



Document title	Communication strategy for the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan
Code	4-1
Category	DEC
Agenda Item	4 - Preparations for HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2021
Submission date	16.11.2020
Submitted by	Executive Secretary
Reference	MM2021, BSAP update

Background

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) is currently being updated, and the revised version is due to be adopted by the HELCOM Contracting Parties during the next Ministerial Meeting to be held in Lübeck, Germany in October 2021.

The communication strategy for the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan serves to raise awareness about the new plan and to support its implementation through targeted communication actions.

Note that the actions contained in the plan pertaining to the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2021 will be further coordinated with Germany and the organizers of the event.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of and approve the communication strategy for the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Updated BSAP: Communication strategy

Background

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) is currently being updated, and the revised version is due to be adopted by the HELCOM Contracting Parties during the next Ministerial Meeting to be held in Lübeck, Germany in October 2021.

In terms of public awareness, the current BSAP is widely known across the entire Baltic Sea region and beyond, but chiefly among policy makers, scientists, academics and other professionals and stakeholders dealing with marine and maritime matters. The BSAP's reach is mainly limited to the various segment of the public making up the "inner circles of HELCOM". As far as the general public is concerned, the BSAP is not well known.

Since the Ministerial Meeting of 2018, where the update of the BSAP was decided, the HELCOM agenda has largely been dominated by that subject, being deeply discussed in all HELCOM bodies. A highly participatory process, the BSAP update also reached a number of stakeholders with a regional call for new actions to be included, as well as a HELCOM Stakeholder Conference dedicated to the topic.

Overall, the general view is that the BSAP has mainly been a success, but that more still needs to be done in order to reach the ecological objectives of the plan. Nonetheless, the delay in achieving good environmental status by 2021 as stated in the original plan has been widely noted. Despite the various compelling reasons such as a lag in the ecosystem's response to the measures, the insufficiency of some actions, or emerging or previously not addressed pressures, the lack of full implementation has especially been singled out as a culprit.

It is worthy of notice that the Contracting Parties do not have a legal obligation to implement the plan. But because of the participatory nature of the development of the BSAP and a science-driven, bottom-up approach within HELCOM that is based on consensus among the Contracting Parties, the BSAP has always benefitted from unanimous support and adherence.

In general, those who will have to deal with the implementation of the updated BSAP are already aware of the scope and content of the update, and some of the persons concerned were, in fact, directly involved in its development and are therefore likely strong supporters of a plan they helped to craft.

Any communication actions should therefore primarily focus on supporting the implementation of the BSAP, and, secondarily, increase awareness in segments of the public that are not yet aware of the plan but can be potential drivers of its implementation.

Core issues

Just as for the original BSAP, implementation of actions and measures will be key for the success of the updated plan. Communication activities should therefore include considerations on how to best facilitate the implementation of the updated plan, and what communication support could be provided to the various stakeholders involved in the execution of the plan's actions and measures.

Although the BSAP and its update are the product of a lengthy policy process led by the Contracting Parties, the BSAP is not legally binding. A strong political backing and endorsement is therefore of key importance for the successful and timely implementation of the plan, providing those tasked with implementing the plan with the necessary political mandate.

The update is underpinned by solid science that is based on a regional consensus, a reality that needs to be emphasized throughout all communication actions, especially in light of the fact that some stakeholders may still question if the plan provides a sufficient basis for achieving GES, as envisioned. The original BSAP was considered a success overall, but did not achieve its ultimate aim. For this reason, among others, some stakeholders may doubt that the updated plan is fit-for-purpose.

Some actions will also need the support of the general public, such as on marine litter. Currently, HELCOM is not reaching out as much as it could to the general public, and some communication actions will therefore need to be geared to a broader audience, to increase awareness using easy-to-understand messages, as an informed general public is more likely to become a driver of implementation.

HELCOM's resources – both in terms of staff and funding – for communication activities are rather limited. What is more, the fact that English is the official HELCOM language further complicates communication activities across the entire Baltic Sea region, especially for those aimed at the general public. HELCOM will therefore need to rely on multipliers such as national ministries and agencies, academic institutions, NGOs, civil society organizations, and maritime professionals that are in touch with the general public in their respective countries.

