



**BSPC**

BALTIC SEA PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE

**Report**  
on the Exercise of the  
**Observer Status**  
of the  
**Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference**  
**(BSPC) at the**  
**Baltic Marine Environment**  
**Protection Commission**  
**(Helsinki Commission - HELCOM)**

2016/2017





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Report on the Exercise of the Observer Status  
of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference  
at HELCOM

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*The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)* was established in 1991 as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from the Baltic Sea Region. BSPC aims at raising awareness and opinion on issues of current political interest and relevance for the Baltic Sea Region. It promotes and drives various initiatives and efforts to support a sustainable environmental, social and economic development of the Baltic Sea Region. It strives at enhancing the visibility of the Baltic Sea Region and its issues in a wider European context.

BSPC gathers parliamentarians from 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments and 5 parliamentary organisations around the Baltic Sea. The BSPC thus constitutes a unique parliamentary bridge between all the EU- and non-EU countries of the Baltic Sea Region.

BSPC external interfaces include parliamentary, governmental, sub-regional and other organizations in the Baltic Sea Region and the Northern Dimension area, among them CBSS, HELCOM, the Northern Dimension Partnership in Health and Social Well-Being (NDPHS), the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF), the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC) and the Baltic Development Forum.

BSPC shall initiate and guide political activities in the region; support and strengthen democratic institutions in the participating states; improve dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society; strengthen the common identity of the Baltic Sea Region by means of close co-operation between national and regional parliaments on the basis of equality; and initiate and guide political activities in the Baltic Sea Region, endowing them with additional democratic legitimacy and parliamentary authority.

The political recommendations of the annual Parliamentary Conferences are expressed in a Conference Resolution adopted by consensus by the Conference. The adopted Resolution shall be submitted to the governments of the Baltic Sea Region, the CBSS and the EU, and disseminated to other relevant national, regional and local stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region and its neighbourhood.

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## I. Introduction



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*Saara-Sofia Sirén  
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The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM), is widely recognized as the main coordinator and implementer of work towards protecting and bettering the marine environment in the Baltic Sea. Since its conception in 1974 and implementation in 1980, the ten Baltic Sea States that are contracting parties of HELCOM have been dedicated to and continuously working towards the goal of achieving a healthy environment in the Baltic Sea. As the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) shares many of the objectives of HELCOM, it has held an observer status to the commission since 2002 and enjoyed a fruitful relationship.

2016, the representatives of the Standing Committee of the BSPC during the 25th annual conference in Riga again agreed to extend the mandate of Sylvia Bretschneider. In its Brussels meeting in January 2017 the Standing Committee appointed Saara-Sofia Sirén as a co-observer and co-rapporteur. Both present this written report to the BSPC.

This report gives an overview of the major work done between August 2016 and this year's 26th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

3-5 September 2017 in Hamburg, Germany. The report will focus on cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM, main decisions in 2016-2017, and prospects for further cooperation between the two and future work of HELCOM

The report gives an update of important processes that HELCOM has been undertaking as well as an overview of new developments. One of these important processes was the application to designate the Baltic Sea as a NO<sub>x</sub> Emission Control Area (NECA) in order to reduce Nitrogen Oxide emissions. The application has been accepted and HELCOM is now working towards implementing this status. Two other major focus areas are the implementation of the MARPOL Annex IV Special area regulations and of the Marine Litter Action Plan.

Furthermore, continued development of the Second Holistic Assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) has been a key focus this year. The assessment will help HELCOM to determine the current state of the Baltic Sea and to identify next steps to achieving a healthy status. Contracting parties have been primarily negotiating to develop and agree on core indicators, which are the main tools of the assessment. Although there have been some challenges in making agreements and keeping with the timeline of the project, the first assessment was carried out in June 2017 as planned, and HELCOM is striving to fill gaps and make improvements for the next assessment planned for mid-2018.

An interesting new development for HELCOM this year was the opportunity to participate in a United Nations High Level Conference on Sustainable Development goals. Sweden and Fiji co-hosted this high-level conference in New York, USA from June 5-9, 2017. HELCOM presented its work at several side events of the conference, and along with individual contracting parties, made several voluntary commitments. This was an opportunity to showcase the importance of regional cooperation among sea conferences, with HELCOM and partners being a prime example of how fruitful such cooperation can be.

