

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)

2015/2016



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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



Ms Sylvia Bretschneider

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, also known as HELCOM has been working now for over four decades on the protection of the marine environment of the Baltic Sea. Constituted on the basis of the Helsinki Convention, signed in 1974 and entered into force 1980, its ten contracting partners are dedicated to the healthy future of the Baltic Sea and therefore sharing a common goal with the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

Consequently, the BSPC applied and obtained observer status to the commission in 2002 and since then has held the position continuously.

2015, the representatives of the Standing Committee of the BSPC agreed once again during the 24th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Rostock to appoint Sylvia Bretschneider to exercise this mandate and report back to the BSPC on the relevant activities of HELCOM.

The present report comprises an overview from the time frame of August 2015 to this year's 25th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference 28 - 30h August 2016 in Riga, Latvia. This report will focus the main steps taken by HELCOM during that time frame.

One of the most important and most difficult achievements was the HELCOM agreement to apply for a NECA (NO_x Emission Control Area) status for the Baltic Sea at the IMO. Therefore, the contracting parties of HELCOM adopted the NECA Roadmap for the Baltic Sea and parallel with the North Sea.

Furthermore, the Second Holistic Assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) was launched. HOLAS II will provide updated information on the status of the marine environment and cumulative pressures and impacts from major human activities. For the first time, social and economic analysis will be truly incorporated into the HELCOM assessment by linking human activities to pressures and impacts on ecosystem components within one holistic framework.

The other important decisions as well as more details of the NECA Roadmap and the HOLAS II can be found in the section “IV. Main decisions”.

The report is mainly based on two meetings of the Heads of Delegation (HOD 49 – 50) and the Helsinki Commission Meeting, 10 - 11 March 2016 (Com. Meeting 37, 2015). The report is intended as an extract of the most important processes of HELCOM. So, the report focuses on the mentioned topics and main decisions.

II. Cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM

The past 14 years of cooperation between HELCOM and the BSPC are characterized by an active exchange of experiences and information and the past year was no exception to the successful collaboration between both institutions.

A part of the partnership is manifested in the joint participation in conferences and events as well as cooperation between intergovernmental and interparliamentary bodies within the Baltic Sea Region.

One example of the joint participation in conferences was once again the annual Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. At the 24th BSPC in Rostock, 30 August – 1 September 2015, Harry Liiv as Chair of HELCOM presented the work of HELCOM.

In his speech, he wanted to shed light on the progress of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and its targets to reduce pollution and under water noise. Eutrophication is one of the largest problems in the Baltic Sea and hence the focus of a large part of the work done by HELCOM.

An important step in tackling this problem is monitoring the balance of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous, so that it can be determined if action plans are actually effective. At this point, there is a wide variety. Some basins, like the Kattegat, the Danish Straits and Bothnian Sea have never exceeded their limits, whereas others, like The Gulf of Riga and the Gulf of Finland have grown far beyond them.

The aim is to reduce such nutrients to acceptable levels. In order to keep the nutrient levels in check, it is necessary to upgrade national standards for nutrient contents in manure, and nutrient bookkeeping at farm level. It will allow for more detailed analysis and planning. For this to be successful, it is important to exchange best practices amongst the Baltic Sea countries.

In addition to harmful substances from the agricultural sector, heavy metals resulting from amongst others the pharmaceutical industry munition are a risk for both the Baltic Sea and human health. In 2013 it was agreed that analysis would take place on this matter,



Harry Liiv, Chair of HELCOM 2014 – 2016 at the 24th BSPC in Rostock

and its impact on the degradation of the marine environment. The first results are expected early 2016.

A new area of focus for HELCOM is marine litter. A significant amount of (household) litter is entering the marine environment through rivers and beaches. In 2013 the goal was set to substantially reduce the litter by 2025. This will be one of the Estonian priorities during its leadership of HELCOM, and the matter has been adopted as part of the HELCOM resolution. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to cooperate closely with the existing waste management plans of the different countries. Mr Liiv therefore asked the parliamentarians for support for such measures.

