

**Statement by the Executive Secretary of HELCOM, Ms. Monika Stankiewicz,  
giving her account on the activities of the Commission in 2012  
at HELCOM 34/2013**

The year 2012 was marked with intensive work to follow the agreed deadlines and commitments of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, as well as with the preparations for the Ministerial Meeting this October, involving all HELCOM groups and many experts in the Contracting Parties. I have picked out a few examples.

I would especially like to mention major progress achieved in providing scientific basis to the work of HELCOM, related to listing threatened species and habitats and in developing core indicators for biodiversity and hazardous substances and associated targets reflecting a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea.

The first of these undertakings, the RED LIST project, prepares, for the first time ever, the complete Red Lists of biotopes and species “under water and swimming on the water”, fulfilling the commitment in the Baltic Sea Action Plan. The scale of the data and information gathering exercise as well as the scope of the assessment work is unprecedented in the recent history of HELCOM. The wealth of information being generated will help better protect the threatened species and habitats and overall manage human activities at sea.

Likewise, the work on core indicators (the CORESET project) made essential progress: the first set of such core indicators is now available for further development. The selection of the set is much more important than it may sound – it facilitates coherence of the approaches in the countries towards other international obligations and it will have implications on the regionally coordinated monitoring programme and its priorities. Ultimately, the set is to help policy-makers to assess whether their decisions and management actions are collectively bringing the expected effect on the scale of the whole sea.

These two flagship projects of HELCOM have one thing in common: the dedication and hard work of experts in all Baltic Sea countries. I could not imagine this ambitious work to have been carried out more efficiently, given the limited resources available. I would like to express my gratitude to the experts, chairs and managers, who have contributed their time, knowledge and intellectual resources to this work.

The work on eutrophication status indicators and their targets, on the other hand, has faced some challenges on the way. Nevertheless, I am glad that the Contracting Parties have reached an agreement on these targets, representing a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea in terms of eutrophication, based on the outcome of HELCOM's scientific project

TARGREV. Now the work can proceed with producing a concise assessment of the eutrophication status of the open sea as well as a revision of the nutrient reduction scheme.

As eutrophication is the main environmental problem in the Baltic Sea, there is a constant need for updated information and assessment in this regard, including for the upcoming Ministerial Meeting. Therefore, I hope for the assessment work to speed-up, and that in the future the whole sea area can be covered with the assessment.

Regarding the new nutrient reduction targets, they will be based on newest and improved data on pollution loads reaching the sea from land and air. Again, a great deal of work has been done to update the dataset which is the best available. With the data gaps filled in by experts, the set is also suitable as a basis for equal burden sharing of reduction needs among the countries. However, there is still room for improvement, and I hope for more active participation of the Contracting Parties in the already started Sixth Periodic Pollution Load Compilation.

Ultimately, improved data will mean improved cost-efficiency of measures to address pollution. Such cost-efficient measures are especially needed in sectors which are yet to better contribute to cutting pollution loads such as agriculture, while progress is being achieved in municipal wastewaters segment.

Recent ratification of the Ballast Water Management Convention by two more HELCOM countries is another concrete example of progress made last year. Many other countries are close to ratification, to meet the deadline of 2013 agreed in the Baltic Sea Action Plan. HELCOM cooperation with OSPAR on the harmonized implementation of the Convention is bringing its fruits.

We still have some homework to do together: the Contracting Parties have not yet reached a decision on the timing of submitting to IMO the proposal to designate the Baltic Sea as NOx Emission Control Area. NECA cannot be seen as the only and sufficient measure to cut NOx emissions from ships. Simultaneously, additional means such as voluntary regimes, economic incentives and use of alternative fuels are available for shipping industry to step in and contribute to fighting eutrophication.

2012 was a year of uncertain budgetary situation, but now, after intensive negotiations, this long-term problem has been successfully solved. I would like to thank the HELCOM Heads of Delegation for constantly working on a sustainable and fair solution to financing HELCOM.

Last but not least I would like to thank my colleagues in the Secretariat, who have been working incredibly hard in preparation for the Ministerial conference, keeping deadlines which might seem impossible to meet, while being responsive to the needs of the Contracting Parties. It is only possible with strong working ethics and a firm "belief in the cause", and I will do my best to promote the Secretariat as a working place where the well-being of employees is as important as high-quality work and professionalism.