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Background

The Twelfth Meeting of the Group on Sustainable Agricultural Practices (AGRI 12-2021) was held online on 10-11 November 2021. The Meeting was attended by all HELCOM Contracting Parties except for the European Union and by Observers from the Baltic Farmers' Forum for Environment (BFFE), Baltic Sea Action Group (BSAG), Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB), Race for the Baltic and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The Meeting was chaired by the Chair of the Agri Group, Sari Luostarinen, Finland.

This document contains the Outcome of AGRI 12-2021. The complete Outcome including all Annexes can be found [here](#).

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the Outcome of AGRI 12-2021 in general and consider it as appropriate. Specifically, the Meeting is invited to:

- take note that Ms. Sari Luostarinen was re-elected as the Chair of the Group for 2022 and for 2023 pending the decision by the Heads of Delegation to extend the mandate of the group beyond 2022;
- approve the organization of the HELCOM Workshop on mitigating ammonia emissions from agriculture and BAT and BEP for animal farming on 7-8 March 2022, lunch to lunch, in Estonia or at the Secretariat premises;
- approve that AGRI 13-2021 will be held on 6-7 April 2022 in Sweden or at the Secretariat premises.



Outcome of the Twelfth Meeting of the Group on Sustainable Agricultural Practices (AGRI 12-2021)

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Outcome of the Twelfth Meeting of the Group on Sustainable Agricultural Practices (AGRI 12-2021)

Introduction

0.1 The Twelfth Meeting of the HELCOM Group on Sustainable Agricultural Practices (AGRI 12-2021) was held online on 10-11 November 2021.

0.2 The Meeting was attended by all HELCOM Contracting Parties except for the European Union as well as by Observers from the Baltic Farmers' Forum for Environment (BFFE), Baltic Sea Action Group (BSAG), Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB), Race for the Baltic and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) (**Annex 1**).

0.3 The Meeting was chaired by Ms. Sari Luostarinen, Chair of HELCOM Agri Group.

0.4 Ms. Lotta Ruokanen, Professional Secretary and Ms. Susanna Kaasinen, Associate Professional Secretary at the HELCOM Secretariat, acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

1.1 The Meeting adopted the agenda as contained in document 1-1.

Agenda Item 2 Matters arising from other HELCOM work of relevance for the Group

2.1 The Meeting took note of the information on the outcomes of recent HELCOM meetings of relevance for the Agri group (document 2-2).

2.2 The Meeting took note of the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan adopted by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting on 20 October 2021 as well as the documents that support the implementation and provide background for the BSAP (document 2-1, **Presentation 1**) and discussed the implementation of the BSAP actions relevant for the Agri Group.

Action E18

2.3 The Meeting took note that Finland could share information on the effects of the payments for transferring organic matter between farms to encourage nutrient recycling. The Meeting also took note that BFFE and CCB could share information on the experiences on taxation of nitrogen and cadmium in fertilizers in Sweden as well as noted that Germany has already sent information on relevant reports.

2.4 The Meeting invited the Contracting Parties and Observers to send relevant information to the Secretariat (susanna.kaasinen@helcom.fi) **by 31 January 2022** and invited the Secretariat to submit to AGRI 13-2022 a document on the information received.

2.5 The Meeting pointed out that the action E18 is connected to also other actions in the BSAP such as E35.

Action E8

2.6 The Meeting clarified that the action E8 is focused on reducing phosphorus losses and that the application of gypsum and structure liming are only included as examples of possible approaches to improve soil structure.

2.7 The Meeting agreed to start collecting material on best practices to improve soil structure and aggregate stability on clay soils to reduce phosphorus losses from agricultural lands after AGRI 13-2022.

Actions E13-E14

2.8 The Meeting took note that Estonia is applying the EU BREF for large poultry and pig farms and has also a BAT document for cattle and that Finland is currently working on a project to develop national BAT and BEP, including also other animal groups mentioned in action E14. The Meeting also took note of

information regarding a Finnish-Russian large infrastructure project preparing examples of best practices for manure management.