HELCOM is valued by the BSPC as the most important environment protection organization in the Baltic Sea Region. Thus, the work of HELCOM is very often reflected and supported in the annual resolutions of the BSPC. The upcoming Silver Jubilee Resolution will not be an exception. Currently, the draft resolution especially includes the support for the HELCOM Marine Litter Action Plan. In the draft resolution, the governments in the Baltic Sea Region, the CBSS and the EU are called regarding cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, to “further strengthen and develop HELCOM as the main coordinating body in the effort to protect the Baltic marine environment, and to strongly support the implementation of the Marine Litter Action Plan, as well as the NO_x emission control area Roadmap for the Baltic Sea”.

If that point of the resolution will be adopted, the close connection and fruitful cooperation between HELCOM and BSPC could continue.



HELCOM Working Group State and Conservation in the Castle of Schwerin

Furthermore, from 11 - 15 April 2016, the HELCOM Working Group on the “State of the Environment and Nature Conservation - State and Conservation” met for several meeting sessions and excursions in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. As the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is located in Schwerin, Sylvia Bretschneider used the opportunity to invite the Working Group “State and Conservation” into the seat of the Parliament, the Castle of Schwerin. After a short guided tour of the castle, the working group members held their meeting on 12th April in the former horse stable.



Working Group members in the former horse stable in the Castle of Schwerin

Last year, the BSPC mainly contributed to two HELCOM events.

1. HELCOM Stakeholder Conference on Marine Litter 2016 - Tackling the Challenge of Marine Litter in the Baltic Sea

On 9 March 2016 HELCOM invited a wide array of stakeholders to announce their commitment to combating marine litter in the Baltic Sea, as stated in the recently adopted HELCOM Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter.

In the run-up to the stakeholder conference, Sylvia Bretschneider addressed the organizers and participants of the conference with the BSPC position through a letter in which she emphasized the importance of such an event. She explained in the letter her point of view as a politician and as Observer of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) to HELCOM concerning the issue of marine litter and how to solve that problem. Sylvia Bretschneider declared that the environmental status of the Baltic Sea is part of her daily work as President of the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and as Chair of the BSPC Working Group on Sustainable Tourism as well as because of her commitment to the important work of HELCOM. Within all these functions she stands up for the improvement of the environmental status of the Baltic Sea, since a good ecological status is very important for life and also for the economy around the Baltic Sea.

Furthermore, she highlighted that a clean and healthy Baltic Sea is even a basic condition for the economic development of the entire Baltic Sea Region. After operating against the invisible pollution caused by harmful substances for decades, HELCOM has developed an Action Plan on Marine litter. Reducing the marine litter in the Baltic Sea is an important issue for the BSPC and therefore she explicitly supports this approach.

In her opinion, the key solution for this challenge is “cooperation”. Stakeholders from all fields – policy, science, economy and society – need to tackle together against the current litter pollution and for the prevention of further marine litter.

The letter was considered in the general discussion at the stakeholder conference and attached to the “Report of the HELCOM Marine Litter Conference 2016” which can be found on the homepage of HELCOM.

As a result, the discussions of the conference were summarized by concluding that marine litter is a real issue in the Baltic Sea and that the problem is very diverse both in terms of sources of litter,

pathways of litter to the sea and impacts of marine litter in the marine environment. Such a diverse problem needs to be tackled by specific measures that target specific parts of the complex issue, and measures need to be very concrete in order to improve the situation. Examples presented during the Conference to highlight the problem came often from other regions, not the Baltic Sea, which shows that there are still regional knowledge gaps on the issue and on the possible solutions to reducing the amount of marine litter in the Baltic Sea region. Funding instruments for further research are in place, and further research needs to be done through stakeholder involvement by, for example, the industry in order to tackle the marine litter issue at source. Public awareness and education is essential as citizens have to be onboard if the community is to succeed in tackling the marine litter problem. Therefore, implementing the HELCOM Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter needs to be linked and harmonized with the processes and actions on the global-, EU- and national scale and other ongoing initiatives.

