The women and men working in HELCOM – the affiliated national institutions on marine research, maritime transport, land-based industry, defense, fisheries and agriculture – have during the last decades carried out a massive number of observations at sea, in the air and on land on the many different characteristics of the Baltic Sea and its inhabitants, and of human activities like ship traffic and pollution loads. The results have also been analyzed and even transformed into computer models useful for scenario building.

Without this century of efforts, we would not be in the situation where we are today – where we can detect even relatively small changes in the environment, make claims on the current status of the Baltic Sea and the sustainability of human activities, as well as confidently recommend corrective science-based measures towards a healthier Baltic Sea.

All Baltic Sea countries have contributed, and continue to contribute, considerable intellectual and financial resources to develop and maintain this reassuring bedrock of “best available science” for maritime spatial planning and other regional policies related to the Baltic Sea, as a part of the extended HELCOM cooperation.

The HELCOM monitoring and surveillance activities will be further developed, as will the resulting data and GIS services, to serve even better spatial policy and planning needs.

Planning is the art of thinking ahead. However, in the case of maritime spatial planning in the Baltic Sea, it will also benefit from lessons from the past. Namely, to get a perspective on the patience - and effort - needed to generate the currently available knowledge base on the marine environment and maritime activities, underpinning the implementation of the ecosystem approach.

How we can jointly ensure that this existing knowledge, data and competences, is used in maritime spatial planning?

Articles 10 and 11 of the EU MSP Directive addresses coordination of maritime spatial plans across the region, including with third countries, in accordance with international law and conventions. Regional Seas Conventions are mentioned as one of the means to pursue such a cooperation. HELCOM involves nine coastal countries, including non-EU member Russia, as well as the EU.

The role of Regional Seas Conventions as regional cooperation frameworks, information hubs and knowledge holders is yet to be fully utilized in maritime spatial planning, especially in trans-boundary context. Further, there could be synergies and even cost savings in terms of data generation and overall implementation for maritime spatial planning and marine environment policies.
The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – Helsinki Commission, or HELCOM – works to protect the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution through intergovernmental co-operation, based on the legally binding Helsinki Convention (1974 and 1992). Contracting Parties to the Convention are Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden.

Currently HELCOM activities cover monitoring and assessment as well as measures in nature protection and biodiversity, safety of navigation, impact from shipping, maritime spatial planning, pollution prevention and response to ship accidents at sea and on the shore, agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, wastewater treatment, marine litter.

**Examples of current HELCOM data products and services relevant for maritime spatial planning**

**HELCOM Map and Data Service** – Open access to all public; at present over 500 map layers & assessment results & underlying spatial data sets. Can be also accessed as service interfaces (OGC WMS, ArcGIS rest)

**Data on ships’ movements** – HELCOM Automatic Identification System (AIS) network provides almost real time information on the position and characteristics of all the larger ships in the entire Baltic Sea area

**Annual reports on shipping accidents and spills** – Regular information on the actual conditions at sea, concerning safety and potential risks for the environment as well as useful material for planning of decent standards

**Cruise ships’ sewage reception in ports** – Mapping completed in 2015 to clarify the needs for passenger ships sewage in ports

**Dredged material** – Dredging sites and amount of disposals are regularly reported by the countries

**HELCOM protected areas database** – Fully modernized database for Baltic Sea coastal and marine protected areas (HELCOM MPAs) just launched

**Holistic assessment of the ecosystem health** – Comprehensive assessment covering biodiversity, eutrophication, hazardous substances and maritime activities. Mapping the distribution of main pressures and impacts on the Baltic Sea. Economic and social analyses. First release mid-2017

**Indicators** – Commonly agreed assessment tools to regularly evaluate the progress made towards their specific targets. Basis for periodic thematic and holistic assessments

**Tools for cumulative impacts** – Baltic Sea Pressure Index (BSPI) and Baltic Sea Impact Index (BSII) under upgrading process

**Distribution of Red Listed species and habitats** – HELCOM Red List assessments from 2013 and their knowledge of the Baltic Sea’s ecosystem structure and function are essential for planning sustainable use of the sea space

[http://helcom.fi](http://helcom.fi)