Looking forward, an important task for HELCOM this year was – and still is - to plan the 2018 Ministerial Meeting. At the 52nd Heads of Delegation Meeting, a general outline of topics to be addressed at the meeting was drafted, with four major topics to be discussed and the three major priorities of the EU Chairmanship of HELCOM. Furthermore, another important development for future planning is the ‘State of the Baltic Sea Report’ that was produced in June 2017. This report gives an assessment of the environmental status of the

Baltic Sea and informs directions for moving forward towards a healthy Baltic Sea.

This report is primarily based on the 51<sup>st</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> Heads of Delegation meetings and the 38<sup>th</sup> Helsinki Commission Meeting held in February 2017. It highlights the most important developments during the 2016-2017 time period and therefore focuses on the topics mentioned.



## II. Cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM

### 1. *HELCOM Report at the 25th annual BSPC*

In this period, the cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM begins with HELCOM's participation in the 25th annual Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, which was held in Riga, Latvia August 2016. Ms Monika Stankiewicz, the Executive Secretary of HELCOM, gave a report on the status of implementation of HELCOM commitments to achieve healthy marine ecosystems.

In her speech, Ms Stankiewicz expressed her gratitude to the BSPC for its very supportive role in the HELCOM work for the Baltic Sea marine environment. She outlined concrete achievements of HELCOM, especially in reducing inputs of excessive nutrients- nitrogen and phosphorus-, which are responsible for eutrophication and algal blooms. One of the greatest achievements was progress towards achieving status as NO<sub>x</sub> Emission Control Area (NECA). In 2016 the Baltic Sea coastal countries agreed and submitted a proposal to the International Maritime Organization, IMO, the global regulator of shipping, to designate the Baltic Sea as a NECA.



*Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary of HELCOM at the 25th BSPC in Riga*

Ms. Stankiewicz expressed in her report that another milestone achieved in curbing nutrient inputs was the ban to discharge untreated sewage from passenger ships in the Baltic Sea. As a step in implementing the Special Area Regulations in MARPOL Annex IV, the contracting parties had finally fulfilled the formal conditions for the ban to be enforced and the new regulations will take effect by 2021, at the latest, for most of the IMO registered passenger vessels. Understanding that strong regional cooperation is extremely important in achieving such goals and is therefore a particularly important theme this year, Ms. Stankiewicz acknowledged that the HELCOM cooperation with IMO and industry stakeholders on the establishment of the special regimes for ships operating in the Baltic Sea is successful example of such cooperation across sectors. Through this cooperation, regional bodies are better supported in their aim to implement global regulations.

## *2. Standing Committee Meeting of the BSPC in Brussels*

Another example of the strong cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM was demonstrated through HELCOM's participation in the Standing Committee meeting of BSPC in January 2017. Ms Carola Veit noted that the HELCOM Chairmanship 2016-2018 had been assumed by the EU Commission. As HELCOM is one of BSPCs most important partners, Ms Marianne Wenning, Chair of HELCOM, was invited to discuss the goals and priorities of the EU Chairmanship of HELCOM.

Ms Wenning noted that with regard to the Chairmanships first major priority, 'Reaching a healthy ecosystem in the Baltic Sea by 2021', new and improved assessment measures would help them determine the current state and pressures of the Baltic Sea and therefore help better determine how to move forward toward reaching the goal. The new holistic assessment, HOLAS II, evaluates the HELCOM countries' efforts for improvements in the Baltic Sea's environmental status since HOLAS I in 2010, the results of which were planned for release by mid-2017 and to be updated by mid-2018. Pressures and impacts in the region would be further quantified, for example via the latest 'Pollution Load Compilation', allowing progress towards the goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan to be evaluated. Ms Wenning stressed that this work is not only relevant to HELCOM activities, but that it would also help the contracting parties that were EU Member States in fulfilling their obligations under EU marine legislation.