2. Baltic Sea Days

On 22nd and 23rd March 2016, the XVII International Environmental Forum “Baltic Sea Days” took place in St. Petersburg, Russia. The BSPC Standing Committee members Maria Tolppanen, member of the Finnish Parliament, and Jørn Dohrmann, member of the European Parliament, represented the BSPC - on behalf of the mandate holder as observer at HELCOM - at the forum and continued thus the tradition of vivid exchange of experience and information as well as of joint participation in conferences.

Maria Tolppanen held a speech on behalf of the BSPC and underlined the BSPC's efforts to further support the work of HELCOM as much as possible. This ambition was also adopted in the resolution of the 24th annual conference of the BSPC in Rostock last year. Under point 10 the parliamentarians from all around the Baltic Sea committed themselves to “strengthen and further develop HELCOM as the main coordinating body in the effort to protect the Baltic marine environment, and to strongly support the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), and to stress the importance of BSAP as the environmental pillar of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region”.

She also stressed that the BSPC especially supports the new HELCOM approach on the second holistic assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea – the so called HOLAS II. HOLAS II will provide updated information on the status of the marine environment and cumulative pressures and impacts from major human activities. For the first time, social and economic analysis will be truly incorporated into the HELCOM assessment by linking human activities to pressures and impacts on ecosystem components within one holistic framework. This new and very practical measure will promote the understanding of the ecosystem approach what is very welcomed by the BSPC.

Furthermore, Maria Tolppanen commented on the HELCOM Commission Meeting that was held 9 to 10 March 2016. One of the most important steps taken on that meeting was the adoption of the NECA Roadmap for the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. This roadmap for designating a NO_x emission control area (NECA) in the Baltic Sea in parallel with the North Sea is a major decision in terms of concrete nutrient pollution reduction potential. In the name of all BSPC members, she thanked HELCOM for this approach.

Moreover, she explained that with the new established Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, the BSPC will tackle the challenges of fostering tourism in the Baltic Sea Region and at the same time conserve a good environmental state of the region.

III. Outgoing Estonian Chairmanship and Programme of the incoming European Union's Chairmanship

The Chairmanship of the Helsinki Commission rotates between all the Contracting Parties every two years according to their alphabetical order in English.

On 30 June 2016 the Estonian chairmanship in HELCOM ended after two years. Harry Liiv as Chair for the last two years drew a positive balance. During the Estonian chairmanship the Baltic Sea countries reached important milestones. HELCOM launched and has progressed on a major project to prepare the Second Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea and the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter was adopted. One of the most important and most difficult achievements was the HELCOM agreement to apply for a NECA status for the Baltic Sea in IMO despite the numerous socio-economic and technical constraints on the way.

Also the ban on discharges of untreated sewage from passenger ships was formalised by IMO in the spring 2016, upon joint request by the HELCOM countries to designate the Baltic Sea as a special area for this type of pollution under international law. In March 2016 the Contracting Parties for the Helsinki Convention finally adopted the long waited recommendation on sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic Sea region. HELCOM's work was also useful for the EU member states which had to update the existing river basin management plans and establish programs of measures to implement the national marine strategies.

By 1st July 2016, the European Union took over the chair of HELCOM until 30th June 2018. Reaching a healthy Baltic Sea ecosystem by 2021, promoting innovation for a sustainable Blue Economy and tackling the challenge of regional governance are the main priorities for the European Union.

Marianne Wenning, Director for Quality of Life, Water and Air in the European Commission, and Matjaž Malgaj, Head of the Unit that deals with Marine Environment and Water Industry, also in the

European Commission, are nominated as Chair and Vice-Chair of HELCOM on behalf of the EU. According to the EU programme for the chairmanship, the three main topics of the EU chairmanship will be the following.

