

# THIRD SESSION

REPORT  
**HELCOM**



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BSPC Observer in HELCOM

Honourable President,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Dear friends,

Last year I have been given the honour to continue the exceptional and passionate work of Sylvia Bretschneider as BSPC Rapporteur at HELCOM. This has occurred in especially turbulent times with the COVID-19 pandemic and the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan update process in full swing. The last couple of months have been trying, but I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to HELCOM for its continued hard and intensive work. I would specifically like to compliment the Commission's transparency and openness with a view to its online presence and outreach.

Let me start by sharing a personal impression. Being new to the role of HELCOM Observer, I first had to come to terms with the restrictions imposed by the mandate. This role is, by nature, limited to acting as BSPC's eyes and ears at the meeting of the executive – but not as the voice of the constituents, which we are all accustomed to as parliamentarians. This required some adaptation, but it also made me think about the ways we can make the most of our observer status and not only act as silent guests.

In this regard, I would like to recall point 24 of our last year's resolution and draw attention to point 10 of this year's resolution draft (nach drafting committee Abgleich), in which the BSPC calls upon governments to “support that the HELCOM chairmanship” pursues “to intensify efforts to address the problem of munition dumps in the sea”. The German team, which assumed HELCOM chairmanship in July, advocates for exchanges of expertise, information sharing and technology tests in order to gain a better overview of the scale of munition compounds and their potential impacts. The ultimate goal is to ensure their safe and environmentally sound removal from the Baltic Sea.

Within the framework of the Baltic Sea Action Plan update process, the HELCOM Expert Group on environmental risks of hazardous submerged objects (SUBMERGED) has submitted a corresponding proposal for new action. It aims at the development of Best Environmental Practice and control of threats posed by munitions, wrecks and other hazardous submerged objects in the Baltic Sea. Today and tomorrow, the BSAP UP workshop on hazardous substances will discuss and evaluate this proposal, among others. We should keep a close eye on these developments bearing in mind that the 41<sup>st</sup> HELCOM Ministerial Meeting stressed that the BSAP update process should be participatory and inclusive.

As far as the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan is concerned, 2019-2020 has marked a departure from plans to concrete actions. The work here has mainly concentrated on two aspects: review and reassessment of current actions and consideration of proposals for new ones. HELCOM is working on a tight schedule despite the pandemic-induced limitations: the updated Plan should be adopted next year at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting.

With the BSAP update high on HELCOM's agenda, regular work on pressing issues had to continue regardless. In order to improve the safety of navigation and protection of the marine environment given the increase of Baltic Sea traffic, this year's Ministerial Meeting adopted recommendations on deep-sea

pilotage and enhancing the use of pilots in Route T and Sound. In addition, it revised the recommendation on the protection of harbour porpoise in view of increased human activities and the critical status of harbour porpoise populations.

At the same time, HELCOM is actively working to increase its outreach and contribute to global commitments. State representatives have agreed to use the HELCOM platform to coordinate the regional implementation of ocean-related SDGs in the Baltic Sea. In addition, HELCOM undertook new voluntary commitments for the 2020 UN Ocean Conference, which ranged from integrating ocean-related SDGs into the updated BSAP, contributing to the UN Decade of Science for Sustainable Development through the development of the HELCOM Science Agenda, to sharing experience within the framework of the UN Regional Seas Programme.

Less than two months ago, the German team has assumed Chairmanship at HELCOM and presented six strategic priorities covering such issue areas as:

- updating and implementing the Baltic Sea Action Plan,
- the already mentioned munitions,
- enhancing marine biodiversity,
- and – last but not least – understanding and responding to climate change.

The outlined priorities show potential synergies with the newly established BSPC Working Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity and could serve as a solid basis for further cooperation between BSPC and HELCOM.

Overall, it has been a busy year, not only because of COVID-19. Much work still lies ahead towards our commonly shared goal: a healthy and safe Baltic Sea.

Thank you for your attention.