Ms Wenning clarified further that the implementation of the regional action plan for marine litter is also a major priority of the EU Chairmanship. In addition to the environmental benefits the implementation of this action plan will bring, it is also an important way demonstrate the strength of Baltic regional cooperation in meeting global commitments.

Under the second major priority ‘Innovation for Sustainable Blue Economy and Healthy Ecosystems’, Ms Wenning emphasized that HELCOM should respond to the need for advanced social and economic analysis to improve the understanding of multidimensional patterns of indicators and their influence over the ecosystems of the Baltic Sea. This means that the data collected by HELCOM should be used for spatial planning. HELCOM would work on developing further synergies with regional or European governance frameworks, for instance with the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

Under the last major priority ‘Tackling the Challenge of Regional Governance’, Ms Wenning stressed that the adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should be used as tool for strengthening ocean governance and regional sea conventions. Several of the SDGs actually align closely with the work of HELCOM, and the objectives can serve to complement each other. In particular, HELCOM should be playing a crucial role in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 on oceans and seas.

### *3. BSPC Efforts to Support HELCOM*

The cooperation of between HELCOM and BSPC this year was not only demonstrated through HELCOM participation at BSPC events, but also through BSPC taking actions to lend its support in HELCOM’s work. Part of this effort can be seen in the resolution that resulted from the 25th annual Baltic Sea Parliamentary conference in Riga, Latvia August 2016. The sixth clause of the resolution was devoted entirely to strengthening cooperation between the two regional bodies. In the resolution, it was agreed by BSPC members that its work would further strengthen and develop HELCOM as the main coordinating body in the effort to protect the Baltic marine environment. In order to do this, they have committed to strongly supporting and encouraging a fast implementation of the Marine Litter Action Plan, which is one of the major priorities of

HELCOM. Additionally, BSPC committed to working harder to support the implementation of the NO<sub>x</sub> emission control area Roadmap for the Baltic Sea, another critical goal of HELCOM. Finally, the conference will take advantage of opportunities to stress the importance of HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) as one of the environmental pillars of the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

In addition to this, the BSPC contributed at the 38th meeting of HELCOM in Helsinki Finland, February 2017. Ms Saara-Sofia Sirén, member of the Finnish Parliament and HELCOM co-observer of the BSPC, provided constructive input for HELCOM in her speech, particularly emphasizing the importance of reducing land-based pollution in cooperation with the agriculture sector and on stronger river basin management cooperation. The high-level delegates of the meeting took note of this contribution and included it in the final outcome of the meeting.



Concerning the update of the Baltic Sea Action plan, Ms Saara-Sofia Sirén rejected any endeavours to soften the ambitious HELCOM targets. She stressed that an update should not lead to targets that are less ambitious than the actual ones. The BSPC and HELCOM member states should stand strongly behind ambitious and concrete targets.

Finally, the BSPC has shown its continued dedication to supporting HELCOM by submitting additions to the resolution of the 26th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference regarding HELCOM. In a letter to Ms. Carola Veit, Chair of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary conference. Co-observers Sylvia Bretschneider and Saara-Sofia Sirén enclosed two Proposals indicating the BSPC's commitment to supporting and strengthening the work of HELCOM. The content of the proposals is explained later in the section on prospective cooperation between HELCOM and the BSPC.

Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern  
International Secretariat

4 April 2017

(The participants....  
call on the governments in the Baltic Sea Region, the CBSS and the EU,  
regarding Co-operation in the Region, to

- further strengthen and develop HELCOM as co-ordinator of the regional implementation of ocean-related goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations, therefore the strengthened implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and the further commitment to achieve a Baltic Sea in good environmental status by 2021 are needed; if applicable, the Baltic Sea Action Plan should be renewed in line with the UN-Sustainable Development Agenda with a time perspective until 2030;
- support HELCOM in elaborating a regional action plan on underwater noise as well as in implementing the marine litter regional action plan and in its battle against eutrophication; concrete measures to reduce the input of plastics into the marine environment should be taken on;

## III. Main Decisions in 2016-2017

### *1. Progress in Application for NECA Status*

Since 2007, HELCOM has been in the process of applying for Nitrogen Oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) Emission Control Area (NECA) Status for the Baltic Sea in order to solidify efforts against the challenge of NO<sub>x</sub> emissions. Achieving this status would mean long-term decrease in NO<sub>x</sub> emissions, and HELCOM has been carrying out studies and intensive negotiations to achieve the requirements for this status.

