

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)

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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 Co-operation (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



Sylvia Bretschneider
President of the Landtag
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
(1960 † 2019)*



Saara-Sofia Sirén
Member of the
Finnish Parliament

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) is widely recognized as the main coordinator and implementer of actions towards protecting and improving the marine environment in the Baltic Sea. Since its establishment in 1974 and implementation in 1980, the ten contracting Baltic Sea States have consistently committed themselves to 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.

In 2017 the representatives of the Standing Committee of the BSPC agreed to extend the mandate of Sylvia Bretschneider and of Saara-Sofia Sirén as co-observer and co-rapporteur. This report is presented to the BSPC with gladness.

This report gives an overview of the major work done between August 2018 and this year's 28th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. The report will focus on the cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM, main decisions in 2018-2019, and prospects between the two as well as future work of HELCOM.

The report presents an update of important processes that HELCOM has been undertaking as well as an overview of new developments.

HELCOM celebrated its 40th Commission Meeting, that was held in Helsinki, Finland 6-9 March 2019. It was centered around the results from the Second Holistic Assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) which was conducted and finalized in mid 2018. Unfortunately, the report revealed, that most of the objectives of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) will likely not be reached by its target year 2021. As a result, the Ministerial Meeting 2018 decided on a mandate to update the BSAP by 2021.

This update process has been of great importance for HELCOM's work in the last year. It gives the opportunity to not only reassess the plan but to include new arisen topics and align the BSAP with several other international aims such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (SDGs), Aichi Targets, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the UNESCO Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030.

The HELCOM working groups collected a vast and diverse amount of data in the past year, from marine activity, nutrient input, the influence of rivers on the Baltic Sea to fish populations and the impact of climate change on the Baltic Sea today and in the future. This is the most complex data collection and thus overview and knowledge of the Baltic Sea that HELCOM ever produced and obtained.

It will provide accuracy and efficiency to new measures but could also be of great interest and benefit for other international and regional bodies such as the BSPC.

This report is primarily based on the 40th Helsinki Commission Meeting 2019 and the 55th and 56th Heads of Delegation meetings. It highlights the most important developments during the 2018-2019 time period.

The State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as well as Saara-Sofia Sirén as a member of the Finish Parliament are deeply saddened to announce that Sylvia Bretschneider, President of the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has passed away on 28. 04. 2019 after a long and courageous battle against serious illness.

She held the position of President of the BSPC in 2014-15, was a longstanding member of the BSPC Standing Committee, Chair of the BSPC Working Group on Sustainable Tourism 2015-2017 and Rapporteur on Sustainable Tourism. Since 2002 she has held her position as an observer of HELCOM and was greatly engaged in the relationship between the two bodies.

Supporting international cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region and the fulfilment of the mandates and responsibilities for her state parliament has been of utmost importance to her. From the beginning of her Presidency of the State Parliament in 2002, she started her ambitious work for the BSPC and gladly held the mandate as an observer of HELCOM immediately after her first election. The goal to achieve a healthy Baltic Sea with great collaboration and joint policies of the coastal countries has always been a matter close to her heart in her longstanding political career. With tremendous sadness and respect the BSPC has lost one of its most committed members and an outstanding personality with remarkable ambition towards its goals and values.

The State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern expressed gratitude for her tireless work and is thankful to the BSPC Standing Committee for the observer mandate in the Helsinki Commission. With honor, the parliament presents this report post mortem on behalf of Sylvia Bretschneider.

Her engagement and passion for the BSPC and HELCOM will be upheld and serve as an ambitious goal and inspiration for the states' to continue the great work on cooperation between the Baltic Sea States and achieving a healthy environment.

II. Cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM

1. HELCOM Report at the 27th annual BSPC

The close partnership between The HELCOM and the BSPC was highlighted by Kimmo Tiilikainen, Minister of the Environment, Energy and Housing of Finland and representative of the HELCOM Chairmanship in his speech at the 27th BSPC in Mariehamn.



Kimmo Tiilikainen

He welcomed the rotating chairmanship to his country Finland for two years. After presenting the findings of the review of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, Mr. Tiilikainen emphasized the need for greater action towards achieving the goal of a healthier Baltic Sea.

The joint strengths of HELCOMs partners include a great scientific basis. The exchange and funding of knowledge and research for more than 100 years between the countries builds a base for tackling the environmental challenges of the Baltic Sea.