Finally, communication actions will need to consider the shift in global work practices, away from physical meetings to online collaboration. Until recently, with the very high number of physical meetings of the various HELCOM bodies, HELCOM outreach and awareness was happening “in the background” without much effort. As in-person meetings are likely to remain less frequent than before the pandemic, new communication formats will need to be considered.

Strategic considerations

Show of strong political support

To lend credibility to the updated BSAP as HELCOM's central programme of action for achieving GES in the Baltic Sea, a show of strong political support will be needed to drive the implementation of the plan – in the absence of a legal obligation to do so. The Ministerial Meeting of 2018 already provided the mandate for an ambitious update. The next Ministerial Meeting in 2021 will be the best platform for garnering and showcasing backing at the highest possible level in HELCOM, and for broadcasting this within the entire Baltic Sea region. Testimonials and commitments by the HELCOM Ministers, both written and on video, will show a political support beneficial for the implementation of the updated BSAP.

Accessibility and visibility

The updated BSAP needs to be accessible, physically in terms of access to the documents and related materials, but also intellectually in terms of comprehension. The updated BSAP will be published and referenced online on a dedicated space on HELCOM's website, along with a variety of documents and other publications such as summaries tailored to the various target audiences and uses or documents providing additional background information. To increase visibility, "brand recognition" and legibility of the BSAP and related communication documents, a visual identity comprised of a logo, graphic elements and templates for various documents will also be developed.

Using multipliers

Since HELCOM does not have the resources to reach a wider audience, it will need to rely on multipliers such as the relevant national bodies of its Contracting Parties, the embassies of the Contracting Parties in Helsinki, stakeholder organizations such as NGOs and civil society organizations, and marine and maritime professionals in contact with the general public. To facilitate their work, a communication toolkit will be provided to the multipliers. Basic technical guidance will also be offered, to help multipliers translate or adapt the various communication materials to fit their own purposes.

Media relations

Traditional media relations will also be considered, chiefly around the Ministerial Meeting 2021 (MM2021), as its high-profile attendance is guaranteed to attract media attention. Capitalizing on the MM2021, HELCOM will also actively engage with media houses in the wake of the event, indicating its availability for interviews and offering contributions such as articles and op-eds on the updated BSAP. At the national level, this will require support from the CPs, whereas media houses and agencies operating at a pan-Baltic or wider level and with a regional representation in Helsinki will particularly be reached out to by the Secretariat.

Online actions

In light of changing working arrangements and HELCOM's limited communication resources, particular focus will be placed on social media, especially on creating content suited for online communications. Emphasis will be placed on producing short videos, animations and infographics on the BSAP and related topics at regular intervals. The videos will also be used for official representation and presentation of the BSAP especially at events where HELCOM is invited but unable to attend in person. Regular online campaigns will be devised whenever an occasion presents itself, such as anniversaries and other milestones. The online actions will also be fed with content generated by the ocean literacy campaign (see below).

Ocean literacy campaign

An ocean literacy campaign on the main segments, namely biodiversity and ecosystems, hazardous substances and marine litter, sea-based activities and eutrophication, will further drive comprehension on the issues facing the Baltic Sea, especially increasing knowledge of the general public on marine and maritime related matters. At the same time, such a campaign will also mobilize the HELCOM stakeholders around the updated BSAP, generating further awareness and visibility.

Presentations in regional and global fora

To further increase awareness of the plan at the regional and global level, HELCOM will respond to as many requests as possible for presenting the BSAP, especially if this can be done online. HELCOM staff and stakeholders will have access to a presentation kit comprised of customisable slide shows, talking points and videos.

Ministerial Meeting 2021

A high-visibility event, the Ministerial Meeting 2021 is central to the BSAP communication, serving as a launch event for various communication actions and tools. It will also be open to stakeholder activities acknowledging the role of those stakeholders in the development of the updated BSAP and as a force driving implementation and awareness of the plan and environmental challenges affecting the Baltic Sea. Media events could also be organized, making use of the rare concentration of high-level decision-makers, experts and other stakeholders.

Monitoring implementation

For reasons of transparency and to maintain a constant focus on the implementation of the plan, monitoring actions will be established such as increasing the visibility and reach of the HELCOM Explorer database tracking progress and the planning of a HELCOM Stakeholder Conference a year after the updated BSAP's launch.