In the 37th HELCOM Commission meeting in 2016, a roadmap to achieve this status was adopted. In HELCOM's 50th Heads of Delegation meeting, the final Baltic Sea NO<sub>x</sub> Emission Control Area Application along with the related information document on NO<sub>x</sub> reducing technology was approved. As agreed in the meeting, the documents were submitted to IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) 70 for final approval. These decisions have consequently led to amendments in the MARPOL treaty, which have been distributed to contracting parties for review. It is the hope that the amended document can be adopted at MEPC 71 in July 2017. As was the hope, it has been agreed upon that the North Sea and the Baltic Sea will be designated as Tier III emission control areas, and this is expected to go into effect on 1 January 2021. The successful application is a major achievement, but HELCOM must continue to work towards implementing this status.

In order to do this, it will be essential to focus on developing technology, which among other purposes aims to reduce economic impact to ship-owners. This will require all contracting parties to be actively engaged in HELCOM activities in this area, as well as other platforms dealing with these issues.

## *2. Progress in the Implementation of MARPOL Annex IV*

Since the Baltic Sea was designated as a special area under MARPOL Annex IV by IMO in 2011, HELCOM has been working continuously to outline and implement regulations for this status. In 2016 at the IMO MEPC 69, final Amendments to the MARPOL Annex IV that sets forth the Baltic Sea Special Area regulations were adopted, making the special area requirements effective for the Baltic Sea. During the 37th HELCOM Commission meeting in 2016, it was stressed that before the application dates of the regulations, it would be essential to ensure that port reception facilities are adequate and urged that further work needed to be done in this area.

To address these concerns, the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission adopted a Work Plan for 2016-2018 of the Cooperation Platform on Special Area According to MARPOL Annex IV at the 38th meeting of HELCOM. The Work Plan outlines further work to be done in terms of obtaining and exchanging information in three major areas: sewage Port Reception Facilities (PRFs) in the Baltic Sea, sewage composition and treatment, and technical issues related to sewage. Specifically under the area of Sewage PRFs, information on capacity of ports across the Baltic to receive sewage, as well as port and ship specific sewage amounts, discharge rates, and composition of sewage from cruise ships in the Baltic needs to be updated. In general, the region needs to promote greater exchange of best practices and challenges, especially in areas regarding technological solutions related to the management and treatment of sewage and composition of sewage. HELCOM hopes to achieve this through activities such as expert events and workshops, especially in connection with the Baltic Ports Organization and other stakeholder conferences. Updating the HELCOM Overview would also be a part of this work. These actions should be implemented with a deadline of the Cooperation Platform event in 2017.

## *3. Status of HOLAS II*

HELCOM conducted its initial Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS I) back in 2010. Starting from 2014, HELCOM has been developing a second assessment (HOLAS II) based on the results of HOLAS I to further determine what needs to be done for the Baltic Sea to reach good status. This

assessment is primarily used to track progress in achieving the goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, but will also potentially serve to help EU member States in their reporting for the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). Contracting parties have worked continuously to agree on core indicators, the primary assessment tools of HOLAS II, as well as other assessment measures.

The work on the Second Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) done in the last year has seen some challenges in parties agreeing on the core indicators. Various contracting parties have expressed reservations about specific indicators, and the Executive Secretary has acknowledged that data gaps regarding certain indicators still exist. NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), have expressed concerns over the delays these issues have caused in the process, and worry about issues of credibility given how much time and resources have been devoted to this project. However, through extended cooperation throughout the year at various meetings and conferences, contracting parties have been able to agree on many core indicators and assessment measures, and many of the reservations have been lifted. Additionally, they have made every effort to proceed with the assessment even when agreements could not be reached. For example, GEAR 15-2016 suggested that if a core indicator could not be operational Baltic-wide, then it could at least be used in sub-basins where all contracting parties sharing the basin are in agreement on the indicator. Furthermore, countries with study reservations about certain indicators could still use these indicators while taking note that they are at a test stage could potentially still need further development. HELCOM carried out a first assessment in June 2017 as planned and will continue to strive to fill gaps and reach agreements where still needed to be included in the second assessment in June 2018.