With a shared goal and vision, of what a “healthy Baltic Sea” looks like, the parties are able to collaborate and cooperate efficiently.

The Baltic Sea Action plan exemplifies how successful this collaboration can be. With this they were able to make the Baltic Sea a Nitrogen Emission Control Area (NECA) and ban discharges of untreated sewage from cruise ships.

With great success, 12% of the Baltic Sea have been designated as marine protected areas and the states agreed to constitute nine Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) as part of the work within the UN Convention of Biological Diversity. Therefore, Mr. Tiilikainen pointed out, that the HELCOM is well equipped to tackle the challenges of the Baltic Sea.

He reminded the conference that the most pressing challenges are eutrophication and the vast impacts of climate change. Together they can warm the Baltic Sea 2-4 degrees in the next century and have a great influence on nutrients, species and their habitats.

But also issues like marine litter, microplastic, hazardous substances, spreading of invasive species and underwater noise hold great importance.

He announced that to resolve these issues he commissioned the preparation of a special program for water protection that is known to cut phosphorus losses by 50%.

He declared the priorities of the Finnish chairmanship to be the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, the reduction of nutrient inputs and nutrient recycling as well as the impact of climate change.

Mr. Tiilikainen underlined the synergy between HELCOM and the UN Agenda 2030 to work towards a sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region.

Finally, he reminded the parliamentarians of their great part and responsibility to ensure that the Baltic Sea receives the attention it deserves in parliaments and national budgets.

2. Statement of the BSPC at the XX Baltic Sea Days



Jorodd Asphjells address at the XX Baltic Sea Days

On 21st and 22nd march the International environmental forum “Baltic Sea Days” celebrated the 20 years of joint collaboration and progress in the Baltic Sea area in St. Petersburg.

BSPC President Jorodd Asphjell and the representative of the delegation of the Finnish Parliament to the BSPC, Maria Tolppanen attended the anniversary to celebrate the HELCOM-supported achievements but also discuss upcoming challenges.

In his address to the Forum Jorodd Asphjell congratulated the Baltic Sea Days for their achievements and gave thanks for the great cooperation and exchange of information.

But he also reminded attendees that actions need to be taken on national and regional levels, to further the common goals of both the HELCOM and the BSPC.

Environmental issues are of great importance to the BSPC and they will aim to lead with progressive steps and convince those, who are still hesitant to act. He pointed out, that in politically difficult times, constructive dialogue and close cooperation become significant.

He recalled, that the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting realized these problems and manifested the resolutions in the ministerial declaration. However the BSPC urges and encourages the members of HELCOM to take even stricter action and pay attention to conduct environmental measures.

In summary, Jorodd Asphjell called to develop regional and national strategies to

- achieve the UN's Agenda 2030 goals
- clear marine litter from the Baltic Sea
- promote sustainable agricultural practices
- promote more sustainable shipping
- tackle eutrophication and underwater noise
- halt untreated discharges without delay and to show determination to clean up the heavily polluted sea
- take urgent, efficient action against the worrying levels of plastics and microplastics in the seas
- support and implement the regulations on reducing or banning single-use plastic as quickly as possible
- promote public awareness of microplastic pollution throughout the Baltic ecosystem
- encourage customers to avoid personal care products containing micro plastics
- further strengthen the interaction between the UN Sustainable Development Goals and human rights while recognising their close relationship

He expressed great interest in the outcomes of the Baltic Sea Days expert seminars and the joint proposals. Jorodd Asphjell offered the support, dialogue and friendship of the BSPC to achieve the set goals and further increase the cooperation to strive towards a healthy Baltic Sea.

III. Main Decisions in 2018-2019

1. Update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan

The Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) was initially agreed upon in 2007 in Krakow, Poland. It is an ambitious program to reach good environmental/ ecological status (GES) of the Baltic Sea by 2021. It provides a concrete plan for the HELCOM States and has been adopted by all of them. From 2014-2018 a Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) was conducted to determine the current state of the Baltic Sea and to follow up on the Action Plan and what has been achieved so far. The final report on the assessment was given in June 2018 and showed that while there are some signs of improvement, the environmental goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan have not been reached.

