

Reply by the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) to the request by the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea regarding information on recent developments concerning the Resolution 66/68 on Sustainable fisheries

Organization: Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)

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Achieving sustainable fisheries

The Helsinki Commission, HELCOM, works to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution through intergovernmental co-operation between Denmark, Estonia, the European Community, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden.

HELCOM is the governing body of the "Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area" - more usually known as the Helsinki Convention.

Development of policy and management measures addressing commercial fisheries in the Baltic in the Baltic Sea is performed within the frame of the European Common Fisheries Policy. Coordination of fisheries policy with the only HELCOM non-EU country – Russia, is done by the EU on a bilateral basis.

Nevertheless, [HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan \(BSAP\)](#)¹, adopted by the Ministers of the Environment of HELCOM Contracting States and a representative of the European Commission in Krakow in November 2007, addresses competent fisheries authorities who should, in collaboration with HELCOM, take action to develop long-term management measures in the Baltic Sea.

The BSAP agreed on the following:

WE AGREE that the Baltic Sea shall become a model of good management of human activities, and recommend that all fisheries management be developed and implemented based on the Ecosystem Approach in order to enhance the balance between sustainable use and protection of marine natural resources,

WE URGE competent fisheries authorities to take all the necessary measures to ensure that, by 2021, populations of all commercially exploited fish species are

¹ http://www.helcom.fi/BSAP/en_GB/intro/

within safe biological limits, reach Maximum Sustainable Yield, and are distributed through their natural range, and contain full size/age range,

Therefore, WE URGE the competent fisheries authorities in co-operation with the Baltic RAC and HELCOM to take immediate actions for:

- development of long-term management plans for commercially exploited fish stocks so that they are within safe biological limits and reach agreed targets, such as Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), and improve their distribution and size/age range, especially for salmon, sea trout, pelagic species (sprat and herring), and flatfish species, by 2010;
- introduction of additional fisheries management measures based on the best available scientific evidence to achieve:
- that all caught species and by-catch which cannot be released alive or without injuries are landed and reported, by 2012;
- continued designation of additional/improved spatial and/or temporal closures of sufficient size and duration for fisheries to prevent capture of spawning and juvenile fish;
- the designation of additional permanent closures of sufficient size for fisheries to prevent capture of non-target species to protect important reproduction and feeding areas and to protect ecosystems, by 2012;
- the further development and application in all cases of appropriate breeding and restocking practices for salmon and sea trout to safeguard the genetic variability of native wild stocks, by 2012;
- the urgent adoption of measures to minimise by-catch of undersized fish and non-target species by 2012,

WE also URGE the competent authorities to take actions for:

- immediate elimination of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fisheries and further development of landing control and other measures, taking into account the outcome of the Baltic RAC Conference on Control and Compliance in the Baltic in March 2007;
- rapid implementation of the existing long-term management plans for cod and eel, not later than by 2012 to improve their distribution size/age-range;

WE FURTHER AGREE to invite the competent authorities to apply, in relation to the recommendation above, the targets annexed to the Baltic Sea Action Plan which require the implementation of fisheries management measures;

Contracting States that are also Member States of the EU AGREE to make a joint submission, in consultation with the Russian Federation, with the view to ensure that fisheries are managed in sustainable manner compatible with the environmental objectives of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, to the 2012 review of the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP);

WE ALSO AGREE:

- to develop national programmes for the conservation of eel stocks as a contribution to a Baltic co-ordinated programme to ensure successful eel migrations from the Baltic Sea drainage basin to natural spawning grounds. For the EU Member States thus implementing the EC Regulation No. 1100/2007 establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel, by 2008;
- the classification and inventorying of rivers with historic and existing migratory fish species (e.g. salmon, eel, sea trout and sturgeon), no later than by 2012;
- the development of restoration plans (including restoration of spawning sites and migration routes) in suitable rivers to reinstate migratory fish species, by 2010;
- the active conservation of at least ten endangered/threatened wild salmon river populations in the Baltic Sea region as well as the reintroduction of native Baltic Sea salmon in at least four potential salmon rivers, by 2009,

WE ALSO AGREE to enhance restoration of lost biodiversity by joining and/or supporting Poland and Germany in reintroducing Baltic sturgeon to its potential spawning rivers,

WE AGREE that coastal fish constitute an imperative part of the Baltic Sea total biodiversity and have a structuring role in coastal food webs. Furthermore, coastal fisheries are of great importance to the society from both a socio-economic and a cultural point of view,

WE ACKNOWLEDGE that a substantial part of the coastal fish community of the Baltic Sea consists of freshwater species, only managed at a national level,

WE AGREE and INVITE the competent authorities

- to establish an international co-operation network to agree on guidelines to promote the ecosystem-based management of coastal fisheries in the Baltic region;
- to develop long-term plans for, protecting, monitoring and sustainably managing coastal fish species, including the most threatened and/or declining, including anadromous ones (according to the HELCOM Red list of threatened and declining species of lampreys and fishes of the Baltic Sea, BSEP No. 109), by 2012,
- develop a suite of indicators with region-specific reference values and targets for coastal fish as well as tools for assessment and sustainable management of coastal fish by 2012.

