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HELCOM's on-going activities related to ocean affairs and the law of the sea (Contribution to UN Secretary-General's annual report to the General Assembly)

Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) governs the regional legal treaty from 1974 – the Helsinki Convention – and applies ecosystem approach to the management of human activities through its [Baltic Sea Action Plan](#) (BSAP, 2007–2021). The progress of all the nine member States in implementing the Action Plan, aiming at a good ecological status of the sea, will be discussed in the Ministerial Meeting of 2013. The Action Plan addresses **biodiversity, eutrophication, hazardous substances and maritime traffic**.

The Action Plan also contributes to the implementation of legislative and policy frameworks in European and global contexts, e.g. by being the coordination platform for the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and by helping to ensure that the decisions under the global Convention on Biological Diversity are obliged; among others. As specified below, HELCOM cooperates with several other Conventions, Programmes and initiatives, such as OSPAR, REMPEC, Black Sea Commission, etc.

First ever checklist of Baltic macro-species

All animal and plant species visible to the human eye and found in the Baltic Sea have been, for the first time, collected into one [checklist](#) of macro-species¹. This is a part of the larger HELCOM process to produce a comprehensive Red List of Baltic Sea species and habitats, following IUCN criteria, as well as updating the lists on biotopes and biotope complexes. The checklist of macro-species presents a detailed overview on which species occur now, or within the last 200 years, and where within its basin. Usually checklists concentrate on a particular group of species found in a defined region, mostly within national borders. The completed HELCOM checklist is unique in that it aims to cover all visible species simultaneously and the Baltic Sea in its entirety. The wealth of information being generated will help better protect the threatened species and habitats and overall manage the human activities at sea.

Follow-up system to measure the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan

A set of core indicators for hazardous substances, marine biodiversity and contamination effects as well as eutrophication with associated targets reflecting a good environmental status has been selected and is under finalisation.

The core indicators will serve the future assessment of the state of the marine environment as well as the effectiveness of implementing HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan. The selected indicators will be prioritized according to the regionally coordinated monitoring programme; they will facilitate coherence of the HELCOM countries' approach towards other international obligations; and ultimately assist policy-makers to assess whether their decisions and management actions are collectively bringing the expected effect on the entire sea area.

The eutrophication indicators and targets for the Baltic Sea, already available, have now been updated based on a major scientific project - [TARGREV](#)².

The new and scientifically strengthened eutrophication targets close the first chapter of the on-going revision of the nutrient load reduction scheme of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan

¹ <http://www.helcom.fi/stc/files/Projects/RedList/BSEP130.pdf> and
http://www.helcom.fi/projects/on_going/en_GB/RedLists/

² http://www.helcom.fi/stc/files/Publications/Proceedings/BSEP133_TARGREV.pdf

(BSAP). The new targets are used as a basis of enhanced ecological modelling of revised nutrient loads the sea can tolerate and still be in the target eutrophication status. The revised maximum allowable nutrient loads set the ground for allocation of new nutrient load reduction targets per each country.

Climate change

The Baltic region has in recent decades warmed up faster than the global average, and the work continues to increase scientific understanding on the effects of these changes on the Baltic Sea ecosystem and to engage decision-makers for reducing of other human-induced pressures. HELCOM has followed closely the scientific community's path towards the second BALTEX Assessment of Climate Change for the Baltic Sea Basin (BACC II), due to release in late 2013.

A regional workshop helped to gather the latest findings on Baltic climate change and its implications on the ecosystem, with the aim to feed into more targeted environmental policies in the Baltic Sea. The [Conclusions](#) of the workshop³ along with the BACC II will be used for HELCOM thematic assessment to provide the most relevant up-to-date information targeting the Baltic decision-makers and to be ready for the 2013 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting.

Assessing the knowledge on climate change and its effects on the Baltic Sea is planned to be done at regular intervals within HELCOM. This activity should aim at making proposals for measures to strengthen the Baltic Sea ecosystem and to make it more resilient against the projected changes.

Sustainable fisheries

To assist the HELCOM Contracting States in complying with their obligations to fulfill conservation objectives of marine protected areas, BALTFIMPA Project⁴ works to produce a generic tool to assist in fisheries management decisions. Key measures will include studying the impact of fisheries and finding new solutions to mitigate it. Solutions can range from improved management of fisheries regulations to development of new types of fishing gear that are more sustainable for the environment.