2.9 The Meeting took note that the EU Industrial Emissions Directive (IED) is under revision and that further information on the revision, including the possible development of BREF for cattle farms, is expected in early 2022. The Meeting pointed out that the revision of the IED is a lengthy process, that the HELCOM BAT and BEP are not similar to the EU BREF and that the HELCOM document on BAT and BEP would be useful for the Contracting Parties regardless of the outcome of the revision of the IED.

2.10 The Meeting pointed out that actions E13-E14 are closely connected and are also linked to action E20 and agreed to come back to further work on actions E13 and E14 under agenda items 3 and 7.

Action E11

2.11 The Meeting welcomed the offer by CCB take the lead in organizing a Baltic Sea regional forum on agriculture to share experiences and proposed that the implementation of the BSAP actions regarding agriculture could be the topic of the first event.

2.12 The Meeting invited the Chair of the Agri Group and the Secretariat to work with CCB intersessionally to plan the event and also contact EUSBRS PA Nutri and PA Bioeconomy, as well as pointed out the possible synergies with the WWF Baltic Farmer of the Year Award ceremony.

National actions

2.13 The Meeting discussed the implementation of the national actions under the theme "Agriculture".

2.14 The Meeting took note that in Germany in areas where the nitrogen content in ground water has exceeded the limit values (red areas) the nitrogen fertilization limits will be tightened by 20%. The Meeting also took note that Germany is in the process of forming a new government (likely until the end of 2021) which might take new objectives and/or actions regarding sustainable agriculture; not at least since an important Commission on the future of agriculture managed to agree on a long-term compromise between both sides after decades of disagreements (German only: <https://www.bmel.de/DE/themen/landwirtschaft/zukunftskommission-landwirtschaft.html>). The Meeting welcomed the offer by Germany to share the information on the possible new objectives and/or actions with the Group as soon as the information is available.

2.15 The Meeting took note that Finland has adopted a new organic farming strategy which is in line with action E9 and the goal of 25% of the agricultural land to be farmed organically by 2030.

2.16 The Meeting took note of the view by BFFE highlighting the important role of advisory services in implementing all national BSAP actions.

2.17 The Meeting took note of the view by CCB encouraging the countries to implement all BSAP actions as soon as possible although some of the actions have only 2030 as the target year.

Agenda Item 3 Reduction of ammonia emissions from agriculture - Update of the HELCOM Recommendation 24/3

3.1 The Meeting considered and discussed the proposed scope of the Recommendation to reduce ammonia emissions from agriculture and the background document based on the work of the reference group (document 3-1).

3.2 The Meeting recalled the action E20 "Revise by 2023 the HELCOM Recommendation 24/3 on "Measures aimed at the reduction of emissions and discharges from agriculture" ensuring reduction of agricultural ammonia emissions and considering relevant Best Available Technology (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP)" in the updated BSAP and highlighted the need to make progress in drafting the Recommendation to meet the agreed deadline for the work.

3.3 The Meeting agreed on the proposed scope of the Recommendation in document 3-1 as the basis for further elaboration.

3.4 The Meeting agreed to organize a workshop to support the elaboration of the Recommendation as well as on BAT and BEP to reduce ammonia emissions and greenhouse gases from animal farming on **7-8 March 2022**, lunch to lunch, in Estonia, pending clarification from Estonia **by 31 January 2022**. The Meeting took note that if the workshop cannot be organised in Estonia it will be organised at the Secretariat.

3.5 The Meeting agreed on the following next steps for the further elaboration of the Recommendation and organization of the workshop:

- The agenda of the workshop will be prepared by Estonia supported by the Secretariat and Finland.
- Further comments on the Recommendation or the background document can be submitted to the Secretariat (susanna.kaasinen@helcom.fi) **by 30 November 2021**.
- The workshop will list and, if needed, prioritize measures to mitigate ammonia emissions under each topic in the scope as well as discuss launching the work on BAT and BEP.
- After the workshop, a drafting group consisting of the members of the reference group with possible additional nominations from the countries will further work on the draft Recommendation to submit the draft to AGRI 13-2022.
- The further elaborated version of the Recommendation will be discussed at AGRI 13-2022.

