



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)

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Report on the Exercise of the Observer Status
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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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President of the Landtag
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*



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Member of the
Finnish Parliament*

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) is widely recognized as the main coordinator and implementer of actions toward protecting and improving the marine environment in the Baltic Sea. Since its establishment in 1974 and implementation in 1980, the ten Baltic Sea States that are contracting parties of HELCOM 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 during the 26th annual conference in Hamburg, the representatives of the Standing Committee of the BSPC again agreed to extend the mandate of Sylvia Bretschneider and of Saara-Sofia Sirén as a co-observer and co-rapporteur.

This report serves as an overview of the significant work done between August 2017 and this year's 27th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference on the 26 – 28 of August in Mariehamn. The report will focus on cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM and the prospects for further cooperation between the two, as well as main

decisions in 2017-2018 and the future work of HELCOM. Additionally, this report provides an update of important processes HELCOM has been undertaking, as well as a summary of new developments.

Furthermore, HELCOM is pleased to announce the Second Holistic Assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) has been finalized and approved. This improved assessment provides new tools and standards for the assessment of the environmental status of the Baltic Sea and informs directions for moving forward toward the vision of a healthier Baltic Sea. This will help HELCOM to better determine the current state of the Baltic Sea and to identify next steps to achieve the healthiest status possible. Contracting parties have undergone intense negotiation to develop and agree on core indicators, which will be used as the main tools of the assessment.

This report is primarily based on the 2018 Ministerial Meeting, the 39th Helsinki Commission Meeting held in March 2018 and the 53rd and 54th Heads of Delegation meetings. It highlights the most important developments during the 2017-2018 time period.

23 August 2018
Schwerin,

Sylvia Bretschneider
BSPC Observer at HELCOM

Turku,

Saara-Sofia Sirén
BSPC Observer at HELCOM

II. Cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM

1. *HELCOM Report at the 26th annual BSPC*

In this period, the cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM begins with HELCOM's participation in the 26th annual Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, which took place in Hamburg, Germany on the 3 – 5 of September 2017. Ms. Monika Stankiewicz, the Executive Secretary of HELCOM, gave a presentation on the State of the Baltic Sea Report and the updated Holistic Assessment (HOLAS II). In her speech, Ms. Stankiewicz first expressed gratitude to the BSPC for its 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.

Ms. Stankiewicz confirmed the reduction of nitrogen and phosphorus is closely related to improve the treatment of wastewater in the cities around the Baltic Sea according to the regional HELCOM standards and European directives. She added that European



Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary of HELCOM at the 26th BSPC in Hamburg

requirements are not sufficient for the BSR, and with HELCOM standards being much higher, she expects Europe as a whole to make efforts toward intensifying their actions. Another important initiative was establishing nontoxic areas for shipping in the Baltic Sea. The initiative, which would result in a reduction of 7 tons of nitrogen annually, had been taken by the region as the localized response to the MARPOL convention by IMO. Ms. Stankiewicz stressed the fact that because the Baltic Sea has a large catchment area, it requires specific solutions to cater to its size. Therefore, although it might be a challenging, lengthy process to achieve the same rules at the European level, only Baltic actors have the potential to make this change. Stankiewicz added that fortunately Sustainable Goals have been gathering political momentum and the Baltic Sea Region should make an effort for the sake of present and future generations. Ms. Stankiewicz also highlighted the economic benefits of protecting the marine environment. Annual losses from eutrophication amount to 3800 – 4000 million Euro, and annual losses of recreation value from 1000 – 2200 million Euro. Therefore promoting the sustainable holistic preservation of the Baltic Sea is in both the people's and the environment's best interest.

2. Statement of HELCOM at the BSPC Standing Committee Meeting

One great example of the strong cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM was demonstrated through HELCOM's participation in the Standing Committee meeting of BSPC in February 2018. Under the Chairmanship of BSPC President Jörgen Pettersson, the Chair of HELCOM Ms Marianne Wenning was invited to discuss the developments and activities of HELCOM.