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

Assessing Good Environmental Status with quantitative indicators while responding effectively to key pressures is announced as task for this priority.

The new holistic assessment, HOLAS II, will reveal if the efforts have led to improvements in the Baltic Sea environmental status, since HOLAS I in 2010. The results will be released by mid-2017 and updated by mid-2018. Pressures and impacts will be further quantified, including via the latest 'Pollution Load Compilation', allowing to evaluate progress towards the goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan. Core indicators will be further developed, especially for seafloor integrity, marine litter and underwater noise. This work will also help the contracting parties that are EU Member States in fulfilling their obligations under EU marine legislation.

Response to certain key pressures, such as marine litter and nutrient enrichment leading to eutrophication, should be made stronger through appropriate measures. The implementation of the regional action plan for marine litter will be a priority. In addition to the environmental benefits, this will also demonstrate the strength of Baltic regional cooperation in meeting global commitments. Actions to reduce the nutrient load in the Baltic will include progress on establishing a NO_x Emissions Control Area, stimulating the building and maintaining of adequate port reception facilities, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Strategic engagement with other sectors will be encouraged to deliver innovative solutions, for instance for nutrient removal.

2. Innovation for a sustainable Blue Economy and healthy ecosystems

This goal should be reached by promoting knowledge and innovation in the Baltic Sea including a well-managed network of marine protected areas.

HELCOM has a unique role in contributing to the further understanding of environmental status of the marine environment in the Baltic and the ecosystem services it provides. This knowledge is essential in ensuring that incentives for investment in promising Blue Growth sectors lead to a healthy ecosystem in the Baltic – the sustainable Blue Economy. This approach will be promoted through the HOLAS II results, follow-up and use the existing or future BONUS1 projects' results, mapping the ecosystem services and assessing their social and economic value, and fostering the application of the ecosystem-based approach in Maritime Spatial Planning.

Integrating healthy ecosystems and economic growth in one coherent policy, does not only require knowledge and innovation but also that the resources of the sea are well-managed and protected where necessary. Marine protected areas (MPA) are one of the most important tools to achieve that. They help to rebuild fish stocks, to improve coastal protection and to greatly benefit coastal and marine tourism. Monitoring the MPA network and implementing the guidelines on management of seafloor integrity and fisheries in protected areas will be essential. HELCOM will also improve the enforcement and coordination of management measures to minimise pressures and impacts on MPAs, in particular for transnational ones. The effectiveness of such measures will need to be assessed, both for individual sites and at network level.

3. Tackling the challenge of regional governance

The third priority will be approached by securing cooperation with Regional Fisheries Bodies and contributing to international ocean governance.

More exchange of information and better cooperation between HELCOM and the relevant Regional Fisheries Bodies will be the key to having a biodiverse ecosystem, also sustaining the livelihood of fisherman in the Baltic Sea. This is reflected in the objective of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, according to which fisheries management should be implemented based on the ecosystem approach, thus supporting sustainable use of natural marine resources.

Further synergies with regional or European governance frameworks will be sought, for instance with the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will strengthen ocean governance. Regional Sea Conventions, in particular HELCOM, should play a crucial role in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 on oceans and seas.

IV. Main decisions in 2015 – 2016

Describing the work of HELCOM and its progress can be a difficult task as there are always many parallel strategies and ongoing processes which are geared for long terms. Last year's report mainly presented the results of the streamlining process of HELCOM and therefore the new structure of the working groups and projects. To avoid repetitions, the structure with a detailed overview of the working groups will not be part of this year's report again. It can be found on HELCOM's homepage under <http://helcom.fi/about-us/organisation/streamlining-process/> or in the report of last year under <http://bspc.net/news/show/799>.

Thus, this year's report will focus on the main decisions of HELCOM taken in the past months.