3.6 The Meeting took note that the Pressure Working Group invited the Secretariat to deliver to the Agri Group the latest Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets on nitrogen emissions and deposition which will be finalized by EMEP by the end of November 2021. The Meeting agreed that the information would be relevant to present at the workshop.

Agenda Item 4 Annual nutrient accounting at farm level and initial discussion on the development of a related Recommendation/Guidelines based on the best regional practices

4.1 The Meeting considered and discussed the sketch for the scope of the recommendation/guidelines on nutrient accounting (document 4-1-Rev.1).

4.2 The Meeting agreed as a first step to compile the guidelines on nutrient accounting at farm level and as a second step to consider whether they should be enacted via HELCOM Recommendation.

4.3 The Meeting pointed out that proximity of waterbodies could be considered as an aspect in the guidelines and that the work currently ongoing in the EU regarding the topic could be a relevant source of information.

4.4 The Meeting took note of the proposal by CCB that the planned Recommendation/Guidelines on annual nutrient accounting at farm level should be developed to support the implementation of actions E7, E17 and E31 in the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan in the following way: Develop Guidelines/Recommendation on best practices for nutrient accounting, balance fertilization rates site specifically to improve nutrient use efficiency and reduce nutrient surplus to create legal and institutional tools to advance towards introducing annual field-level fertilization planning and farm-gate nutrient balancing for nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) as a requirement for all farms in the Baltic Sea Region to reduce nutrient surplus on farmlands to the highest possible degree in a cost-effective way.

4.5 The Meeting agreed on the following next steps for the further elaboration of the document:

- Contracting Parties and Observers to nominate contacts to the drafting group and inform the Secretariat (susanna.kaasinen@helcom.fi) **by 3 December 2021**.
- Secretariat to make a doodle to set the date for the drafting group meeting tentatively to be held in the **end of January 2022**.
- The drafting group to divide the work for drafting the first version of the guidelines and consider the proposal by CCB to cluster actions that are connected.
- The further elaborated version of the guidelines to be considered at AGRI 13-2022.

Agenda Item 5 Nutrient recycling

5.1 The Meeting took note of the Baltic Sea Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy and the nutrient recycling related actions in the BSAP adopted by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting (document 5-1, **Presentation 2**) and discussed the plans for implementation of the Strategy to reach the agreed objectives.

5.2 The Meeting took note of the view by BFFE that action E33 should be implemented first since harmful substances need to be minimized in fertilizer products derived from sewage sludge before they can be utilized by farmers on a larger scale.

5.3 The Meeting took note that Finland is currently working on a project with the aim to develop an indicator for nutrient recycling and especially on how nutrients are moved between regions and noted the difficulties in collecting the required data. The Meeting also took note that Estonia is considering a similar approach.

5.4 The Meeting took note that Estonia is planning to integrate elements of the Baltic Sea Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy into their national circular economy document.

5.5 The Meeting agreed that it would be beneficial to have a joint project to facilitate the countries in implementing the nutrient recycling related BSAP actions.

5.6 The Meeting agreed on the following next steps:

- Secretariat and Contracting Parties to look for possible funding opportunities for a regional project on nutrient recycling to be discussed at AGRI 13-2022.
- Contracting Parties to inform the Secretariat (susanna.kaasinen@helcom.fi) of possible project partners in their countries.

5.7 The Meeting took note of the PA Nutri and PA Bioeconomy webinar on the implementation of the Baltic Sea Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy to be held online on 22 November 2021 (document 5-2) and welcomed the webinar as an important contribution on planning the implementation of the strategy.