Ms Marianne Wenning, Chairlady of HELCOM, presented the current state of the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan 2021 and pointed out that not much time was left for completing the plan. The Action Plan had been structured around a set of Ecological Objectives used to define indicators and targets, including effect-based nutrient input ceilings, and to monitor implementation. To the four main objectives of the BSAP – 1) a Baltic Sea unaffected by eutrophication 2) a Baltic Sea undisturbed by hazardous substances 3) a Baltic Sea with environmentally friendly maritime activities and 4) a favourable conservation status of Baltic Sea biodiversity –, three new issues were added: seabed disturbance, underwater noise and marine litter. Ms Wenning noted that during the

European Union Chairmanship of HELCOM, the State of the Baltic Sea 2017 Report had been presented. This holistic assessment, covering and linking within one conceptual framework all important ecosystem components and pressures from human activities, as well as social and economic analysis, was based on over 30 core indicators. Various ecosystem components had been analysed: pelagic and benthic habitats, fish, seals, birds which had been subjected to various pressures: eutrophication, hazardous substances, alien species, extraction of fish through commercial fishing, marine litter, underwater sound, and seabed disturbance. Regrettably, the graph shown by Ms Wenning indicated mainly a poor state of the Baltic Sea. For instance, the Baltic Sea was still highly affected by eutrophication, even though phosphorous and nitrogen inputs – causing eutrophication – had been reduced significantly. There were some positive signs regarding the status, though, such as a decrease in nutrient concentrations and improved water clarity in parts of the Baltic Sea. That would indicate that several measures to improve the status of the Baltic Sea were operating but might not be sufficiently comprehensive or had not been in place long enough to have an effect. Furthermore, she admitted that the Baltic Sea Action Plan had not yet been fully implemented. About 70% of the agreed joint regional actions in the Plan had been carried out. Regarding actions to be implemented on a national level, the corresponding number was between 35% and 60% depending on the country. If all agreed actions of the Baltic Sea Action Plan were to be taken, this would bring about increased human welfare and economic benefits to citizens in the coastal countries, as evidenced in the State of the Baltic Sea report. Ms Wenning emphasized that total losses due to eutrophication had been estimated at 3.8 – 4.4 billion euros annually for the Baltic Sea region. In other words, citizens' welfare would increase by this much each year if a good eutrophication status was achieved. Similarly, recreation values would increase by 1 – 2 billion euros each year in a good state of the environment. The speaker noted that HELCOM had been considering the results of the assessment in order to plan further steps.

3. Statement of the BSPC at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting

BSPC President Jörgen Petterson in attendance at the Ministerial Meeting made a statement to reiterate his support of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan's progress. Foremost in his speech, he called upon the participating governments to make sure Baltic Sea objectives are completed on schedule so that the projects do not become more expensive and challenging in the future. In this regard, he additionally called for more regular HELCOM Ministerial Meetings in order to bring the issues of a clean Baltic Sea more deeply into the political debate and to ensure the schedule for certain projects is being met. The BSPC, he said, fully supports HELCOM as the coordinator of the regional implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 through strengthened implementation of the HELCOM BSAP.

The BSPC President also discussed the climate debate as an overarching issue which needs to be addressed at multiple levels. If climate change is not addressed properly in future, policies and projects regarding the Baltic Sea, Mr. Petterson noted there would be a much higher risk of projects becoming more complicated through problems such as cost increase and having to cut down on objectives, which would be detrimental to the environment as well as citizens of the Baltic region and beyond.



BSPC President Jörgen Petterson at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting



BSPC President Jörgen Pettersson and EU Commissioner Karmenu Vella at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting

The BSPC President is committed to support HELCOM strengthen actions for a healthy Baltic Sea and meet its goals in a timely manner. In his statement, Mr. Pettersson commented: “Apart from all the progress achieved by HELCOM in the meantime, the current situation shows us that appeals alone are not enough. We must act more widely and rigorously and make greater efforts. At this point, it may not be impossible but certainly a particular challenge to implement the requirements of the action plan on time by 2021 and the further goals of HELCOM. If we want to achieve these goals, we have to force ourselves to act more stringently than before.”