Sources and flows of hazardous substances

The Final Report of a major project ([COHIBA](#))⁵ by applying novel methods such as the Whole Effluent Assessment, delivered valuable information on the identification of sources and flows of hazardous substances; and about the development of cost-efficient measures to minimise pollution by them, among others. The outcomes are ready for application at national level.

Improved wastewater treatment

The publishing of the *Book of Good Practices in Sludge Management*, first of its kind in the Baltic Sea Region and issued under [PURE Project](#), supports the efforts towards better phosphorus removal, which has a key role in reducing the potentially harmful environmental impacts within urban wastewater treatment. The goal is to have all water utilities meeting HELCOM standards in outgoing wastewaters.

Addressing significant polluters – “Hot Spots”

Over two-thirds of the 162 serious pollution areas - so called hot spots - identified around the Baltic Sea since 1992 have been cleaned up, as a result of the Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP), the current form of which has officially completed. The JCP was established as an international environmental management framework for the long-term restoration of the Baltic's ecological balance. In latest year (2012), six agricultural areas, eight municipal/industrial waste water treatment plants and one coastal management programme, were removed from the list. Overall, the hot spots concern municipal and industrial

³ <http://www.helcom.fi/stc/files/Publications/FINALConclusionsOfTheWorkshop.pdf>

⁴ http://www.helcom.fi/projects/on_going/en_GB/BALTFIMPA/

⁵ <http://www.cohiba-project.net/>

waste water treatment areas, along with industrial and agricultural areas, the latter ones often being the most challenging to mitigate. 53 hot spots remain to be remedied.

Partnership with the Black Sea Commission

HELCOM partners with the Black Sea Commission in an EU-project by transferring know-how on monitoring and assessment methods related to eutrophication⁶, including on a nutrient reductions scheme.

Risks of oil and chemical substances

Sub-regional risks of spills of oil and hazardous substances from ships in the Baltic Sea were assessed in [BRISK/BRISK-RU Projects](#)⁷ along with high-definition maps that define high risk accident areas in the region.

The official HELCOM oil drift forecasting system (SeaTrackWeb) has been upgraded to meet the rapid progresses in internet technologies. The effective service forecasts and backtracks drift and spreading of oil, chemicals, algae and substances in water, and it uses the latest technology, three-dimensional modelling, updated atmospheric and ocean forecasts and observations, satellite information and HELCOM's AIS system. The system is available to all HELCOM countries for free.

Tackling invasive species

Recent ratification of the IMO's Ballast Water Management Convention by two more HELCOM countries (Russia and Denmark), in addition to Sweden (2009) is another concrete example of progress made last year. Many other HELCOM countries are close to ratification, to meet the deadline of 2013 agreed in the Baltic Sea Action Plan and according to the regional ballast water roadmap. A more detailed study on risk assessment of alien species transfer has been finalized⁸. New joint Guidance for voluntary ballast water exchange by ships has been adopted by HELCOM, OSPAR and under Barcelona Convention⁹, applicable as of 1 October 2012.

Testing of regional Maritime Spatial Planning principles

To solve issues related to competition for limited marine space between sectoral interests and environmental concerns, the Joint Working Group of HELCOM and VASAB on Maritime Spatial Planning has since 2010 worked on the goal of drawing up and applying of ecosystem-based maritime spatial plans, taking into account the transboundary context. The regional MSP Principles for MSP¹⁰ were tested within the Plan Bothnia project¹¹ finalized in 2012, delivering joint Swedish-Finnish pilot spatial plan for the Bothnian Sea, and giving a practical example that the joint planning of shared sea areas is possible, even if the legally binding decisions are done at the national level. The publication also highlights the fact that joint forms of planning at sea are necessary due to the interconnectedness of marine ecosystems; the international nature of marine activities; and the scale of the offshore wind power developments.

⁶ Baltic2Black Project 2011–2013: http://www.helcom.fi/projects/on_going/en_GB/Baltic2Black/

⁷ <http://www.brisk.helcom.fi/>

⁸ http://www.helcom.fi/stc/files/Publications/HELCOM_ALIENS_2_Report.pdf

⁹ http://www.helcom.fi/stc/files/shipping/General%20Guidance_Mediterranean%20Sea_North-East%20Atlantic_Baltic%20Sea.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.helcom.fi/stc/files/HELCOM-VASAB%20MSP%20WG%20Principles.pdf>

¹¹ <http://planbothnia.org/>