress on specific requirements

Eutrophication

Germany presented its priorities to Pressure 13-2020 ([document 7-4](#)). Pressure welcomed the priorities to provide for continuity and succession in the HELCOM work. On specific initiatives:

- ***Review of nutrient hot spot list:*** The proposal to develop a methodology for designating hot spots and eliminating hot spots from the list, which Germany offers to facilitate, provides a basis for future reviews and updates of the hot spots list. The activity links with action 7.2 of the Pressure workplan 2021-2022. This will be a joint activity of Pressure and AGRI.
- ***Effective implementation of the optimised reduction scheme for nutrient inputs:*** The analysis of implementation obstacles and propagation of best practice examples, which Germany offers to facilitate, are intended to help progressing on the challenging implementation of the updated nutrient reduction scheme. The activity seeks to determine barriers to progress and possible solutions. The exercise includes analysis of best practice examples for nutrient management. Against this background,

Germany presented a first outline of the example project "Model Region Schlei" to Pressure 13-2020 ([document 7-4](#)). The whole activity will be a joint activity of Pressure and AGRI.

Marine Litter: Implementation of the Regional Action Plan for Marine Litter, and Actions on abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG)

Germany presented its priorities to the latest Workshop on the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter ([WS RAP ML 5-2020 document 4-7](#)) and to Pressure 13-2020 ([document 4-13](#)). The presentations launched discussions on options for progressing on the implementation of the Regional Action Plan. This includes actions to address the prevention and reduction of ghost gear (ALDFG) (e.g. a HELCOM Recommendation) and to link land-based waste management to marine litter in the Baltic Sea. The revision of the Regional Action Plan will allow Contracting Parties to sharpen and prioritise actions to combat marine litter and thereby their implementation. The parallel revision of the OSPAR Regional Action on Marine Litter provides opportunities to mutually strengthen actions and efforts in implementation. The activity links to actions 5.2 and 5.3 of the Pressure workplan 2021-2022 and contributes to the issue of strengthening Ocean Governance.

Tackling new solutions for well-known, pressing challenges

Munitions: Common knowledge base and options for actions with regard to munitions

Together with Poland, Germany proposed first steps to progress on building a common knowledge base for developing actions with regard to munitions at Response 28-2020 ([document 9-3](#)), which were agreed by Response. The longer-term aim is to move from stock-taking (knowledge on locations, amount and conditions of conventional and chemical munitions in the Baltic Sea and the toxicological effects of munition-compounds on the marine environment) to options for actions based on joint risk assessment and prioritisation, identification of hot spots and pilots for retrieval as well as elimination of munitions.

Underwater noise: Moving forward on regional actions on underwater noise

The updated BSAP and the Regional Action Plan on Underwater Noise will address impulsive and continuous noise. They will envisage measures to mitigate sound emissions at source. Germany plans to initiate a cross-disciplinary discussion at EN Noise, Pressure and Maritime on exploring development of a pilot project by interested Contracting Parties to assess efficiency and impact of noise mitigation measures. It is the intention to help moving from aspiration to the implementation of concrete mitigation measures.

Strengthening marine biodiversity

Coherent MPA network

Germany reported to State&Conservation 13-2020 about the approach taken in OSPAR to assess the effectiveness of marine protected areas management. State&Conservation 13-2020 supported a coordinated approach across marine regions and to await progress in OSPAR to this end. Germany will facilitate linking OSPAR and HELCOM approaches and progress on the issue in HELCOM. The activity links to actions 4.3 and 4.4 of the State&Conservation workplan 2021-2022 and contributes to the issue of strengthening Ocean Governance.

Implementation of HELCOM recommendations on species (37/2) and habitats (40/1) protection

Germany as lead country for the recommendation on species and habitats provided State&Conservation 13-2020 with drafts for the format and content of implementation reports, which the meeting adopted. In

preparing the implementation report, Germany attempts to identify obstacles to progress and options to intensify implementation. The activity links to actions of State&Conservation workplan 2021-2022 relating to ToR duties on conservation and biodiversity.