EU Commissioner Karmenu Vella, Jörgen Pettersson and Bodo Bahr



Jörgen Pettersson and Monika Stankiewicz at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting

Mr. Pettersson also thanked and congratulated different people and organizations who have contributed to the success of HELCOM. He specifically thanked the HELCOM Chairs and Executive Secretaries for keeping the BSPC regularly informed on the continued development.

Pettersson restated the common priorities and regional strategies of action of Baltic Sea governments which were discussed at the 26th Annual Conference last year in Hamburg. He considers these responsibilities crucial to the health of the Baltic Sea and the sustainability of its resources. In summary, these priorities include:

1. continuing to intensify the cooperation of governments and organizations in the Baltic Sea Region on common priorities and developing respective regional strategies and action plans;
2. further strengthening HELCOM as the coordinator of the regional implementation of ocean-related goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations;
3. supporting 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.

In his closing statement, Pettersson assured the Meeting: “The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Åland on 26-28 August 2018 will continue on this path, and also offer dialogue, debate, solutions, friendship and a strong will to increase cooperation,



Jörgen Pettersson, HELCOM Chairlady Marianne Wenning, Bodo Bahr and Deputy Prime Minister of the Åland Islands, Camilla Gunnell

prosperity and a healthy environment in the region. We are the Islands of Peace in the midst of the Baltic Sea, and we want the whole of the Baltic Sea Region to follow our example.“

As President of the BSPC and close partner to HELCOM, Pettersson hopes to see HELCOM continue to thrive and grow as a guardian of the Baltic Sea, the body of water which has become a common cause of diplomacy for connecting many diverse countries.

4. BSPC Efforts to Support HELCOM

The cooperation 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 in points 2 and 3 of the 26th BSPC resolution in regard to cooperation in the region in which the BSPC has committed to further strengthen and develop HELCOM as the coordinator of the regional implementation of ocean-related goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations. This will be achieved through the strengthened implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and further dedication to achieve a Baltic Sea in good environmental status by 2021 and if applicable, by renewing the Baltic Sea Action Plan in line with the UN Sustainable Development Agenda with a time perspective until 2030. The resolution further supports HELCOM in elaborating a regional action plan on underwater noise, implementing the marine litter regional action plan, and fighting eutrophication. Furthermore, the BSPC welcomes concrete measures from HELCOM to reduce the input of plastics into the marine environment.

Finally, Jörgen Pettersson also discussed BSPC relations with HELCOM during an intensive conversation with the European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella at the Ministerial Meeting in Brussels. In this conversation, the BSPC President called for more action rather than just discussions and debates.

III. Main Decisions in 2017-2018

1. Status of HOLAS II and the Baltic Sea Action Plan

In 2010, HELCOM performed the initial Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS I). From 2014 to the present, HELCOM has been developing an updated assessment (HOLAS II) which is based on the results of HOLAS I. The goal of a second HOLAS is to determine what needs to be done for the Baltic Sea to reach healthier status and how to pursue these actions sustainably. This is done through the identification of key indicators, 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. This assessment influences and tracks the progress in achieving the Baltic Sea Action Plan's objectives, but may also be able to help EU member States in their reporting for the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). Contracting parties have overcome many challenges to agree on core indicators, which are the primary assessment tools of HOLAS II, as well as other assessment measures.

The final version of the second Holistic Assessment (HOLAS II) was approved at the 54th Heads of Delegation meeting in Helsinki, Finland in mid June 2018. The assessment has been well received, as many respondents have highlighted the usefulness of such a comprehensive report as the main point of reference to the state of the Baltic Sea. Eighty percent of the respondents agreed the updated assessment provides sufficient direction for the protection and sustainable use of the Baltic Sea, and eighty seven percent found the assessment results specifically relevant to their work.