1. NECA Roadmap

Nitrogen Oxide (NO_x) emissions from shipping are a major issue touching the Baltic Sea. To tackle this ongoing challenge, HELCOM has been working towards NO_x Emission Control Area (NECA) status. A Baltic NECA will ensure that NO_x levels decrease over the long term by requiring new ships sailing in the area to meet tighter emissions standards. The process of gaining NECA status for the Baltic Sea started in 2007, when HELCOM began carrying out the necessary environmental and economic studies, as well as assessing technical requirements and finalizing submission papers. Intensive negotiations have also been conducted on the right timing for a final submission to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which will approve the proposal.

The NECA efforts are being made alongside international partners, who are simultaneously working to apply the same standards to the North Sea, located west of the Baltic. The tighter NO_x emission standards for new ships are planned to come into force in 2021.

The background of this roadmap is that the Baltic Sea states have decided to submit an application to the IMO for designation of the Baltic Sea as NECA. Furthermore, the Baltic Sea states expressed

their preference for a parallel, synchronized process of NECA designation in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea.

The North Sea states are ready to submit their application to the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) of the IMO and have a strong preference for synchronizing North Sea and Baltic Sea NECA designations.

Therefore the North Sea countries invited the Baltic Sea countries to a technical meeting, hosted by Finland in Helsinki in June 2015 for a common discussion on the options and modalities for parallel NECA applications. The aim of the meeting was to facilitate a common understanding of the timing and procedural steps for a possible parallel process, i.e. a roadmap for parallel Baltic Sea and North Sea NECA designations.

The procedural steps, possible timing and duration for a synchronized designation of the Baltic Sea and North Sea NECAs which were agreed are the following.

The roadmap was firstly adopted by the HELCOM Commission meeting 37-2016 in March 2016. The decision taken by HELCOM has to be supported by the North Sea countries in order to continue, which was proposed to be in form of a silent procedure between North Sea states. The responsible IMO commission meeting MEPC 70, in which the application for the NECAs will be discussed, will take place in October 2016, so the applications should be submitted by July 2016.

If the applications are approved at MEPC 70 they will be forwarded to MEPC 71 for adoption. The dates for MEPC 71 are not yet set, but the meeting is assumed to take place in May 2017. The NECA would enter into force at least 16 months later, which would be in October 2018. The entry into force will of course only apply to the ships constructed and installed on or after the effective date, which could be on the date of adoption (at the earliest) or any later date as specified in the amendment designating the NECAs. The North Sea countries suggest that the industry is given three years from the date of adoption until the date of compliance. It was agreed that the compliance date should be 1 January 2021. This would imply the “Tier III emission standards” to be applicable to ships constructed on or after this date.

The EU Member States agreed on further obligations and to coordinate their positions within the EU.

2. *HOLAS II- HELCOM Second Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea (2014–2018)*

With the second holistic assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea, HELCOM continues and intensifies the work of HOLAS I. The overall aim of HOLAS II is to evaluate the progress in relation to the goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) and any improvement in the status of the marine environment since the initial holistic assessment of HELCOM.

In addition, the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention that are also EU member states have expressed the intention to use HOLAS II to prepare “roof report” for their reporting of Article 8 of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

The project is composed of several building blocks, including an assessment of 1) the distribution of human activities and pressures, 2) the status of the environment based on core indicators (integrated assessments of Biodiversity, Eutrophication and Hazardous substances; maritime activities will also be addressed, being the fourth core segment of the Baltic Sea Action Plan), and 3) social and economic impacts analyses to support regional assessments of the use of marine waters and cost of degradation, focusing on the ecosystem services approach. Furthermore, measures to reach good environmental status will be addressed.

The project runs from December 2014 to June 2018. HOLAS II started in December 2014 and will continue until June 2018. Within the first year, the project has covered the initial planning phase and detailed further the concepts, tools and data which the assessments will build on. At the HELCOM Commission meeting in March 2016, the contracting parties decided to agree on HELCOM core indicators for the second building block ready by the end of 2016.