The results of the first assessment of HOLAS II can be found in the 'State of the Baltic Sea' report, which will be discussed in more detail later on in this report. The results indicate that there are signs of improvement in the overall state of the Baltic Sea, but the BSAP goals and objectives have yet to be reached. However, it is worth noting that some measures have not been in operation long enough to have an effect. The assessment does provide important information to determine what further actions need to be taken to reach a good environmental status and to implement the Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021. The important step now is further development to ensure a more complete assessment can be made by the end of the project period in 2018.



#### 4. *HELCOM Marine Litter Action Plan*

At the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in October 2013, it was decided that a regional action plan on marine litter should be developed no later than 2015 in order to significantly reduce marine litter by 2025. In 2015, HELCOM adopted this regional action plan as HELCOM Recommendation 36/1, which outlines concrete measures to prevent and reduce marine litter; aims to develop indicators and targets related to quantities, composition, sources and pathways of marine litter; and further aims to assess socio-economic and biological impacts of marine litter.

At present, there still lacks a regional system for monitoring of marine litter. However, based on national monitoring programmes within the region, HELCOM is currently preparing its first marine monitoring guidelines related to beach litter, which it hopes to have finalized for the next State and Conservation meeting. HELCOM SPICE, which is co-funded by the EU, supports the HELCOM Expert Network on Marine Litter in initiating regular activities for them to carry out collection of data and information in order to define a baseline for beach litter and explore possibilities to define such a baseline for seafloor litter for the Baltic Sea. Additionally, the data collected can contribute to establishing reduction targets for items of particular concern.

Regarding seafloor litter, national data has already been compiled through the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea's (ICES) DATRAS database. With the exception of two states (Finland and Russia), seafloor litter is currently monitored in all Baltic Sea countries and this information is included in the database. It is worth noting, however, that this monitoring occurs at trawl hauls for cost effectiveness, with fish stock assessment as a priority for determining location. This therefore impacts the representativeness of marine litter monitoring results. Expanding marine litter monitoring to additional areas would be necessary to carry out more complete assessments.

Recently a lot of progress has been made in the implementation of the action plan, especially in terms of developing indicators. Two pre-core indicators and one candidate indicator have been developed. Nevertheless, gaps still exist and HELCOM expressed that it must move with greater urgency to implement the plan, given that it is a priority of the EU Chairmanship of HELCOM.

### *5. HELCOM Representation at the SDG 14 High Level Meeting*

A particularly important opportunity for HELCOM presented itself this year that served to strengthen cooperation between contracting parties and improve progress toward the region's goals. At the 51st Heads of Delegations meeting, Sweden announced that along with Fiji, they would be co-hosting a High-Level United Nations Conference titled „Our oceans, our future: partnering for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.“ HELCOM was invited to make a contribution to the conference, as much of HELCOM's work aligns with certain UN SDGs, particularly SDG 14. Taking note of the joint communication with the EU „International Ocean governance: an agenda for the future of our oceans“ and its emphasis on the improvement and strengthening of regional governance, it was agreed that this would be an excellent opportunity to showcase the importance of regional cooperation in Regional Sea Conventions. The Baltic Sea region serves as a successful example of such cooperation, especially in areas regarding regional policy making, stakeholder involvement and establishing partnerships for integrated management of human activities.

Taking full advantage of this opportunity, HELCOM contributed to four side events of the conference. The first contribution was a presentation on integrated solutions and good-practice examples from marine regions at the 'Oceans in 2030 Agenda: The role of regional governance' event. At the 'Environmentally Sound Waste Management as Action against Marine Litter' event, the Chair of HELCOM Maritime, Ms Anna Patersson presented on sea-based waste: green ports and fisheries. Furthermore, a joint presentation with the Maritime Policy at Cruise Lines International Association on eutrophication and wastewater by ships was made at the panel on 'Collaboration in Public Private Partnership for a sustainable maritime future'. Finally, at the 'Regional Marine Protected Areas networks in Action' event, HELCOM Executive Secretary Monika Stankiewicz presented on HELCOM Marine Protected Areas (MPA).