The main strength of the report is its holistic approach, the diversity and scope of its topics, and the large amount of data and information that is used to support the assessments. Many respondents also recognized and appreciated that the assessments are based on up to date knowledge, technology, and research, which is helpful in making sure projects and programs are being carried out with the best resources available. The HOLAS II project has involved more than three hundred topical experts and national representatives from marine management authorities around the Baltic Sea, and their participation in the creation of the new assessment along with

their consultation and experience have significantly helped to further strengthen the report. Other elements worth recognition include the expansion of social and economic analyses compared to the initial HELCOM holistic assessment, the focus on additional pressures such as marine litter and underwater sound, and the inclusion of an evaluation of confidence status.

In addition to the current objectives on eutrophication, biodiversity, maritime activities and hazardous substances, the BSAP incorporates new perspectives beyond 2021. For example, the report focuses on an ecosystem approach and giving due consideration to the economic and social aspects of its measures. The report addresses emerging pressures such as underwater noise, pharmaceuticals and micro-plastics. It 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 update of the BSAP particularly resonates with the region's desire to intensify its efforts for a healthy Baltic Sea and to better adhere to its timely schedule of goals.

In short, the main components of the assessment are:

- a. Distribution of human activities and pressures in the Baltic Sea. Cumulative impacts are assessed using the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact Index;
- b. Assessment of good environmental status using core indicators, and integrated assessments of Biodiversity, Eutrophication, Hazardous substances;
- c. Economic and social analyses to support regional assessments of the use of marine waters and cost of degradation.

There remains the question of how this new assessment can continue to be updated and improved going into the future. There have been numerous proposals on what to include in the drafting of a HOLAS III. One of the main weaknesses addressed in HOLAS II was the lack of availability of data, which has been noted as an obvious task for future. Other proposals for a future assessment include to:

- ensure comparability of results between assessment periods so that improvements can be assessed,
- put more emphasis on implementation of necessary measures,

- relate results to the delivery of SDG objectives and describe the extent to which the region, contributes to SDG14 and other relevant goals,
- provide linkages to EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,
- rank pressures and impacts clearly,
- focus on pressures and impacts of climate change on biodiversity and the marine environment that could prevent achievement of a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea,
- focus more on the results and leave out some of the background/enrichment information and highlight even more the key findings,
- regional reporting of relevant indicators from the Contracting Parties to UN custodian agencies and facilitate joint implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Because data quickly becomes old and irrelevant, it is also proposed to set up a supplementary website, in which indicator evaluations and associated information are provided in live tables, updated frequently during the years between Holistic Assessments.

HELCOM and Contracting Parties have pledged to strengthen the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan at the UN Ocean Conference, 5-9 June 2017, New York. The commitment is to continue implementation of the agreed actions that will contribute to the implementation of SDG 14, and for instance, includes:

- a. speeding up the implementation of the marine litter regional action plan, continuing its battle against eutrophication and planning towards the elaboration of a regional action plan on underwater noise, to fulfil SDG 14.1,
- b. ensuring close cooperation on any maritime spatial planning in the Baltic Sea area and management plans for all marine protected areas, to fulfil SDG 14.2 and 14.5,
- c. supporting sustainable agricultural practices, to contribute to SDG 2.4, and ecosystem-related fishery measures, towards SDG 14.4 and 14.6.

Through these assessments and strategies, HELCOM will strive for more resilient marine ecosystems to be better prepared for human-

induced climate change challenges. It will also promote further regional development of socio-economic analyses to create tailor-made connecting points between implementation of different SDGs.