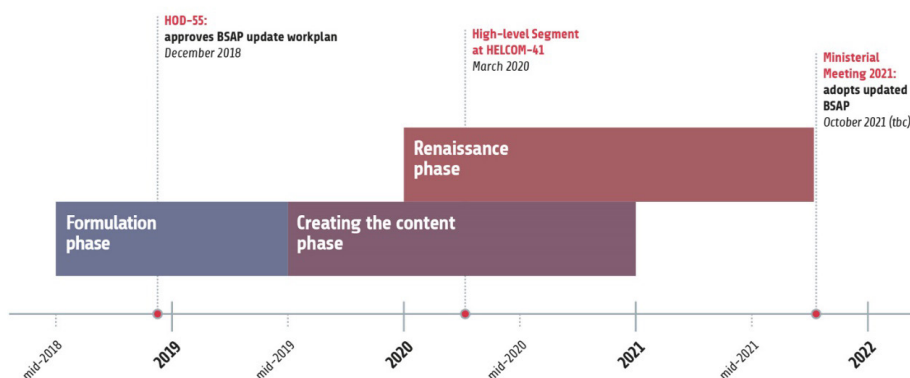
On the HELCOM Ministerial meeting in March 2018, the results of HOLAS II were thoroughly evaluated and discussed. It has been decided to update the current BSAP including the results of the holistic assessment and reconduct it after 2021. This update is an opportunity to resolve inadequacies of the previous plan, and to include new arisen issues while profiting from great efficiency and a united plan that keeps track of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

The general structure of the BSAP was of great success and will be upheld. But the adjustments will especially consider

- the integration of cross- cutting issues such as climate change
- important new topics that appeared since the last BSAP and have been addressed in the BSPC such as marine and beach litter, underwater noise seabed loss and measures for biodiversity
- making a standing commitment to achieve the SDGs, Aichi Targets, the Marine Strategy Framework directive (MSFD) and the UNESCO Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.
- to include a HELCOM Science agenda concomitantly with the BSAP to outline existing and foreseen scientific needs
- the new year in which the status of GED will be accomplished

The 56th Head of Delegation Meeting (HOD 56) concluded, that the Update will be conducted in several steps. In the “Formulation” phase from mid 2018- mid 2019 the workplan for the update process will be established and proposals for adjustments will be developed. The second phase is named the “Creating the content” phase and will conclude after the Formulation. During the second phase the current BSAP will be reviewed thoroughly and the sufficiency of measures will be analyzed. The third, time overlapping, phase “Renaissance” will be used to propose new actions and improve the existing ones. The Ministerial Meeting in 2021 will then adopt the updated BSAP.

Three phases of the BSAP update



To help the development and execution of an updated BSAP HELCOM initiated two key instruments to the update process: The ACTION project and the HELCOM SOM Platform. These initiatives are a direct result of the 2018 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting. The essential part of both initiatives is the development of “business as usual” (BAU) scenarios.

BAU scenarios describe how the state of the marine environment would change over time due to future developments in climate change, marine use and other circumstances and the effect of measures impacting the Baltic Sea. The BAU scenarios will provide a better understanding about how far away the States and regions are from achieving GES with the measures the undertake at the moment.

Actions to evaluate and identify effective measures to reach GES in the Baltic Sea Marine region (ACTION)

The ACTION initiative is a HELCOM project and co-financed by the EU. It will run from January 2019 until December 2019. It is designed to contribute and assist to the update of the BSAP and especially focus on combining measures to also fulfil the EU MSFD Program as well as reach the UNs SDGs. The ACTION project is evaluating the effectiveness of already existing measures but also analyze the environmental conditions that influence the achievement of GES like prospective climate change and incorporate these aspects into the recommendations for an updated BSAP.

The tasks and issues to be addressed by the ACTION Project are categorized in work packages (WPs):

- WP1: identifying high-risk areas for by-catch of mammals and birds, evaluating technical measures to reduce by-catch of harbour porpoise, estimating the effect and cost of these measures
- WP2: Impacts on the seabed: evaluating restoration measures in coastal areas and impacts of spatial regulation of offshore fisheries, including effects on benthic communities and costs of measures
- WP3: Marine protected areas (MPAs): developing a method to assess effectiveness of MPAs and how MPAs contribute to achieving GES
- WP4: Input of nutrients: analysing sources and trends of nutrient input and compatibility of nutrient reduction targets under different policies, evaluating the combined effect of existing measures
- WP5: Conditions that influence GES: analysing the conditions of the Baltic Sea that influence achievement of GES, including climate change
- WP6: Sufficiency of measures: developing business-as-usual (BAU) scenarios for selected topics to identify potential gaps in measures to achieve GES, estimating cost-effectiveness of tentative new measures.
- WP7: Policy-project interphase: ensuring guidance from and timely contribution to the BSAP update process and the preparation of MSFD

Sufficiency of Measures (HELCOM SOM Platform)

The Sufficiency of Measures Platform (SOM) was established in early 2019 and will finish its work by mid- 2020. The group will consist of members of the HELCOM working groups, the HELCOM network on social and economic analysis (ESA) as well as experts in environmental economy and natural scientists.