The first assessment results will be released by mid-2017. The report will be finalized by mid-2018.

The project develops common concepts and methods for status assessment and performs assessments at regional scale. HELCOM core indicators form the basis for the assessment of environmental status. Aggregated results are produced using assessment tools, which are developed and tested as part of HOLAS II and supporting projects.

3. Ministerial Meeting

Since the HELCOM Commission in March 2015, it is a continuous discussion to organize a Ministerial Meeting. An exact date for the next Ministerial Meeting is not been determined, yet, but it is agreed that it will take place in 2018 at latest. That means that the Ministerial Meeting will be under the lead of the EU, if it will be held in the first part of 2018, or under the lead of Finland, if it will be held in the second part of 2018.

To discuss details for such a meeting, Finland invited the Contracting Parties for a HELCOM Ministerial Session held on 18 May 2016 in Turku, back-to-back to the European Maritime Day 2016. The Contracting Parties taking part in the debate were Estonia, EU, Finland, Germany, Poland and Sweden. Harry Liiv, HELCOM Chair, participated also in the debate.

The initiative was taken by Kimmo Tiilikainen, the Minister of Agriculture and the Environment of Finland to host such a session, putting into action the intention of paving way for the planned HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in 2018 and ideally initiate a series of high-level HELCOM gatherings.

The Meeting considered potential topics for the Ministerial Meeting and recognized that both the 2nd HELCOM holistic assessment of the ecosystem health (HOLAS II) and the nutrient reduction scheme provide possibilities to take stock of HELCOM achievements in improving the status of the marine environment and to consider strategic directions for further HELCOM work. Furthermore themes like marine litter and costs of degradation of the marine environment are of potential focus, too.

4. Development of the Baltic Sea Action Plan

The development of a system to follow-up HELCOM agreements under the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), Ministerial Declarations and Recommendations was initiated in 2014 and progress on its development was presented to HOD 48-2015 and HOD 49-2015. HOD 49-2015 agreed on a step-wise approach on the reporting of national actions, firstly focusing on the commitments under the BSAP and Ministerial Declarations.

At present the assessment of joint regional actions agreed under the BSAP and Ministerial Declarations is up to date and reporting on national actions by the Contracting Parties is nearly completed. The results have been transferred to a web-based platform – the HELCOM Explorer - where the results can be viewed, sorted, and downloaded. The HELCOM Explorer can be accessed by the general public since May 2016 (released during European Maritime Day 2016 in Turku, Finland).

The current follow-up includes only a limited number of actions from HELCOM Recommendations, i.e. those that were specifically cited in the BSAP, although the system has been set-up to follow-up all commitment paragraphs of HELCOM Recommendations. This concerns Recommendations referred to in the BSAP or adopted after 2007 as listed in a document which was presented at HOD 49-2015. Criteria for assessing their implementation have been developed and reviewed by the relevant HELCOM Working Groups for a majority of these Recommendation and are ready to be applied.

The development of the system has been supported through resources from the HELCOM coordinated EU co-financed project BalticBOOST.

At the Ministerial Session meeting in Turku, Finland, Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary of HELCOM, gave a short overview of the current status of HELCOM's work and influence concerning the Baltic Sea Action Plan that was adopted in 2007.

According to the latest review focusing on the implementation of the 2007 Baltic Sea Action Plan and the two follow-up Ministerial Declarations, 2010 (Moscow) and 2013 (Copenhagen), 60 % of the regional commitments have been accomplished while 40% still remains to be fully implemented. Only half of the agreed joint actions to protect biodiversity has been carried out. Work also remains to be done in applying the ecosystem approach in fisheries, better conserving threatened species and biotopes, advancing the

network of marine protected areas and improving maritime spatial planning, as well as reducing the impacts of marine litter and underwater noise.