2. Ministerial Meeting 2018

On the 6th of March 2018, the Ministerial Meeting of the HELCOM took place in Brussels, Belgium. This important meeting serves as a response to the call for action in the Baltic Sea based on the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SDGs). During this event, the environment ministers of countries bordering on the Baltic Sea, along with EU Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella, assessed the environmental status of the Baltic Sea as well as the degree of progress made to restore the good environmental status of the Baltic marine environment by 2021. Setting an ambitious path towards achieving a healthy marine environment, the parties focused on the following issues:

I. Taking new action to meet the Sustainable Development Goals in the Baltic Sea

The countries around the Baltic Sea have agreed to use HELCOM as the regional arena for coordinating work on those SDGs that relate to marine and water issues. The main issues discussed in the meeting include eutrophication, nutrient recycling, marine litter, hazardous substances, underwater noise, biodiversity, climate change, ecosystem approach, and improving regional ocean governance.

II. Strengthening implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021 as a top priority

The Baltic Sea Action Plan, which strives for a healthy Baltic Sea by 2021, depends largely on timely executed, cooperative strategies. HELCOM's evaluation on the fulfilment of BSAP actions as well as the assessments of the state of the marine environment show that while much has been accomplished and positive signs of improvement have been shown, the efforts have not yet led to the recovery of the Baltic Sea. The Meeting calls for intensified efforts to reach

common goals in order to achieve more progress on the BSAP and therefore complete the goals of Agenda 2030 in the region.

III. Adjusting the Baltic Sea Action Plan based on new knowledge and future challenges

As scientific knowledge and technologic innovation grows and new issues emerge, the BSAP must undergo reforms to reflect the changing situation and to meet the relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Supported by up to date information, the Meeting plans the next steps to focus on the issues that are most widely distributed and pose the greatest threat, along with climate change and any situations that will develop in the future.

The results of the meeting were laid down in a common declaration, which adapts the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan based on new knowledge and challenges acknowledges the BSAP will be built off the framework of the SDGs as it continues to be updated. The Declaration also enhances efforts made to reach the existing goals while developing a regional strategy on the recycling of nutrients. The parties welcomed the progress which has been made in reducing their nutrient input to the Baltic Sea from land-based sources. They also addressed inputs from ships by designating the Baltic Sea as a special area under MARPOL Annexes IV and as a NO_x Emission Control Area (NECA) under MARPOL Annex VI. Furthermore, the parties appreciated the HELCOM commitment at the UN Ocean Conference on NECA to promote green shipping technology and use of alternative fuels, including LNG. They also supported the recent International Maritime Organization (IMO) decision on the date of enforcement of the Baltic Sea as a special area under MARPOL Annex IV.

During the meeting, OSPAR highlighted the shared vision by HELCOM and OSPAR on the ecosystem approach as well as sharing the transition area between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea as a palpable basis for cooperation. Ms. Salvador, Executive Secretary of OSPAR, stated regional collaboration will play a substantive role in supporting the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030.

As rising HELCOM Chair, Finland made it clear that with only three years left to reach the goals of the BSAP, HELCOM is lagging behind in the implementation and needs to take appropriate

actions to meet deadlines. Finland has committed to focus on the implementation of remaining national actions will facilitate the implementation of the joint actions. It is also important to note the Meeting shared information from Finland that the UN Environment Assembly has made resolutions regarding marine litter and has established an expert group on marine litter and microplastics.

One highlight of the meeting was a letter sent by the HELCOM Chair to the current Chair of BALTFISH (Denmark), the upcoming HELCOM Chair (Finland) and the upcoming BALTFISH Chair (Sweden) suggesting a meeting between HELCOM and BALTFISH to discuss closer cooperation between management of fisheries and marine environment. This is a huge step forward as the EU Chairmanship has been striving toward more communication and synergy between different organizations in order to preserve the health of the Baltic as a unified team.