Implementation of the Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan (BSSAP)

Germany is lead country of the HELCOM Expert Group on Sturgeon Remediation (EG STUR) whose purpose is to contribute to the implementation of the Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan (BSSAP). Germany will coordinate the activities of HELCOM states to bring back the locally extinct Baltic sturgeon. A next workshop is planned for January 2021 in Berlin.

Improving the status of the harbour porpoise populations in the Baltic Sea

Germany and Sweden are co-lead countries for a new indicator on "Abundance and distribution of harbour porpoise" and have taken lead for the application of a LIFE project for SAMBAH II (Spatio-temporal monitoring of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise and its habitat quality). The concept note has been pre-selected. The full project proposal is being developed for submission to EU Commission by 15 February 2021.

Migratory routes of birds in the Baltic Sea Region

Germany is lead country for HELCOM Recommendation 34E1 which includes the goal to develop maps on migratory routes and main habitats of migratory birds in the Baltic Sea region. State&Conservation agreed to set up a subgroup of experts. Germany will facilitate to kick-off the activity through a Workshop in spring 2021.

Work towards assessing the pressure of hazardous substances on marine mammals

Germany initiated discussions at EN MAMA 14-2020 ([document 2-4](#)), Pressure 13-2020 ([document 4-11](#)) and State&Conservation 13 on assessment of hazardous substances in marine mammals. Germany launched a project to screen substances in marine mammals' samples. The initiative was well received at EN MAMA, Pressure and State&Conservation, and several Contracting Parties confirmed to contribute samples to the screening project. Future activities facilitated by Germany through a research project include selection of relevant substances, threshold development, draft of a monitoring and assessment concept.

Improving the protection of species and habitats in coastal areas

Germany plans to initiate the discussion of a common understanding within HELCOM on how to **protect species and habitats in coastal areas** more effectively. A respective discussion document will be presented at S&C 15/2021.

Climate change and the Baltic Sea – understanding and responding

Role of blue carbon for Baltic Sea and synergies with marine nature conservation

Germany plans to engage in discussion at the next meetings of EN CLIME and State&Conservation on the topic. Germany is preparing the launch of a study to explore the potential role of blue carbon in the Baltic Sea. It is expected to deliver results during 2021 and to contribute to discussions in HELCOM in reviewing state of knowledge, achieving a common understanding on the topic and, depending on the outcome of these first steps, identifying and developing concrete actions for blue carbon. Those results may contribute to climate mitigation initiatives and support marine nature conservation objectives and actions. The activity links to action 4.7.3 of the State&Conservation workplan 2021-2022.

Sustainable coastal defence to adapt to climate change

Following brief verbal information, State&Conservation 13 invited Germany to provide a more detailed presentation of the "Baltic Sea Coast Strategy 2100" initiated by Schleswig-Holstein to the next State&Conservation and Pressure meetings as a best practice example for nature based and biodiversity promoting coastal defence measures, including the role of stakeholders (e.g. tourism infrastructure, municipalities and companies) in the implementation. The aim is to explore options for cooperation (e.g. knowledge exchange) among HELCOM Contracting Parties.



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Successful global marine protection is only possible with strong regional cooperation

Working together for our sea – the Baltic Sea

The protection of the Baltic Sea is our top priority. However, HELCOM, too, is confronted with the social and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. With the mandate of providing the best possible protection for the Baltic Sea, the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and future HELCOM decisions should therefore be specifically reviewed for their relevance to the climate and biological diversity and for their suitability. Ecosystems need to be resilient to withstand the stresses of climate change and human activities. Sustainable economic recovery over the months ahead must also lead to progress on environmental protection, including marine protection.

Strengthening ocean governance

HELCOM is a symbol of successful regional cooperation on marine protection, deeply rooted in science and in dialogue with stakeholders. It looks for practical ways to ensure that decision-making processes give due consideration to the economic and social significance of healthy marine ecosystems.

- Our goal, too, is to closely connect the planned HELCOM Science Agenda and the Baltic Sea Action Plan with the UN 2030 Agenda and other international processes.
- We advocate stepping up cooperation that has already been initiated in the Baltic Sea region between HELCOM and other important stakeholders for marine protection. We also advocate HELCOM playing an active part in the UN Ocean Conference in 2021.
- We want to help highlight the economic consequences of major stresses on marine ecosystems and the management of the Baltic Sea.

