

Annex 6 Statement by the Executive Secretary 1.3.2017

I would like to share with you my reflection on our joint work in 2016. In doing so, I will take a broader perspective based on global developments.

Last year HELCOM efforts continued to develop the holistic state of the Baltic Sea assessment, and more specifically to develop and agree on the core indicators with quantitative boundaries and common methods for integration of the indicators in the assessment. We know that on the level of individual indicators, expert or national agreement has not always been reached, that there are data gaps in some areas and for some indicators, and we still need to work further to ensure comparability of the results throughout the whole Baltic Sea - in the off-shore waters and in coastal areas. The holistic assessment has to serve policy needs well, and at the same time it must be a high-quality product, utilizing best available scientific knowledge, as this is a matter of credibility.

The difficulties we are trying to overcome and the gaps that exist are not the result of a lack of willingness or commitment in general, but of the high level of ambition we have set for ourselves. Nowhere else have I seen such comprehensive assessment work on a sea basin scale, or countries willing to come as far with common approaches for the assessment as the Baltic Sea countries. More specifically, to give an example, the countries are able to agree on common threshold values – or boundaries for indicators, or arrive at an assessment of cumulative impacts on ecosystems.

I would like to thank you, the Contracting Parties, for collectively aiming high and for your incredible work on the expert level in the HOLAS II project on the “State of the Baltic Sea” assessment to be released this June. And I would like to thank the Heads of Delegation specifically for the tireless national coordination and persistence to back up the HOLAS II process so it can move forward – as, after all, indicators and assessment methods are not the easiest material to negotiate due to their technical character. Our Chair’s guidance and persistence in this task has been invaluable – we might have been lost one or two times without your guidance, Marianne.

We should strive to fill in as many gaps as possible when updating the holistic assessment for June 2018, and thus create a product, moreover a whole assessment system that provides strong and common basis for further work and for taking appropriate measures.

Good progress is also being achieved in the field of maritime spatial planning (MSP). Guideline for the implementation of ecosystem-based approach in Maritime Spatial Planning in the Baltic Sea area was adopted last year. The guideline is the first step to apply ecosystem approach in MSP in practice, and with the upcoming HOLAS II we will provide concrete tools to further substantiate the application of ecosystem approach in MSP, more concretely by bringing into use an improved method for assessing cumulative impacts and social and economic analysis. Thank you for your support yesterday to the HELCOM work on social and economic analysis and for adopting the Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Expert Network on social and economic analysis.

Further, Guidelines on transboundary consultations, public participation and co-operation were adopted last year and have already triggered more in-depth transboundary consultations on maritime spatial plans in some countries that are in active stage of planning. I believe such information exchange at the early stages of the planning process can in the future become instrumental in advancing towards the objectives of the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Again, the Baltic Sea cooperation on maritime spatial planning is commonly recognized as a good example, reflecting a high level of ambition on how to approach the topic of MSP in a comprehensive way. As the aim is to finalize maritime spatial plans by the countries by 2020, the best time window of opportunity for creating

best practices and joint frameworks in ecosystem based MSP is now. I would like to thank the Contracting Parties for increasingly supporting and promoting pan-Baltic thinking in MSP.

While all these developments are positive and show that in HELCOM and in the Baltic Sea region we are good in cooperating, they need to be backed up by concrete action and measures that actually improve the status of the marine environment and ensure sustainable human activities. Last year's decisions on NOx Emission Control Area (NECA) and sewage ban from passenger ships in the Baltic Sea are such joint measures, which will lead to concrete reduction of P and N inputs directly to the sea. This is also an example demonstrating that even if sometimes an agreement cannot be reached at a given moment in time, the case is not lost yet and can become a possible success in the future.

I would like to thank all the national experts, Heads of Delegations, Observers as well as colleagues in the Secretariat for making the past year of HELCOM work a successful one.