**Öppning och deltagande av minister Tiilikainen i den parlamentariska Östersjökonferensen (BSPC) den 27 Augusti, Mariehamn**

PUHEPOINTTEJA TIILIKAISELLE BSPC AVAUSPUHEENVUOROON

**Mr.** **Kimmo Tiilikainen, Minister of the Environment, Energy and Housing of Finland**

“**The Priorities of the Finnish HELCOM Chairmanship and the future of the Baltic Sea Action Plan”**

* It is a pleasure to be here on Åland Islands one of our most marine regions. As such this is a well suited location for a session on the Baltic Sea.
* Finland started as Chair of HELCOM in the beginning of July. We hold the rotating Chairmanship during the next two years from 1 July 2018 until the end of June 2020. We take this task very seriously.
* This summer blooms of blue-green algae in the Gulf of Finland and the northern Baltic Sea were the worst of this decade. The Baltic Sea is not healthy yet although nutrient load to the sea has already been cut significantly. We need to do more.
* The holistic assessment, State of the Baltic Sea Report, published by HELCOM in July provides the same message: There are many good trends but we still have too much red on the maps indicating that we have not yet reached a good status of the sea.
* In March, at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Brussels, we reviewed the status of implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan. HELCOM’s Baltic Sea Action Plan is the roadmap for reaching a healthy Baltic Sea. Unfortunately, the conclusions were that although implementation is underway, it has not progressed as swiftly as it should have, and we still have a lot to do before 2021, the deadline year for the Baltic Sea Action Plan.
* I would like to highlight that despite the challenges we face with our naturally shallow and enclosed sea and the many inhabitants on its shores, we also have many strengths. Our strengths include:
  + The **good scientific basis** we can build upon. More than 100 years of scientific cooperation between the Baltic Sea states and the more recent BONUS programmes for funding science have prepared us well for tackling our environmental challenges in a knowledge-based manner.
  + Secondly, through HELCOM’s monitoring and assessment work we **share a common view of what a “healthy Baltic Sea”** or a sea in “good environmental status” is in all of its technical detail, and we understand how far we are from that desired status and what needs to be done to achieve a good status.
  + Thirdly, we are able to **collaborate and cooperate**. The Baltic Sea Action Plan is a good example. Other recent examples include the good cooperation Baltic Sea states had within HELCOM when preparing to address jointly International Maritime Organisation, IMO, to make the Baltic Sea a Nitrogen Emission Control Area NECA or to ban discharges of untreated sewage from cruise ships.
  + HELCOM, however, does a lot more We have also jointly been able to designate 12 % of the area of the Baltic Sea as marine protected area, and recently all Baltic Sea states agreed on the description of nine Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) as a part of the work done within the UN Convention of Biological Diversity.
* Therefore, despite the work we still have ahead of us, I look brightly to the future and consider that our well educated and innovative societies will be able to find ways to work together and tackle the remaining pollution sources, particularly from diffuse sources such as agriculture. Currently, eutrophication together with impacts of climate change, is the most pressing challenge we have to deal with. They together also influence life in the Baltic Sea: the species and habitats.
* Climate change has a serious impact on the worlds’ oceans and seas. The Baltic Sea is estimated to warm additional 2-4 degrees during this century. The impact is not limited to the foreseen temperature increase. Snow and ice cover is becoming increasingly meagre, and snowless agricultural lands under increasing rain will increase losses of nutrients to the sea. Warming of the water enhances anoxia, release of phosphate from the sediments and growth of algae. Signs of acidification of sea water, caused by high atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide, have now been recorded in the Baltic Sea too. Therefore, all measures taken to mitigate climate change will help the Baltic Sea along with the climate.
* We must not forget about the other challenges we have in the Baltic, such as marine litter and microplastics, hazardous substances, spreading of invasive species and underwater noise.
* Nationally, to speed up the recovery of the Baltic Sea, I have commissioned the preparation of a special action programme for water protection. The program enables us to carry out specific and concrete measures in the Baltic Sea catchment and coastal area to improve the status. These measures include spreading of gypsum and fiber-waste products from the industry to bind phosphates to the soil and prevent losses of phosphates from the fields to the sea. This measure is known to cut phosphorus losses by 50%. XXX euro will be allocated for this program in the state budget for years xxx to xxx.
* To combat marine litter and to provide a national response the EU Plastics Strategy, we are preparing a national plastics roadmap. It will include measures and actions to decrease the use of plastics, increase recycling and employment of new sustainable materials to replace plastics. The roadmap will be ready soon, during autumn.
* Finland is fully committed to its chairmanship and to supporting HELCOM’s work. The Chair will be Ms. Saara Bäck from the Ministry of the Environment.
* We have indicated that priorities of our chairmanship are:
* **First: Updating the Baltic Sea Action Plan**

Ministerial Meeting in March agreed that HELCOM will embark on updating the Action Plan and the renewed Plan will be adopted in 2021. This will necessitate a solid scientific-technical background, involvement of the stakeholders, cross-sectorial working mode of the policy-makers and mobilization of funding for measures and actions. **As Chair of HELCOM, we are committed to leading the updating the Baltic Sea Action Plan and finding common solutions to formulate an ambitious and realistic updated Plan.**

* **Second: Reduction of nutrient inputs and nutrient recycling**

Eutrophication is caused by excess input of nutrients to the Baltic Sea and it is still the main environmental problem. HELCOM is a global forerunner with its regional science-based nutrient input reduction targets and burden-sharing system. Inputs of nutrients have declined in parts of the sea but further work is still needed to prevent losses of nutrients to the sea. An important means for this is recycling of nutrients. **We are committed to facilitating the fine-tuning of the nutrient input reduction system based on the agreed Maximum Allowable Inputs and to developing an effective follow-up system. We are ready to dedicate significant effort to formulating Baltic Sea regional strategy on nutrient recycling and related actions for inclusion in the updated BSAP.**

* **Baltic Sea and climate change**

Climate change causes multiple impacts on the Baltic Sea and its marine flora and fauna. Change is fast and, as a response, our decisions may need adjustment. The Baltic Sea is part of the carbon cycle but our understanding of its role in the carbon cycle, e.g. its carbon storage services is still meager. HELCOM can play a role in climate change mitigation by working to maximize storage of carbon in the Baltic Sea. **We want to ensure that consequences of climate change, such as warming, sea ice decline, acidification, anoxia and shifting species ranges will be taken into account when the BSAP will be updated. We also aim to work towards a better understanding of the role of the Baltic Sea in the global carbon cycle.**

* **Synergy between Agenda2030 and HELCOM work**

Agenda2030 provides a global framework for HELCOM’s work towards sustainable development in the Baltic Sea region. It also places HELCOM on the global ocean agenda as the major Baltic Sea regional organisation. **We aim to create strong links between the Agenda 2030 process and HELCOM work.**

* We look forward to continuing fruitful cooperation with our counterparts, both public and private, in the protection of the Sea. Baltic Sea Action Plan provides a roadmap for all our common efforts.
* Parliamentarians have an important role in ensuring that the Baltic Sea protection receives the attention it deserves in your parliaments - and in your national budgets. We need to make sure that means will be provided for the work that Baltic Sea protection needs.
* We know what needs to be done! Now is the time to go and finish what we are already doing and prepare us to do more – to reach a good status of the Baltic Sea.