In addition to these contributions, contracting parties registered four HELCOM voluntary commitments at the conference and many individual contracting parties made their own voluntary commitments as well.

## IV. Prospects for 2018 and Beyond

### *1. Strengthening Cooperation between the BSPC and HELCOM*

Moving forward, the BSPC strives to continue and strengthen its relationship with its partner HELCOM. Regarding this, the BSPC has again devoted language in its resolution of the 26th annual Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference to building upon its support of the work of HELCOM. Acknowledging that regional implementation of ocean-related goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations should be a major objective of the region, the BSPC parties have committed to further strengthening and developing HELCOM's role as the major coordinator of this goal in the region. In order to do this, it will be necessary for the BSPC to support and strengthen the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan by the governments and make an even stronger commitment to achieve a good environmental status for the Baltic Sea by 2021. If applicable, it is also important that the Baltic Sea Action Plan will be renewed in line with the UN Sustainable Development Agenda with commitments extending to 2030.

Additionally, the parties expressed their commitment to support HELCOM in some of their major objectives by helping to develop a regional action plan on underwater noise and providing support in implementing the Marine Litter Regional Action Plan. Furthermore, the BSPC will strengthen its support for HELCOM's battle against eutrophication and will work to develop and implement concrete measures to reduce the input of plastics into the marine environment.

To support the implementation and realization of the work, it is important to strengthen the cooperation between the BSPC and HELCOM. Therefore a closer partnership and possibilities for a more active participation of observers in future HELCOM work would be useful.

## *2. Ministerial Meeting 2018*

A particularly important task for HELCOM this year included the planning of the next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, to be held in 2018. The purpose of this meeting is for Ministers to produce a focused statement which should help accelerate the implementation of Baltic Sea Action Plan and orient the Heads of Delegation in their work until 2021. The EU has offered to host this meeting during their chairmanship, and plans have been made to invite the OSPAR Commission. A number of topics were suggested to be covered by the meeting, with the renewal of the BSAP being one of the most important. At the 52nd Heads of Delegation Meeting a first draft outline for the 2018 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting was proposed. While still tentative, this draft proposes topics under the three major EU Chairmanship priorities: Reaching a healthy ecosystem in the Baltic Sea by 2021, innovation for a sustainable Blue Economy and healthy ecosystems, and tackling the challenge of regional governance.

### *1. Reaching a healthy ecosystem in the Baltic Sea by 2021*

The first step to be taken by the ministerial meeting should be reflecting on the current state, pressures and impacts on the Baltic Sea. Taking into consideration the results of the HOLAS II assessment released in June 2017 and of the PLC-6 (regular assessment of the Baltic's pollution load) conducted by HELCOM, the meeting must make note of progress made in reducing pressures on the marine environment and reaching a healthy ecosystem. In the declaration, the ministers should identify priority pressures and components of ecosystems that are not in good status while under said pressures. Additionally, further work needs to be carried out to develop and adopt core indicators in December 2017, particularly for seafloor integrity, marine litter and underwater noise.

In order to respond to these pressures, a second major task to undertake is to update the Baltic Sea Action Plan beyond 2021 towards 2030. At the 52nd Heads of Delegation Meeting, the members agreed that the term “update” better suits the foreseen process and that the previously agreed commitments should not be opened. An analysis of the results of the first version of the ‘State of the Baltic Sea’ report will be an important next step to understand the underlying reasons for not reaching a good environmental status yet.