Agenda Item 6 Transfer of knowledge and technology and exchange of good examples

Innovative water management

6.1 The Meeting recalled that as part of the Work Plan of the group, AGRI 8-2019 agreed to start compiling practices on sustainable water management (including assessment of efficiency to reduce input of nutrients) in agriculture which can be further developed to a relevant regional document that could take the form of a guidebook or Recommendation.

6.2 The Meeting considered the outcomes and tools of the WaterDrive project and their value for future work of the Agri Group, including the possible development of a regional guidebook or Recommendation (document 6-1, **Presentation 3**). The Meeting thanked the work done by the project, especially the catalogue of measures aiming to target measures on different levels with output also on economical aspects, and the Story Map approach. The Meeting also noted that the work of the project supports for preparation of implementing the action E19 in the 2021 BSAP on applying innovative water management measures as well as action E8 on best practices to improve soil structure and aggregate stability on clay soils to reduce phosphorus losses from agricultural lands.

6.3 The Meeting invited the project to draft their recommendations and strategic guidelines to HELCOM policy brief(s) **by 15 January 2022** to be circulated to the Agri Group contacts, inviting the Contracting Parties and Observers to comment the draft policy brief(s) to Secretariat (susanna.kaasinen@helcom.fi) **by 28 February 2022**. The Meeting agreed to consider the draft policy brief(s) in AGRI 13-2022.

6.4 The Meeting agreed to organise a half day workshop in the latter half of 2022 after considering the draft policy brief(s) and gaps and bottlenecks and come back to the details of the workshop in AGRI 13-2022.

Best available technology in animal farming

6.5 The Meeting recalled that AGRI 8-2019 agreed, as part of the new Work Plan of the group, to launch an activity to collect information on national BREFs for cattle farming and that based on the results of the stock taking, a project application could be considered.

6.6 The Meeting took note of the BSAP action “Develop by 2025 recommendations for Best Available Technology (BAT)/Best Environmental Practice (BEP) to reduce ammonia and greenhouse gas emissions from livestock housing, manure storage and spreading”.

6.7 The Meeting discussed the possibility to apply for funding for a regional project to develop a regional Recommendation for the BAT, noted that it would be important to involve as many Contracting Parties as possible to the work and agreed to discuss the project preparations in the same workshop with the ammonia emissions in March 2022.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation measures

6.8 The Meeting took note of the information that in Finland the main adaptation measure is related to water management but there is also a research programme related to land use and climate change and several studies and pilot programs on climate-friendly water management on peatlands.

6.9 The Meeting took note of CCB’s recent publication on flood management (originally in Russian), with civil society cooperation and national measures in several countries, having some larger catchments like Vistula and Neman as examples.

6.10 The Meeting also took note that BSAG and Finland have been involved since COP 2015 meeting in France in the 4/1000 initiative with the aim of annual increase of carbon in soils, and that there will be Northern Europe symposium June 2023 in Finland. The Meeting noted that BSAG is also cooperating with the Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI) on developing models and assessment for soil carbon by combining GHG observation results and satellite data, giving real-time information on the soil as a source or a sink of carbon and aiming for a carbon sequestration forecast.

Exchange of experiences and analyses of development of CAP strategic plans and other policy instruments

6.11 The Meeting took note of the information on the development of CAP strategic plans and other policy instruments as follows:

- DE – The draft strategic plan was published in May with three parts; 1) to promote diversified agriculture sector and guarantee food security, 2) environment and climate protection and fostering carbon sequestration and use of renewable energy, 3) socio-economy in rural areas;
- DK – The parliament has been negotiating for the past year on the new agricultural package to restructure the Danish scheme, considering climate change and WFD, which could have an effect on the CAP strategic plans. The CAP strategic plans are already in hearing;
- EE – Measures planned in CAP which contribute to water quality improvement are also implemented (linked) into the river basin management plans and into the programme of measures. Special measures are planned in CAP II pillar for surface and groundwater protection which are also included into the river basin management plans;
- FI – Continue the work with agri-environmental measures with traditionally 90% of farmers attending the scheme. The new eco-scheme from the Pillar I is still work in progress and ready by the end of the year. Ministries of Agriculture and Environment prepare together legislation for P fertilizer use, including all fertilizer products, limits for P use and set to agriculture and landscaping, and entering into force in 2023 at the same time as CAP strategic plans as part of the WFD implementation;
- LV – Agri-environmental measures provisionally planning measures in Pillar I eco-schemes (e.g. green areas, ecological focus, cover crops, crop rotations, minimum tillage, precision agriculture for mineral fertilizers and liquid manure spreading techniques to reduce ammonia release, grasslands, green strips, organic farming) and Pillar II in agri-environmental measures (environmentally friendly field

crop cultivation measures, payments for organic farming, extension of grazing period to reduce ammonia emissions, project-based measures for wetland construction);

- LT – Strong draft on Pillar I with no new measures on water protection but trying to make the measures more intensive and more widely implemented (minimum tillage, ecological farming, catch crops...). Pillar II is still in first phase of preparation;
- PL – Analysis and expertise on the CAP strategic plan for the Ministry of Agriculture, preparation of a draft "program to prevent water pollution with phosphorus from fertilization" for voluntary use by farmers, and development of sustainable tools for farmers for fertilization planning and nutrient balance;
- RU – Two groups with big agricultural companies (special staff, agrochemical usage) and small private farms (fertilisers, planning) – Three main programmes with sustainable rural development, soil restoration and every program has special instruments for environmental protection. Engineering manure and other agricultural waste processing, producing special map where manure is produced and a big project for big poultry farms and special workshop to collect manure and prepare compost from the manure. For cattle farms there is a need to have a special document how they work with manure in every farm, preparing cattle farm regulations with special waste fees. With small farms preparing them to be organic farms, assistance from region, to have good climate change scenarios to know what will happen in few years to prepare accordingly;
- SE – Some examples of measures that are discussed are carbon sequestration and reducing nitrogen losses, payments for precision farming and support for wetlands.

6.12 The Meeting took note of the concern and frustration by WWF over the situation where draft CAP strategic plans that will be locking in a significant part of the EU budget apparently still lack clear and measurable ambition to deliver the needed cuts in phosphorus and nitrogen losses.

6.13 The Meeting also took note that CCB finds the aimed interventions in CAP country strategic plans insufficient to limit nutrient leaching, and encourages the Contracting Parties to use the tools that are proposed in the CAP to apply them in the national strategic plans to limit nutrient leakage from agricultural land and thus reduce eutrophication of the Baltic Sea, and points out that the problem with alternating rainy periods and droughts should be taken into consideration when developing the strategic plans.

Agenda Item 7 Future work

7.1 The Meeting agreed that the next meeting of the group will be organized on **6-7 April 2022** in Sweden, pending clarification of Sweden **by 30 November 2021**. The Meeting took note that if Sweden is not able to organise the Meeting, it is possible to organise it at the Secretariat.

Agenda Item 8 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Group

8.1 The Meeting re-elected Ms. Sari Luostarinen as the Chair of the Group for 2022 and for 2023 pending the decision by the Heads of Delegation to extend the mandate of the group beyond 2022. The Meeting noted that it was not possible to elect Vice-chair(s) of the Group.

Agenda Item 9 Any other business

9.1 The Meeting invited the Contracting Parties and Observers to check the list of contact of the Agri group (document 11-1) and inform the Secretariat (susanna.kaasinen@helcom.fi) of possible changes.

9.2 The Meeting took note of The Archipelago Sea Hot Spot Road Map Project (document 9-2, **Presentation 4**) and the actions that have been and will be made to enhance agricultural water protection in the Archipelago Sea catchment. The Meeting took note of the comment by CCB that attention should be drawn in the future to clarify both the criteria for inclusion and deletion of hot spots with the 2021 BSAP, as these types of hot spots are the most difficult to remediate.

