

Agenda Item 2 HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan

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Submitted by: Moderators

OUTCOME OF THE 2ND HELCOM STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE

The Meeting is invited to:

- take note of the outcome of the Stakeholder Conference;
- agree to feed the outcome of the Stakeholder Conference into the further process on the development of the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

General

The Stakeholder Conference found that the four overviews of the status of the Baltic Sea marine environment, identifying the main problem areas, provide a good starting point for the needed actions.

During the Stakeholder Conference there was an agreement that the package of measures identified so far is a good start and is covering the needed actions in general. It was stressed that what was at stake now was the political commitment of the Contracting States to implement existing as well as planned measures in order to reach and maintain good ecological status of the Baltic.

During the discussion it was stated that eutrophication is the major problem and will need more specific focus in the Action Plan, especially with regard to measures for agriculture.

It was also stressed that this is not going to be the ultimate Action Plan; the Plan needs to be evaluated on regular basis to check the status of implementation of the actions. Additionally, there will be a need to periodically review the effectiveness of the actions, targets and ecological objectives to make sure that we will reach and maintain the good ecological status of the Baltic Sea.

For this reason it was stressed that the implementation mechanism and the review mechanism of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan are two very important elements of the Plan to be further developed.

The Stakeholder Conference also stressed the need to link the Action Plan to on-going programmes and processes addressed at global, European and national levels. This will ensure an integrated management of human activities and that environmental objectives are integrated to all policies and programmes implemented in the Baltic Region.

Furthermore, the Stakeholder Conference found that the cost and the sources for financing the implementation of the actions need to be addressed in the Action Plan. The need to select the most cost-efficient measures was stressed and it was found that this could be ensured through identifying "hot spots". The Action Plan should contain an agreement on needed nutrient reduction inputs at sub-regional and country level, and a timetable for when to achieve these. Based on this a political commitment could be sought for the establishment of a possible trading system.

A Task Force could be established to evaluate the implementation of the Plan and to consider by 2009 a possible trading scheme, including a decision on a testing period.

Eutrophication

There was general agreement on the scientific background of the problem with eutrophication and the urgency to take appropriate actions to combat eutrophication. There was also agreement on the ecosystem approach to the management of human activities, including the need to define the required reduction of nutrient to reach the targets for eutrophication in total for the whole Baltic Sea and by subregion as well as country.

The package of different proposed measures to reach the required reductions was also supported.

The introduction of phosphorus free detergents was supported as a cost effective way to reduce phosphorus inputs.

In general the need to link and coordinate the proposed actions with ongoing programmes and processes was stressed, e.g. the Common Agricultural Policies.

The conference highlighted the need to develop and take actions within agriculture. As the EU CAP is decisive for EU Member states the conference stressed the importance to give input to the health check of the CAP in 2008 and the need to more strongly link the subsidies to the farmers with environmental measures.

It was acknowledged that there is a need for regional specific measures and targets especially with regard to agriculture.

It was also pointed out that as the hot spot approach in the JCP was successful it should be investigated if new hot spots, e.g. big animal farms should be identified.

In general the conference agreed that the aspect of cost efficiency is important when jointly identifying the needed measures. It was also pointed out that not only the cost to achieve the targets should be mentioned, but also the value of a healthy Baltic Sea as well as the cost of non-action should be underlined and emphasized.

There was general acceptance to further look into the concept of a quota system and a possible trading scheme to implement such a system. The quotas should be based on a level much below the existing discharges in order to allow for an efficient trading.

The quota system and a possible trading system should be seen as a means to efficiently reduce the inputs and speed up the implementation of existing regulations.

The EC pointed out that there are no fundamental legal conflicts with the EU Water Framework Directive and a possible trading system for nutrient reductions and at the same time underlined that the system need to demonstrate that it is effective in achieving the environmental objectives targeted (over and above those of e.g. EU Directives) i.e. to reduce eutrophication. The existing legislation is regarded as a baseline; there are e.g. no plans to revise the Directives in these fields in the near future.

The Conference also underlined the importance to implement existing legislation and HELCOM recommendations e.g. concerning municipal waste water treatment or the Nitrates Directive.

The Conference also stressed the need for effective follow-up mechanisms of both the progress towards achieving the ecological targets as well as the implementation of agreed actions.

Hazardous Substances

The conference noted that a HELCOM Project has been established to develop actions for hazardous substances to be included in the BSAP. The aim is to identify the main sources of some selected hazardous substances and to develop actions:

- at plant level (hot spots approach)
- for relevant sectors
- for product control

The actions will include proposals for measures to reduce emissions, discharges and losses for the hot spots/sectors/substances, e.g.:

- Production control measures
 - o including ban/substitution with less hazardous substances

- Selection of better quality raw materials
- BAT application including how much the discharges and emissions could be reduced indicating the most effective BAT as a reference
- Handling/treatment of waste.