The meeting should track how many actions of the plan have been implemented and the progress that has been made in key areas, especially in reducing nutrient inputs to the Baltic Sea. Special attention should be given to a comparison of HOLAS II results and BSAP follow up results to identify where actions have been inadequate. In addition to renewing commitments of the plan, the Ministers should also outline new commitments, especially in the areas of battling eutrophication and further accumulation of nutrients in the marine ecosystem, potential for further reduction of inputs of phosphorous and nitrogen, and further actions to be taken to reach reduction targets. Additionally, they should address the implementation of the Marine Litter Action Plan, implementation of commitments on underwater noise, regional quantitative reduction targets for physical disturbance, and the inclusion of climate change adaptation into HELCOM work.

## *II. Innovation for a sustainable Blue Economy and healthy ecosystems*

Another task HELCOM must take on is furthering its role in the promotion of knowledge and innovation in the Baltic Sea. This knowledge and innovation brings investment in Blue Growth sectors with strong potential, which would contribute to the development of a healthy ecosystem in the Baltic. Such a system is otherwise known as the sustainable Blue Economy. The HOLAS II results, cooperation with BONUS projects, and Maritime Spatial Planning among other approaches will help HELCOM achieve this.

Additionally proper management and protection of marine resources is necessary to achieve this priority goal. Marine protected areas (MPA) play a key role in establishing a sustainable blue economy in that they help rebuild fish stocks and improve protection of coasts, while also contributing to coastal and marine tourism. HELCOM must monitor and assess the MPA network as well as improve management of MPAs to reduce pressures and impacts to these areas.

In this regard, the third major task the ministerial meeting should undertake is enhancing economic and social analysis and innovation to implement the ecosystem approach. Based on the HOLAS II results, it is important to determine how environmental targets can be coordinated with economic and social goals so that they support each other. In particular, HELCOM should provide knowledge based regional guidance in terms of innovation for nutrient removal.

### *III. Tackling the challenge of regional governance*

One particularly important theme for HELCOM in terms of regional governance is strengthening cooperation, especially with regard to fisheries. This was exemplified through its involvement in the “Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) Global Dialogue with Regional Seas Organizations and Regional Fisheries Bodies on Accelerating Progress Towards the AICHI Biodiversity Targets” held in Seoul, Korea in September 2016. The event emphasized the need for closer cooperation at the regional level in terms of fisheries and the environment, through strengthening of exchange of information and best practices, coordinating work on shared objectives, and addressing areas of common interest. HELCOM’s Working group FISH serves as a particularly good example of cooperation in this regard, however, HELCOM acknowledges that a lot of areas for improvement remain. For example, there is no formal system of exchange in place between HELCOM and fisheries administration or the fisheries management work taking place with BALTFISH or the EU-Russia arrangement. Such an exchange would be beneficial to creating synergy between the various projects of the different groups and possibly eliminate any overlap.

The fourth major area for the ministerial meeting to tackle is implementing SDGs and regional ocean governance. HELCOM should continue to seek out opportunities such as the successful designation of the Baltic Sea as a NO<sub>x</sub> Emission Control Area to strengthen cooperation in the region. In particular, it should seek to strengthen cooperation with BALTFISH and the Baltic Sea Advisor Council, and continue coordinating regional implementation of Sustainable development Goal 14. Finally, HELCOM should continue its work with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, especially in regards to integrating HELCOM monitoring systems into the development of the monitoring system of the EU Strategy, involving EUSBSR stakeholders in sharing the HOLAS II results, and continuing its role as horizontal action coordinator for Horizontal Area „Spatial Planning.“

It was agreed that based on these four key points, the work in these areas would be divided up into four drafting groups at the ministerial meeting.

### *3. The State of the Baltic Sea Report*

In order to strive towards HELCOM's major goal of reaching a healthy ecosystem in the Baltic Sea by 2021, it is important to track progress and assess the environmental situation of the Baltic Sea along the way. To this end, HELCOM prepared a 'State of the Baltic Sea Report' in June 2015, which provides an update of the environmental situation in the Baltic Sea for the period from 2011 to 2015. With this report, HELCOM can determine new directions and renew commitments aimed at improving the environmental status of the Baltic Sea. The report touches on a variety of themes, including the status of the ecosystem, environmental pressures and human well-being. The primary form of assessment comes from HELCOM core indicators of HOLAS II, which indicate the status of specific elements of biodiversity and human-induced pressures on the Baltic Sea against regionally agreed threshold values, based on current knowledge and available data for the assessment. Core indicators also provide assessment for eutrophication and contamination status. For marine litter, underwater noise, and seafloor loss and disturbance, since HELCOM core indicators are still under development, the assessment is mostly qualitative. The report also takes note of trends over time and spatial aspects, as far as data are available, in order to predict potential future developments and identify geographic areas of major importance for the assessed themes.