Updating and implementing the BSAP – making progress on specific requirements

The Baltic Sea Action Plan and the supplementary Regional Marine Litter Action Plan have set ambitious goals and measures. Despite success achieved to date, good environmental

7





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status has not yet been attained for Baltic Sea ecosystems, and the planned measures and activities have not yet been implemented in full. It is important not only to update the Baltic Sea Action Plan but also to visibly accelerate and intensify its implementation. One particularly urgent task is to join forces to further reduce the high nutrient pollution in the Baltic Sea, which remains the biggest burden on the Baltic Sea ecosystems.

- One of our priorities is to achieve an ambitious conclusion to the revision of the BSAP and to work together with determination to implement it.
- We are ready to develop options for action to reduce nutrient inputs, for example by analysing barriers to implementation, updating nutrient hotspots and assessing local tailor-made approaches (for example the Schlei model region – how measures in the catchment area of an inlet can help reduce nutrient inputs, improve biodiversity and promote climate action).
- We see a considerable need to work together on driving forward implementation of the Regional Marine Litter Action Plan. To name just one of many examples, we would like to highlight our support for the development of regional solutions to the problem of ghost nets.

Tackling new solutions for well-known, pressing challenges

In addition to challenges in protecting the Baltic Sea such as the impacts of climate change, warfare material in the sea and underwater noise are threats that have long since been known, and solutions are urgently required. Munition containers are corroding, and their toxic munition compounds are increasingly entering the marine environment.

Commercial and recreational shipping, the expansion of offshore wind power and other technical infrastructures are examples of noise pollution sources in the sea.

- We advocate regular exchanges of expertise, information sharing and technology tests with the goal of gaining a better overview of the scale of munition compounds and their potential impacts. The ultimate aim is to ensure the safe and environmentally sound removal of munition from the Baltic Sea.
- We see the Regional Action Plan on Underwater Noise, which should be implemented, with a focus on measures, together with key sectors such as shipping and the offshore industry, as an innovative step for HELCOM in its endeavour to move forward on avoiding and minimising noise inputs.

8





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Strengthening marine biodiversity

For decades, marine biodiversity in the Baltic Sea has been subject to anthropogenic impairments, but also to natural variations. Although the general status of biodiversity continues to deteriorate, there have been positive developments for some species, for example grey seals. The impacts of human activities, together with those of climate change, remain the largest threats and challenges.

- We are striving for the completion and development of the coherence of the HELCOM network of marine protected areas and their management with effective protection and conservation measures.
- We want to step up efforts and measures to protect and conserve endangered species and habitats in the Baltic Sea and, for example, to contribute to improving the status of the harbour porpoise populations in the Baltic Sea. We aim to make progress on the reintroduction of the sturgeon and support the tracking of the routes of migratory birds in the Baltic Sea region.
- We plan to test marine mammals for pollutants in order to help assess the state of their health. As final links in the food webs in the Baltic Sea, the state of their health needs to be enhanced to ensure their conservation.

Climate change and the Baltic Sea - understanding and responding

Climate change is one of the most pressing environmental problems worldwide. The impacts of climate change have long been felt in the Baltic Sea and its coasts. Over the past two years, HELCOM has made major progress in tackling these problems.

- We want to continue resolutely along our jointly chosen path of considering climate aspects in all of HELCOM's activities.
- We want to further sound out the potential and relevance of blue carbon as natural carbon sinks in the Baltic Sea, and assess possible options for action.
- We see an important role for HELCOM in explaining the interactions between climate action and marine protection, including for climate policy, to a wide audience.

9





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- The project “Baltic Sea Coast Strategy 2100” is a good example of how the countries bordering the Baltic Sea can prepare in an ecologically sustainable way for possible impacts such as a rise in sea levels and an increase in extreme weather events.

We are looking forward to working together in the next two years, which will see us face special challenges. We are confident that we will continue to reach forward-looking solutions even in this difficult time.