3. Priorities and Results of the EU Chairmanship of HELCOM

As the EU's HELCOM Chairmanship ends, it is important to recognize the progress of the goals and priorities they had set under their leadership. Information to and results of the three main priorities of the EU Chairmanship can be found below:

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

The first priority was to assess good environmental status with quantitative indicators to thereby be able to reflect on the current state, pressures, and impacts on the Baltic Sea. The Chairmanship has succeeded in delivering the results of the HOLAS II assessment in July 2017, as well as updating and finalizing HOLAS II and having it approved by the 54th Heads of Delegation meeting in June 2018. The Chairmanship has also been able to quantify pressures and effects with the latest Pollution Load Compilation (PLC), which was based on the report on sources and pathways of nutrient inputs by HELCOM presented at the 53rd Heads of Delegations meeting in 2017. This measure illustrates the contribution of various sources of nitrogen and phosphorus to total loads in 2014 and has helped make progress in reducing pressures on the marine environment to

reach a healthier ecosystem. Furthermore, the Chairmanship has accomplished the development and adoption of core indicators for marine litter and underwater noise as proposed by HELCOM's guidelines in May 2018. However, core indicators for seafloor integrity have only been partly accomplished, and therefore will require efforts from the new Chairmanship to be completed.

The EU Chairmanship has also succeeded in making a stronger and more effective response to nutrient enrichment through appropriate measures. This has been done through programs and agreements such as the HELCOM recommendation on sewage sludge, a new regional project on manure nutrient content, and the Brussels Ministerial Declaration to elaborate a nutrient recycling strategy by 2020. These effective responses have accomplished a NO_x Emission Control Area in the Baltic Sea, adequate port reception facilities, and the acceptance of more sustainable agricultural practices. The EU Chairmanship also met its priority to encourage strategic engagement with other sectors in order to deliver innovative solutions to marine issues. One of these important solutions to take note of is the effort toward nutrient removal, which took place through the HELCOM lead project (OPENRISK) on open tools for assessing the risk of maritime accidents and spills and can also be seen in the Brussel Ministerial nutrient recycling strategy elaboration. The EU was only partially able to build a stronger response to marine litter, which they have been striving toward with appropriate measures and regional action plans. However, the EU Chairmanship has set a foundation to improve actions against marine litter, and the Finnish Chairmanship will be able to take over this responsibility with confidence.

II. Innovation for a sustainable Blue Economy and healthy ecosystems

The second major priority of the EU Chairmanship was to promote knowledge and innovation in the Baltic Sea. Spreading information and encouraging scientific and technological progress brings investment in Blue Growth sectors with strong potential, which keeps the ecosystem in the Baltic healthy. Such a system is known as the sustainable Blue Economy. This has been achieved through actions such as publishing the HOLAS II results and BONUS projects' results, ecosystem service mapping and the assessment of their social and economic values, and fostering the application of the ecosystem-based approach in maritime spatial planning. In terms of maritime spatial planning, HELCOM, in partnership with 12 other national authorities, has launched a new project on ecosystem

approaches known as “Pan Baltic Scope,” scheduled to take place between January 2018 and December 2019. The goal of this project is to promote coherent Baltic Sea maritime spatial planning and to construct sustainable macro-region mechanisms for MSP cooperation across borders.

Another aspect of this priority is to maintain a well-managed network of marine protected areas. HELCOM recognizes marine protected areas (MPA) as a key factor in establishing a sustainable blue economy because they help rebuild fish stocks and preserve coastal areas, while also contributing to coastal and marine tourism. For this HELCOM-directed responsibility, the EU Chairmanship will be handing the strategies over to Finland. These include monitoring the MPA network and implementing the guidelines on management of seafloor integrity and fisheries in protected areas, improving the enforcement and coordination of management measures to minimise pressures and impacts on MPAs (in particular for transnational ones), and assessing the effectiveness of management measures both for individual sites and at network level. Environmental targets can be coordinated with economic and social goals and support each other using the HOLAS II results.