The main task will be, to analyze the sufficiency of measures with the help of BAU scenarios, alike the ACTION group. Furthermore, they will prepare scientific and economical background information to support new proposals on new HELCOM projects, which will also be able to help the working Groups in their participation in the update.

The SOM initiative will carry out their efficiency of measures analysis in the topics of:

- Biodiversity: analysis in groups for birds, fish and mammals
- Hazardous substances: analysis on priority substances
- Marine litter: beach litter, litter on seafloor
- Non indigenous species: ballast water, biofouling, aquaculture, etc.
- Underwater Sound: analysis on the activities producing noise affecting a specific group e.g. marine mammals, fish

While the HELCOM ACTION and SOM projects are different initiatives with different work fields, they are organized to produce complementary and coordinated results and input towards the update of the BSAP. The SOM platform is entrusted with overseeing the analyses of joint effect measures and to prepare the working groups' thematic meetings to contribute to the updated BSAP.

2. Developments in achieving a GES

New recommendation on threatened habitats and biotopes

While the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan was one of the most important aspects in the past year, the HELCOM conference and working groups have also had great success in other endeavors.

At the 40th HELCOM meeting the commission adopted a new recommendation on threatened habitats and biotopes in the Baltic Sea. The HELCOM Red List Assessment identifies habitats and biotopes that are under threat to collapse due to climate factors such as eutrophication or oxygen depletion. But the mere identification of these areas as threatened will not be sufficient, action needed to be taken to preserve and protect the currently 59 habitats and biotopes under threat in the Baltic Sea. Unfortunately many of the arisen issues are not covered by other regulations and protections programs and guidelines.

The Ministerial Meeting in 2018 agreed to develop a new HELCOM Recommendation for biotopes that are at risk. Through the persistent work this new recommendation was able to be accomplished and adopted within a very short time.

New AIS data management

Furthermore, the data management for using the Automatic Identification System (AIS) has been greatly revised and improved to create a unified standard. The AIS data sent by all ships will be made available to all participating parties free of charge. With this measurement the maritime safety and protection of the Baltic Sea can be greatly improved. It also provides better information and more efficient future planning of marine traffic or accident investigation as well as pollution prevention amongst other uses.

HELCOM BALEX DELTA Exercise in Karlskrona, Sweden

**HELCOM
BALEX DELTA**
KARLSKRONA 2018



A crucial part of the collaboration between the Baltic Sea States is the preparedness and action in emergency management for incidents on the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea is one of the busiest marine areas of the world. The waters are heavily frequented by cargo and container ships, tankers, passengers but also fishing vessel. This results in a great risk of major oil or chemical spills, for which immediate and coordinated action is fundamental.

A chemical or oil spill poses great risk for the marine but also land environment since the hazardous substances reach the shore quickly. The endangered marine and coastal areas often reach several countries' territories. This created the need for instant joint action to minimize the effects on the environment in the international Baltic Sea Area.

Therefore, the HELCOM BALEX Delta exercises are organized to practice response capabilities and develop alarm procedures for the joint countries' cooperation. In 2018 Sweden hosted the exercise in Karlskrona, which was one of the most extensive, longest and biggest of these exercises worldwide.

The Contracting Parties Denmark, Estonia, EU, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden participated with 18 vessels, of different sizes in the exercise at sea. Maritime incident Response Group from Sweden and Norway participated, as did divers from Germany, Finland and Sweden.

The exercise lasted over 36 hours, had 550 participants and included exercises at sea and at shore, including the handling of hazardous substances, chemical diving and diving at sea for containers as well as night time operations

The utmost importance was demonstrated by the great interest from the international community in the exercise. Over 140 delegates and representatives from 32 nations observed the remarkable collaboration.

The Exercise has been a great success and showed, that the Baltic Sea States are prepared for handling an intense accident on sea, but they also drew important conclusions to update their manual and procedures and to encourage its implementation to handle such incidents. Furthermore, the preparation and outcomes of the exercises was in need for optimization to achieve the full potential of lessons learned in each of the countries but also for the HELCOM Response group.