The results indicate that in general, a lot of work still needs to be done to achieve overall good environmental status in the Baltic Sea. However, one should note that many measures that have been implemented have not been in effect long enough to have an impact, and further assessment should be made later on. The assessment provides significant information for further work towards reaching good environmental status for the Baltic Sea and implementing the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021. The assessment may also serve as a regional guideline baseline for implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals or the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

Pressures on the Baltic Sea are various, some of the major ones being eutrophication, marine litter, and underwater noise. Based on the report, at this time the state of hazardous substances is showing a trend toward improvement, and it is expected that by 2020, all Baltic States will be at acceptable levels. Under the category of species removal by fishing and hunting, there also does not seem to be great concern in terms of hunting, and several of the fish stocks are in good status. However, there still remain several fish stocks that were unable to be assessed. In terms of eutrophication, there has

been some improvement in some indicators and sub-basins, however generally the state of eutrophication has deteriorated. Marine litter was not assessed as core indicators have not been fully developed at this time, and furthermore assessments were not able to be made on adverse effects of underwater sound on marine species, or adverse effects of seabed loss and disturbance.

Biodiversity of habitats, fish, sea mammals, and water mammals was also a major component of the assessment. Although many species and habitats are in good status, the biodiversity in general is inadequate and there is significant need for further assessment in many areas. The food web status was also assessed and is currently deteriorating.

The cumulative and human impact assessment of these statuses indicate that the highest potential environmental impact is seen in the south-west Baltic Sea, and concentration of nutrients (representing inputs of nutrients), contamination, underwater noise, non-indigenous species, and the extraction of fish represent the most significant pressures. The costs of eutrophication, inadequate status of marine vegetation and fish stocks, and recreational losses due to degradation of marine environment are estimated to be 3.8 – 4.4 billion euros, 1.8 –2.6 billion euros and 1-2 billion euros annually respectively.

Despite general inadequate progress towards achieving a good overall environmental status in the Baltic Sea and lack of assessment in many of these areas, further assessment tools are in the process of being developed, and it is predicted that the Baltic Sea Action Plan will lead to progress in the long term in several areas. The current assessment will also help determine what areas to focus on moving forward for more efficient planning and management of environmental issues.

Moreover, the HELCOM members took note of the potential of Circular Economy as a solution for many challenges threatening the wellbeing of the sea like eutrophication and marine litter. The Circular Economy Package adopted by the European Commission on 2 December 2015, is recognized by the HELCOM members as an important approach to increase recycling of waste. The proposed actions will contribute to “closing the loop” of product lifecycles through greater recycling and re-use, and bring benefits for both the environment and the economy.

Furthermore, achievements in other areas from actions taken by HELCOM should not be dismissed. HELCOM is already carrying



out a significant number of concrete actions and has implemented 126 recommendations agreed upon in the Baltic Sea Action Plan. Generally, more than half of joint regional actions and actions implemented at the national level have been carried out. Additionally, HELCOM carries out significant actions beyond concrete measures, in areas such as monitoring, improvement of the knowledge base, and agreement on how to assess the state of the Baltic Sea. In these areas, HELCOM has enjoyed a lot of success in its work. This success is demonstrated, for example, in its designation of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) and commitment to further work in this area, or its agreement on reduction targets for input of nutrients and regular assessment of progress in reaching these targets. Reduction of pollution hot spots as part of its programme established in 1992, and the achievement of designation as NO<sub>x</sub> Emission Control Area and a special area under MARPOL Annex IV also exemplify this success. The Baltic Sea is the first area in the world to receive a status of a special area for sewage from passenger ships and having this status enforced by the International Maritime Organization, and this is the result of the regional cooperation coordinated by HELCOM.





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