III: Tackling the challenge of regional governance

Under the subject of regional governance, the EU Chairmanship found it important to increase exchange of information and better cooperation between HELCOM and the relevant Regional Fisheries Bodies. This was exemplified through agreements such as the Brussel Ministerial Declaration on a nutrient recycling program by 2020, in which HELCOM agreed to use the Baltic Sea 2030 Action to strengthen regional governance. The Declaration also agreed to strengthen cooperation with BALTFISH and the Baltic Sea Advisory Council in order to sustain a coherent communication network between marine and fishery management measures. Such an exchange is beneficial to create synergy between the specific goals of the different groups and prevent overlapping. Furthermore, in contribution to international ocean governance, the EU Chairmanship has developed synergies with regional or European governance frameworks, for instance with the EUSBSR. The EU has also maintained HELCOM’s crucial role in the implementation of SDG 14 on oceans and seas, which can be seen in the decision to update the BSAP and the local implementation of ocean-related SDGs in the Baltic Sea.

4. Cooperation between OSPAR and HELCOM

For many years, HELCOM and OSPAR, The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, have collaborated closely on a wide range of topics, and their cooperation has led to significant efficiency and the implementation of certain effective measures. Among the efficiency gains are joint requests to ICES, joint work on indicators, sharing databases, and jointly developing measures under both Conventions on the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter. In the development of effective measures regarding invasive species, underwater noise and migratory birds, cooperation is always an advantage. OSPAR welcomes further discussions with HELCOM to identify new issues of common concern that will contribute to support the implementation of SDG 14 and in this regard welcomes further cooperation in existing work.

During the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Brussels, the Oskar Commission (OSPAR), represented by Chair Laura Piriz, reiterated its support to HELCOM's monumental efforts for protection of the marine environment as well as healthy and productive oceans and seas. OSPAR also welcomed the possibility to submit views and suggestion on areas of further cooperation between HELCOM and OSPAR in preparation of the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in March 2018. HELCOM and OSPAR have a common vision of an ecosystem approach to managing human activities impacting on the marine environment as reflected by the joint adoption of the "Statement on the Ecosystem Approach to the Management of Human Activities" at the joint Ministerial Meeting held in Bremen in June 2003.

OSPAR congratulated HELCOM for the State of the Baltic Sea report HOLAS II and acknowledged the cooperation in relation to common indicators in both HOLAS II and the OSPAR Intermediate Assessment 2017. It also welcomed HELCOM's engagement in the global process of fulfilling the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially goal 14 'Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development'.

HELCOM and OSPAR depend on the influence of countries (Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden) that are Contracting Parties to both Conventions and have contributed towards the enhancement of common knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, the two Conventions share a particular transition area with the Kattegat region where the North Sea and the Baltic Sea connect. It is in this transition area and the North Sea/Baltic Sea that the most opportunities for enhanced collaboration and cooperation exist.

Amongst a wider scope of opportunities for HELCOM and OSPAR to join efforts in the future, some of the steps already taken on specific areas of work can be further developed through cooperation at thematic, regional, European and global levels, along with opportunities for collaborative activities. OSPAR proposed joint research and action on the topics of Biodiversity, Environmental Impact of Human Activities, Hazardous substances, European Union Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Emerging and horizontal issues.

In conclusion and bearing in mind OSPAR's example of good collaboration between Regional Sea Conventions, OSPAR will endeavour to collaborate with HELCOM, and to draw from each other's relevant experience and support our Contracting Parties on the implementation of the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goal issues, addressing subjects of regional concern and common interest.

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 build 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 suitable 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 plans on underwater noise and beach litter, and providing support in implementing the Marine Litter Regional Action Plan.

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. Finnish HELCOM Chairmanship 2018-2020

As Finland assumes the HELCOM Chairmanship from 2018 to 2020, the new Chair Ms. Saara Bäck and Vice Chair Ms. Tarja Haaranen from the Ministry of Environment have committed their Chairmanship team to the following four top priorities:

I. Updating the Baltic Sea Action Plan

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) is HELCOM's roadmap for achieving a healthy Baltic Sea. Many of the measures and actions of the 2007 Action Plan have been accomplished; however, favorable environmental status remains to be achieved. The Ministerial Meeting in 2018 agreed to embark on updating the Action Plan by 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. The Chair of HELCOM is therefore committed to lead the updating the Baltic Sea Action Plan and to find common solutions to formulate an ambitious and realistic updated Plan.