In November 2018 the BALEX DELTA 2018 After Action Review took place in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The conference discussed the practical usability, the use of shore and EU resources and the overall Balex Delta exercise concepts. The evaluation and discussions at the After Action Review were taken into the conclusions and recommendations and the Final Report, published in April 2019.

Alternative fuels for shipping in the Baltic Sea Region

In April 2019, the HELCOM Report on Alternative fuels for shipping in the Baltic Sea Region has been published. It has been conducted by the Environmental impact of low Sulphur ship fuel: Measurements and modelling strategies (ENVISUM) that works closely with many important participants in the Baltic Region, including HELCOM. HELCOM's role is, to promote the project outcomes into policies and endorse the involvement and implementation of the authorities in the Baltic Sea Region. This report is an excellent and great example of cooperation between HELCOM and other projects and the strive to achieve GES in the Baltic Sea. HELCOM provides knowledge and skill for partners and observers and is a key partner to realize policies and to convert scientific analysis into recommendations.

The report shows clean shipping solutions that fulfil both a technical but also an environmental and socio-economic aspect. Recent developments and research on alternative fuels was analyzed in this report, with a special focus on liquified natural gas (LNG) which has already been partially adopted by the countries to support cleaner fuels.

With the results of the report, the environmental impact of shipping, which has been one of HELCOM's key concerns, can be further worked on and be improved to achieve GES.

3. Cooperation between OSPAR and HELCOM

OSPAR is one of the most important partner of HELCOM. The Oslo-Paris Convention in 1992 is a commission of 15 governments on the west coast of Europe who aim to protect to marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. It covers human pollution both on and off shore of the sea and coast but also biodiversity and ecosystems. With several countries, that are members of both organizations there are great overlapping interests and common regional issues between OSPAR and HELCOM.

The two commissions have been working together closely over the past years and collaborated on a vast range of issues and workshops. The HELCOM/OSPAR task group on ballast water management in met in Sweden to continue their 6th year of joint work, which carries particular importance due to the shipping between the two seas and the resulting possible transfer of ballast water between them.

The two commissions also conduct joint workshops to tackle common issues. Later this year, a workshop will be held on developing indicators for incidental bycatch of marine birds and mammals for both, which is also part of the ACTION initiative as well as OSPARS goals.

Another great example of the close cooperation and common goals is the construction of the Baltic Sea Science agenda that will be provided to better assess the scientific state and needs of the Baltic Sea as well as a contribution towards the UNESCO Decade of Ocean Science 2021-2030. The OSPAR science agenda is finalized presently and could be of great help for the development of the HELCOM Science agenda. The common interests and goals could be an advantage to create unified European scientific goals.

BALTFISH cooperation

Another example of the vast partnership between HELCOM and international organizations is the cooperation with BALTFISH. In the year 2018, the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting aspired to strengthen the cooperation with fisheries bodies.

This intent was executed shortly after to ensure the efficiency of HELCOMs work.

A successful senior level meeting between HELCOM and BALTFISH took place in Tallinn, Estonia in January 2019. The Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum (BALTFISH) is a regional body of the 8 EU member states bordering the Baltic Sea. Its aims are to improve the coordination and cooperation in fisheries management, to constitute a forum for exchanging ideas, stay in cooperation with other key stakeholders and most importantly achieving sustainable fisheries in the Baltic Sea. They stay in close cooperation with the EU and bases the activities on the EU Common Fisheries Policy and help to implement it.

The meeting recognized the coherence between the overall goals between the two organizations. Especially in the working group FISH there are huge overlapping efforts in creating sustainable fisheries in the Baltic Sea.

HELCOM is delighted to pursue this cooperation in the future with regular meetings and improved sharing information as well as participation in the two bodies' events.

IV. Prospects for 2019 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 27th annual Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference to build upon its support of the work of HELCOM. In support of the HELCOM Ministerial Declaration 2018 in Brussels about the critical state of the Baltic Sea, the BSPC will vigorously implement the Decisions in the Ministerial Declaration.

Since, depending on the country, only 25 to 60% of the targets of the BSAP are to be implemented by 2021, the BSPC calls for more action to urgently intensify efforts at national and regional level. Thereby appropriate policy priorities need to be set to achieve the objectives of the BSAP as far as possible by 2021.