It was acknowledged that the approach to select some substances to target the work as a start was a good one, which in future could be supplemented with actions on further identified relevant substances. The preliminarily selected 9 organic substances and 2 heavy metals are currently under investigation.

It was proposed that each HELCOM Country would make a national inventory on possible dumped hazardous substances in the Baltic Sea.

As a possible measure intensified fishing of sprat from the Baltic Sea was proposed to decrease dioxin levels in the Baltic Sea, but its cost-efficiency was questioned.

It was also noted that there are significant data gaps concerning hazardous substances, which makes it difficult to address hazardous substances in a comprehensive way. The REACH (Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals) system will bring more information on uses of certain chemicals in EU Member States.

EC pointed out that national and regional (such as HELCOM) restrictions concerning use of chemicals are possible to develop if justified and the environmental benefits are real.

Biodiversity and nature protection

The Stakeholder Conference considered the main actions to reach the favourable status of Baltic Sea biodiversity based on the introduction by Poland, i.e.

- Spatial zoning of marine areas in order to avoid conflicts between uses and to guarantee sustainable use of all the resources,
- the role of network of well-managed marine protected areas in biodiversity conservation,
- safeguarding the natural distribution of habitat-building species,
- and measures and programmes to protect threatened and/or declining species,
- stakeholder dialogue especially with fisheries sector.

Since multitude of human actions have impacts on biodiversity, the goal “favourable status of the Baltic Sea biodiversity” can not be reached without reducing Eutrophication and inputs of hazardous substances and sustainable maritime activities. Biodiversity is in the core of HELCOM’s vision of the healthy sea, and thus this segment serves also as a controlling element for the performance of the whole Action Plan.

The scientific background information on the overall trends in biodiversity shows that the present status is far from favourable but that biodiversity recovery is possible (e.g. recovery grey seal).

Fish was acknowledged as an important component of the Baltic Sea ecosystem and therefore also fisheries should be addressed in the Action plan.

The Conference welcomed the set of initial actions presented but emphasised that more concrete programmes and measures should be elaborated for the final Action Plan.

The representative of the fisheries sector stated that they are not against the marine protected areas *per se* and that areas closed for fisheries is used on the voluntary bases by fisheries.

It was also stated that the marine protected areas can not be a target by itself but an important mean in protection of biodiversity. It was emphasised that establishment of marine protected areas is not enough to protect marine biodiversity and major threats (such as eutrophication) need other measures.

Maritime activities

The Conference discussed the set of actions which have been proposed under the BSAP to ensure good performance of shipping and other uses of the Baltic Sea.

The draft overview "Towards a Baltic Sea with environmentally friendly maritime activities" served as a background material for presentations and discussion.

No objections were raised by the stakeholders as to the main directions of work identified in the background material.

The following further detailed comments and proposals were made:

Further measures to reduce emission from shipping as well as to address introduction of alien species were pointed to as particularly relevant ones.

Reference was made to the ongoing revision process of Annex VI to MARPOL 73/78 under which more stringent requirements as to the SO_x emission from ships are being discussed. The stakeholders were of the opinion that HELCOM should take active part in this discussion within IMO to promote the best available and, the same time, the most cost-efficient solutions.

The maritime transport is considered as the most environmentally friendly mode of transport, however it was pointed out that in the future the share of pollution from this sector is expected to increase. The need to equally address the responsibility for the pollution generated by the land-based sources and the shipping sector was mentioned.

The concept of the Quality Coastal States was presented as means to address the environmental performance of shipping in a more comprehensive way.

Furthermore, it was pointed out that the discharges from ships within present legal requirements may have bigger impact on the environment of the Baltic Sea than illegal discharges and that e.g. the ban on wastewater discharges from cruise ships should be introduced.

The need for designation of the whole Baltic Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area was suggested.

The global character of shipping should be kept in mind when addressing the shipping related environmental problems in the Baltic. In any case, the IMO was acknowledged as the proper forum for issuing new requirements.

The actions leading to the implementation and ratification of the IMO Ballast Water Convention were given a support. Some supplementary measures should also be taken, like mandatory reporting system on ballast water and actions to address the risk of alien species introduction from Ponto-Caspian region. There were some ideas on having a permitting system for ballast water exchange in the Baltic, but due to specific characteristic of the Baltic Sea no ballast water exchange should take place in the Baltic.

As the density of shipping is rising, posing the increased risk of accidents, the need for improved communication and reporting systems between neighbouring countries as well as for mandatory pilotage and escort towing was addressed.

The importance for identification of polluters and the reasons behind the pollution cases was underlined. On that basis the gaps in the existing regulatory and enforcement systems should be identified to improve the situation.