The BSAP has so far achieved:

Through the HELCOM BSAP the following actions have so far been implemented towards sustainable fisheries in the Baltic:

-assessment of conservation status of non-commercial fish species through the HELCOM FISH-PRO projectⁱ and establishment of a cooperation network to agree on guidelines to promote the ecosystem-based management of coastal fisheries

-on-going promotion of research on developing methods for assessing and reporting on impacts of fisheries on biodiversity

-new HELCOM BALTFIMPA project to address the impacts of fisheries on marine protected areas, including development and implementation of fisheries management measures

-on-going development and implementation of effective monitoring and reporting systems for by-caught birds and mammals

-A joint submission by EU Member States to the 2012 review of EU Common Fisheries Policy

-Additional fisheries measures such as classification and inventory of rivers with historic and existing migratory fish species and development of restorations plans to reinstate migratory fish

-Annual Reporting and Review by the HELCOM Baltic Fisheries Environmental Forum on the following:

- The competent fisheries authorities to take all the necessary measures to ensure that populations of all commercially exploited fish species are within safe biological limits, reach Maximum Sustainable Yield, and are distributed through their natural range, and contain full size/age range
- Contracting Parties report on actions taken by the competent authorities and Baltic Fisheries/Environmental Forum for Implementation of the HELCOM BSAP Fish/Fisheries related items to work on the issue
- Development of long-term management plans for commercially exploited fish species
- Introduction of additional fisheries management measures to achieve:
 - that all caught species and by-catch are landed and reported
 - continued designation of additional/improved spatial and/or temporal closures
 - designation of additional permanent closures
 - further development and application in all cases of appropriate breeding and restocking practices for salmon and sea trout
 - minimisation of by-catch of under-sized fish and non-target species
 - an evaluation of the effectiveness of existing technical measures to minimise of by-catch of harbour porpoises and to introduce adequate new technologies and measures (by 2008)

- Elimination of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fisheries and further development of landing control

Subregional and Regional cooperation in the Baltic

HELCOM contributes to sustainable fisheries in the Baltic through the BSAP and by coordinating on a regional level, environmental and fisheries related dialogue and cooperation between the HELCOM Contracting States and the European Commission.

The HELCOM Baltic Fisheries Environmental Forum brings together Fisheries and Environment authorities twice a year to discuss and find common ground on current environmental and fisheries related issues in the Baltic.

HELCOM also coordinates the implementation of EU policies, such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), on the Baltic Sea level. MSFD, likewise BSAP, is based on ecosystem approach and aims at achieving a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea. For example, the HELCOM CORESET project is developing core indicators and determining thresholds for Good Environmental Status in order to assess the state of the Baltic Sea, including the fish stocks.

Monitoring, control, surveillance, compliance, and enforcement

Development of guidelines on flag State control of fishing vessels is not under the mandate of HELCOM. HELCOM nevertheless takes part in the work of Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council's (BS RAC) work, which addresses this issue. BS RAC is one of the seven Regional Advisory Councils established by the European Council to increase stakeholder involvement in the development of a successful Common Fisheries Policy of the EU. The BS RAC has also addressed the issue of better traceability of fish and fisheries products. The HELCOM BSAP does not address the issue of traceability.

HELCOM also coordinates monitoring of the Baltic Sea environment, including coastal fish monitoring under the [HELCOM FISH-PRO project](#). The FISH-PRO project has been carrying out an indicator-based assessment of coastal fish community status in the Baltic Sea for the years 2005-2009, which is to be published in spring 2012. The assessment will propose a method for selecting indicators to assess coastal fish community status, present an assessment of the current status of coastal fish communities in the Baltic Sea, and review existing restoration and restocking programmes for threatened and declining coastal fish species in the HELCOM contracting states.

Responsible fisheries in the marine ecosystem

HELCOM coordinates monitoring of the Baltic Sea environment, including coastal fish. HELCOM has a coordinated monitoring programme COMBINE addressing the status of the marine environment, which has been running since 1979. Assessments of the status of the environment are an essential part of HELCOM's activities and the HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy².

In addition, HELCOM has a Data and Information Strategy³ and the data is collected to databanks, including a databank hosted by the International Council for Exploration of the Sea (ICES). HELCOM also has a [map and data service](#)⁴ to make environmental information accessible for interested users and the general public, where GIS data can be viewed and downloaded.

HELCOM has adopted guidelines for the management of the Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs)⁵, which take into account potential impacts from fisheries, but does not include criteria on the objectives and management of marine protected areas for fisheries purposes. The guidelines are linked to a HELCOM Recommendation 15/5⁶ on Coastal and marine Baltic Sea protected areas.

The BSAP requested the following:

“WE FURTHER REQUEST the competent authorities, in co-operation with the Baltic Regional Advisory Council (RAC) under the EU Common Fisheries Policy and HELCOM, to collaborate closely with the Contracting Parties in developing and implementing management measures for fisheries inside marine protected areas in the Baltic Sea area in order to fulfill conservation targets by 2010.”

This issue has been addressed in a new HELCOM Managing Fisheries in Baltic Marine Protected Areas (BALTFIMPA) project⁷, the aim of which is to assist, on a regional level, the HELCOM Contracting States to comply with their obligations to fulfill conservation objectives of marine protected areas in the Baltic Sea. This will be achieved by identifying conflicts of use and when applicable assist the running of a case-by-case consultative process aiming for a dialogue on possible measures. The central question guiding the project is how can fisheries management contribute to achieving conservation objectives of marine protected areas?

¹ more information on www.helcom.fi

² http://www.helcom.fi/groups/monas/en_GB/monitoring_strategy/

³ http://www.helcom.fi/groups/monas/en_GB/datastrategy/

⁴ http://www.helcom.fi/GIS/en_GB/HelcomGIS/

⁵ http://www.helcom.fi/Recommendations/guidelines/en_GB/guidel_15_5_mgt/

⁶ http://www.helcom.fi/Recommendations/en_GB/rec15_5/

⁷ http://www.helcom.fi/projects/on_going/en_GB/BALTFIMPA/