The BSPC also calls for holding regular HELCOM Ministerial Meetings and come to binding rules under international law, as was the case of measures to increase maritime safety with the involvement of the transport ministers. This will bring the issue of a clean Baltic Sea more strongly into the political debate of the nations and achieve a more binding enforcement of the respective agreements.

Cooperation between the two bodies carries significance, since they discuss mutual topics. For example, the 56th HOD Meeting took note of the presentations by representatives of the investor on the Polish project “Construction of a waterway connecting the Vistula Lagoon with the Gulf of Gdansk”.

The BSPC resolution also highlighted the common goal to develop sustainability strategies to achieve the UN Agenda 2030 goals and to realize the vision of a clean Baltic Sea whilst promoting sustainable shipping and tackling eutrophication and underwater noise.

Alike the HELCOM, the BSPC is looking forward to contribute to the UN “Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development” from 2021- 2030 in order to reach the goal of a healthy ocean in the future.

2. Change of HELCOM's executive Secretary



Rüdiger Stempel and Monika Stankiewicz at HELCOM Secretariat

2018/19 was the last year for Monika Stankiewicz as the Executive Secretary of HELCOM. Stankiewicz has been in her position since 2012, after she started as professional secretary for maritime affairs in 2006. Since then, she has been in the position of Executive Secretary for three terms.

From her involvement in the implementation of the BSAP into her engagement in the update process of the BSAP, her commitment has ensured the environmental improvement of the Baltic Sea and the Sustainability of HELCOM policies in the future undertakings.

Monika Stankiewicz oversaw the greatest assessment of the state of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) which provided significant insights and foundation for future actions.

Thereby, she provided an elaborate foundation for her successor, Mr Rüdiger Stempel from Germany. Beforehand he led the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS), which was established in 1987, a cooperation between the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark.

He is a lawyer, specialized in international law and has comprehensive experience on environmental issues, especially in the Baltic Sea Region. As such, he is well equipped to lead the HELCOM in the future years and to represent it to other international stakeholders.

Monika Stankiewicz welcomed him warmly into the the HELCOM network and the Delegates look forward to a great collaboration with Mr. Stempel in the future of HELCOM and on the road to achieve good environmental and ecological status (GES) in the Baltic Sea.

3. Finland's Chairmanship and following German HELCOM Chairmanship 2020-2022

The first year of the Finnish HELCOM Chairmanship has passed.

It was characterized as a year of environmental assessment with a strong scientific research that will provide HELCOM with a thorough basis to work efficiently and plan ahead for the future.

The HOLAS II final report, which was published in July 2018, painted a clear picture of the ecological state of the Baltic Sea and the unfortunate reality, that the set goals will likely not be achieved by 2021. On the other hand, it enables not only the HELCOM participants but also other bodies that are aiming to enhance the Baltic Sea Region, to construct new policies and recommendations towards the goal of GES. Furthermore, the synergy between the BSAP and the SDGs by 2030 will profit from the thorough analysis and assessment, to achieve joint goals. The alignment of the BSAP with other environmental goals has been one of Finland's top priorities during their chairmanship.

The Finnish Ministry of Environment has also declared the reduction of nutrient input and recycling as a highlighted issue for their time of chairmanship. The Sixth Pollution Load Compilation has given a comprehensive overview of the input of both nutrients and hazardous substances into the Baltic Sea from both human activities as well as joining rivers.

The Maritime Assessment 2018 and the results from FISH-PRO II completed the data with their contribution in maritime activities and coastal fish communities.

With this variety of data and great expertise, HELCOM achieved more information about the Baltic Sea, than ever before. This enables the development of a more accurate and suitable BSAP to keep all targets coordinated and have a complex understanding how to achieve a balanced and healthy ecosystem in the Baltic Sea.

Germany is looking forward to their chairmanship starting in July 2020. Finland provided great work and comprehensive data, which they will put it to good use to develop an updated BSAP with ambitious goals.

The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 in coordination with the SDG 2030 will give the opportunity to improve the work and collaborations on achieving healthy seas even further and make great contributions as a pioneer which HELCOM has developed to be.

Climate change will also remain as important issue, which needs to be considered on the BSAP update to align HELCOMs recommendations with the everchanging environmental circumstances. The planned HELCOM Science Agenda will greatly contribute to analyze on the impact and vulnerabilities of the Baltic Sea to climate change.

Cooperation and intensified collaboration as well as joint working groups with other bodies, stakeholders and regional organization will remain a priority of the Chairmanship.

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