II. Reduction of nutrient inputs and nutrient recycling

Eutrophication, which is the excess input of nutrients to the Baltic Sea, is still a main environmental problem. HELCOM has been 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 measure to secure the balance of ocean nutrients is the recycling of nutrients. The HELCOM Chair is 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. The Chair is also ready to dedicate significant effort to formulate Baltic Sea regional strategy on nutrient recycling and related actions for inclusion in the updated BSAP.

III. Baltic Sea and Climate Change

Climate change causes multiple impacts on the Baltic Sea and its marine flora and fauna. This change happens fast and, as a response, policies and strategies need to adjust accordingly. 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 could play a role in climate change mitigation by working to reduce the load of organic carbon to the Baltic and by maximizing storage of carbon in the Baltic Sea. The Chair wants to ensure consequences of climate change, such as warming, sea ice decline, anoxia and shifting species ranges will be taken into account when the BSAP will be updated. It also aims to work towards a better understanding of the role of the Baltic Sea in the global carbon cycle.

IV. Synergy between Agenda 2030 and HELCOM work

Agenda 2030 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. The Chair strives to create and maintain strong synergistic links between the Agenda 2030 process and HELCOM work.

3. Proposed HELCOM work on climate change

The ultimate aim of HELCOM work on climate change has been identified as increasing the resilience of the system about climate change impacts. From a HELCOM perspective, the following steps have been identified as possible ways to support the process towards reaching this aim:

1. the provisioning of robust, policy relevant, research-based knowledge on the impacts and vulnerabilities to climate change;
2. ensuring a platform for a policy/stakeholder-science dialogue and
3. reviewing policies in the light of climate adaptation.

To achieve this, the primary climate change objective of HELCOM is to provide a coordinating framework to centralize and synthesize the latest knowledge on the effects of climate change for the Baltic Sea region through e.g. the development of a Baltic Sea climate change report card. Such an approach would provide a clear pathway from science to policy, with clear guidance on the level of confidence in information being presented, and facilitate the development of appropriate advisory approaches to support the update and implementation of the BSAP.

To achieve the goals laid out by HELCOM, there is a need for scientific expertise on both direct and indirect effects of climate change on the Baltic Sea environment. This coordinating framework and subsequent platform is suggested to take the form of a HELCOM Expert Network on Climate Change (EN CLIME), to be housed under and guided by the State and Conservation group. However, as climate change is a cross-cutting issue the proposed EN CLIME would need to have an inclusive working structure and prioritize close cooperation with both internal (e.g. Expert Networks) and external partners (e.g. Baltic Earth). This would also help ensure that the standard and usability of the work is high, and avoid different organizations from repeating the work of others.

The work of EN CLIME, through products such as the report card, would reduce the lag time for transferring quality assured science to end users with clear guidance on the level of confidence in the science. The work could also support the assessment of knowledge gaps and future research priorities and ensure that new scientific findings on climate change and its impacts on oceans and seas should be visible in HELCOM, as well as find their way into HELCOM decision-making and the day to day work.

The main product of the EN CLIME work would be a concise and easily accessible report card synthesizing the latest climate change science to assist decision-makers in their understanding of what changes have already taken place, and what may occur in the future. The confidence of the research results presented in the report cards should be supported by showing climate change results predominantly based on commonly agreed modelling. To account for this, and to provide the highest possible standards of transparency, the report cards would be accompanied by associated reports providing more in depth information on the process and background behind the work. The fully-citable report cards and associated reports would draw on the best of regional and international science, utilizing already available results and information.

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