Sectors of the public and respective communication focus

- **Contracting Parties and their national agencies/bodies:** implementation of the updated BSAP, message multiplier;
- **HELCOM stakeholders:** sharing progress of implementation, message multiplier;
- **Media:** general presentation of the BSAP and the issues it tries to solve;
- **General public:** challenges affecting the Baltic Sea, ecological processes, and what can be done at the individual level to contribute to the BSAP objectives;
- **Other organizations (UN, EU):** awareness, and linkages with global and regional targets such as SDGs or MSFD.

Main communication messages

- **Update is based on a strong political mandate:** Already in 2018, the HELCOM Ministers acknowledged the success of the original BSAP and agreed on its update. Recognizing its importance for achieving good environmental status in the Baltic Sea, the Ministers officially approved the updated plan during the Ministerial Meeting 2021. The BSAP also benefits from a wide regional and cross-sectoral acceptance;
- **The original plan has delivered, and so will the update:** The BSAP remains one of the most effective instruments for achieving the HELCOM environmental objectives, offering a long-term vision and strategic orientation. The original plan can be credited with reducing inputs of nutrients and hazardous substances, the protection of biodiversity, and cleaner and safer shipping practices;
- **Implementation is key to success:** To achieve the ecological objectives of the BSAP, eventually leading to good environmental status of the Baltic Sea, more efforts need to be allocated to the implementation of the agreed actions and measures – the Baltic Sea is currently not in a good state, and more still needs to be done;
- **The BSAP is a science-based and holistic plan:** The BSAP is based on the latest science available on processes affecting the marine environment, containing a holistic set of science-based actions and measures for a healthy Baltic Sea;
- **Evolution, not revolution – and the update maintains a high level of ambition:** The updated BSAP is based on the current plan and maintains, at least, the same level of ambition. It also includes all actions and measures from the previous plan that haven't been implemented yet;
- **Sufficiency of measures:** The updated BSAP is based on a thorough analysis of the sufficiency of already agreed upon actions and measures, to understand which actions worked, which did not (or not fully), and which need more time or adjustments to deliver on their intended objectives;
- **Emerging and previously unaddressed pressures:** the updated BSAP includes emerging and previously insufficiently addressed pressures such as climate change, marine litter, pharmaceuticals, underwater noise, and loss and disturbance of seabed, among other pressures, making it fit-for-purpose to address today's challenges;
- **The ecosystem approach is widely considered in the updated BSAP,** as are the economic and social benefits of a Baltic Sea in a healthy state. Based on an integrated management of all human activities pertaining to the sea, the BSAP includes actions improving the health of the marine ecosystem in order to support a sustainable use of the various ecosystem goods and services;
- **Inclusive, stakeholder-driven update process:** the majority of HELCOM groups and bodies were involved in developing the update, and stakeholders were invited to submit their proposals for new actions;
- **International targets and objectives:** The updated BSAP is closely aligned with international and regional ecological objectives such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity, or the MSFD (for Contracting Parties being EU members). This position HELCOM as one of the regional platforms for the implementation of these targets and objectives.

Tools

Visual identity and communication toolbox

The visual identity, comprised of logo, colour scheme, fonts and other graphical elements will create a distinct personality for the BSAP, facilitating visibility and recognition. The visual elements will also help to differentiate the BSAP's different segments, organize content and increase overall legibility. A communication toolbox containing various templates for all sorts of communication products will facilitate developing communication actions in the most efficient manner and guarantee overall visual coherence between the different communication products.

Website

The BSAP pages on HELCOM's website will be overhauled, presenting the new BSAP, its structure, goals and objectives. All publications, additional resources and communication materials will also be made available for download on the website.

BSAP publication

With the target year of 2030 for the implementation of its actions and measures, the BSAP is due to have a rather long shelf-life. The main publication will therefore be designed in a way that will guarantee its future relevance, be easily readable and be primarily designed for online use. A small number of copies will be printed for handing out to high-profile audiences and provided to places where a hard copy may be of benefit, such as libraries.

Supporting publications and communication material

To provide additional background information, supporting publications will be produced, such as a publication depicting the update process and one on the identified gaps of the previous plan. Posters and brochures for general outreach activities will also be prepared, as will a presentation kit including various materials to facilitate presentations of the BSAP such as customizable slide shows, talking points and videos.