The central task of reducing nutrients is both a success story and a challenge. Starting from 1950s there was a steep increase in inputs of nutrients, peaking in early 1980s. But since then, there has been improvement. The final step, of course, is to reach the target set for 2021.

The status of individual HELCOM commitments, both the ones to be taken jointly and the ones that can only be implemented nationally, can be followed with an online tool on the HELCOM web page: <http://maps.helcom.fi/website/BSAPexplorer>.

5. *Implementation of the regulations under MARPOL Annex IV*

At the meeting of the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 69) in April 2016 the Baltic Sea Special Area regulations under MARPOL Annex IV were discussed with the result that they will be applied on or after 1 June 2021 for existing IMO-registered passenger ships. For new passenger ships, the regulations come into effect on or after 1 June 2019. For direct passages between St. Petersburg and the North Sea, there is an extension until 1 June 2023.

After many years of intensive discussions, the application by HELCOM for the status as Special Area for the Baltic Sea will finally be implemented.

The background of this main decision is explained in the following.

In 2011 IMO designated the Baltic Sea as a Special Area under MARPOL Annex IV. This proposal was submitted to IMO, MEPC, by the HELCOM countries in 2010, following a decision by the 2007 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Cracow, Poland. The momentum to submit a proposal to designate the Baltic Sea as a sewage special area comes from the fact that standards for, and implementation of, sewage treatment on the shore in the Baltic Sea region have been tightened considerably during the last decades, with stringent requirements applied today not only to cities but also to smaller municipalities and in some countries even leisure boats.

Within the special area discharge of sewage from passenger ships (including cruise ships) is prohibited. As an alternative, ships may have a sewage treatment plant installed certified to stringent Special Area effluent standards. For the prohibition to be effectuated and applicable in the Baltic Sea area, the coastal states must ensure (via a notification to IMO) that there are sufficient adequate reception facilities in the relevant ports in the area.

Within the HELCOM framework, considerable work has been carried out during the years to ensure that adequate reception facilities are in place.

The BSPC has also urged the governments to support and fulfill the regulations under MARPOL Annex IV since its resolution at the 23rd annual conference in Olsztyn, Poland in 2014. The recommendation was reiterated at the 24th annual conference in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, in 2015. Furthermore, Christina Gestrin und Sylvia Bretschneider as mandate-holder to HELCOM reminded at several occasions in 2014 and 2015 (see last year's report) to implement the obligations to achieve the status as special area.

In March 2015, a notification for a portion of the Baltic Sea Area was submitted to the IMO. Following an intensive discussion during the IMO meeting (MEPC 68) in May 2015, the committee agreed that sufficient notification had been received and that, therefore, effective dates could be established for the Baltic Sea Special Area. However, the committee concluded that an amendment to MARPOL would be needed, since the proposed area differed from the designated special area.

At MEPC 69 in April 2016, the final amendments to MARPOL Annex IV addressing the legal implications and the resolution making the requirements effective, were considered. Following intensive work and excellent collaborative efforts prior and during the meeting, it was possible for the committee to adopt the amendments to MARPOL and the resolution making the special area requirements effective for the entire Baltic Sea Area according to the proposed timeframe.

The special area rules will be applied from June 2021 for existing passenger vessels and from 2019 for new passenger vessels. For direct passages between St. Petersburg and the North Sea, there is a transitional extension and the requirements will be applicable from June 2023.

The HELCOM Commission meeting 37-2016 in March 2016 emphasized the importance of ensuring adequate port reception facilities prior to the application dates of the Baltic Sea Special Area requirements. The meeting underlined the urgency to enhance the work in this regard and to continue the efforts to make certain that all relevant concerns are properly addressed and recognized the need for continuous regional data collection and monitoring of the progress and improvements already made. The meeting decided to request the HELCOM Maritime Group to include necessary action items in the existing work plan of the HELCOM Cooperation Platform on Port Reception Facilities and to prioritize the group's work accordingly.

Sylvia Bretschneider

President of the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

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