Legacy artworks

Six large-size panels – one overview, four main segments, one horizontal segment – will be commissioned from a visual artist to illustrate the different components of the BSAP, in a style used for visual recordings. The artworks will be unveiled during MM2021, and digital versions will further serve to support communication activities on the BSAP. The artworks will serve as a visual legacy of the updated BSAP.

Videos

Videos will be developed to respond to a possible high initial demand for presentations on the updated BSAP and to accommodate travel restrictions that may still be in place. To begin with, three videos will be made: a general presentation of the updated BSAP and its contents, a video message where the HELCOM Ministers quote from the BSAP's preamble, and another one by the Executive Secretary. Further videos will be developed inhouse based on templates from the communication toolbox, depending on needs that may arise.

Multiplier kit

The multiplier kit will contain all publications and communication material in digital format and in English language, as well as elements – both graphics and content – to easily design own communication materials for various purposes including print, web and social media. To facilitate translations and adaptations, the original and editable files will also be included. The kit will also contain instructions on how to use the various materials.

Branding and promotional material (MM2021)

To confer an image that is up to the occasion, the Ministerial Meeting 2021 will be branded based on its own visual identity but closely inspired by the one of the BSAP, with backdrops, banners and digital material such as background screens and presentation templates, as well as stationery items and other branded items such as badges, signage, give-aways and other promotional material.

Social media

A key component of the BSAP communication mix, social media will be used to create awareness of the plan and to engage with the HELCOM publics. Focus will be on producing messages and materials tailored to social media and that have the potential to spread, such as infographics, short animations and video interviews. HELCOM will be present on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. A series of visual materials, specific hashtags and instructions will also be shared and included in the multiplier kit. In addition to a specific BSAP launch promotion, short social media campaigns will regularly be developed on an ad-hoc basis whenever warranted by global events and occasions to benefit from a heightened attention and to increase visibility and outreach. Campaigns will be developed based on the previously mentioned communication toolbox.

BSAP-specific content

Specific contents on the BSAP will be created on a regular basis. These can include general news articles, interviews, opinion pieces by HELCOM and external stakeholders. The main focus of these contents will be on the implementation and successes, particularly highlighting best practices that have led to tangible results. These contents will be published on the HELCOM website, its periodic newsletter, update campaigns via email, social media, as well as offered to third parties such as stakeholders and media.

Media relations

The Ministerial Meeting 2021 will be the occasion for increased PR activities, both before, during and after the event. An online press conference could be arranged prior to the event, presenting the expected outcomes of the MM2021 and introducing some key issues about the BSAP. A main press conference could be held during the MM2021, with the participation of the HELCOM Ministers. A media kit will be prepared and published online, containing backgrounders, standard press releases and any other relevant materials. HELCOM will also actively offer to write articles and op-eds for relevant publications, for both specialised and mainstream media.

Ocean literacy campaign

To further support the implementation of the BSAP, an ocean literacy campaign will be developed during the last quarter of 2021, with a launch planned during the second quarter of 2022. The campaign will mainly focus on the segments of the BSAP, namely eutrophication, hazardous substances and litter, sea-based activities, and ecosystems and biodiversity. The main audience for the campaign will be youth and the general public. Possible partners will be organizations already dealing with promoting ocean literacy in the Baltic Sea region.

HELCOM Stakeholder Conference

A HELCOM Stakeholder Conference will be planned for the end of 2022 or beginning of 2023, with a focus on implementation – “One year after launch: where are we now on the BSAP”. The conference will help to show possible barriers of implementation already at an early stage in order to provide an adequate and prompt response to their mitigation.

Timeline for main actions

	2021				2022			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
General communication strategy								
Visual identity and toolbox								
Website				*				
BSAP main publication				*				
Supporting publications and material				*				
Legacy artwork				*				
Videos				*				
Multiplier kit				*				
Branding and promo material (MM2021)								
Social media actions	**	**	**	*				***
Media relations			**	*				***
Ocean literacy campaign						*		***
Content creation (articles, interviews...)								***
HELCOM Stakeholder Conference								

*) Launch

**) Pre-launch activities

***) Ongoing after 2022

Note: communication actions will continue after 2022, in form of reporting about the implementation, stakeholder conferences, assessments of the state of the Baltic Sea...

The financing aspect is contained in the HELCOM general budget.