



## Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

HELCOM Ministerial Session  
Turku, Finland, 18 May 2016

### Summary of the HELCOM Ministerial Session

# How to protect the marine environment while enabling sustainable use and blue economy

Wednesday 18 May 2016 at 13:00 – 15:00

Logomo, Köydenpunojankatu 14, Turku, Finland

#### Session participants:

**Kimmo Tiilikainen**, Minister of the Environment of Finland, hosting the session

**Karmenu Vella**, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission

**Harry Liiv**, HELCOM Chair, Ministry of the Environment of Estonia

**Jan Olsson**, Environment Ambassador, Ministry of the Environment and Energy/Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

**Heike Imhoff**, EU Water Director at the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety

**Silver Vahtra**, Head of Delegation for HELCOM, Ministry for the Environment of Estonia

**Joanna Kopczyńska**, Head of Delegation for HELCOM, Ministry of the Environment of Poland

The Session was moderated by **Nicklas Wancke**, a journalist from the Finnish Broadcasting Company.

## Opening of the session

Minister Tiilikainen opened the session by saying that the protection of the Baltic Sea is of a high priority for Finland. Being aware that the official HELCOM ministerial meeting will be held only in 2018, he decided as a responsible minister for the Baltic Sea protection in Finland to organize this high level debate. He noted that in the Baltic Sea region we are in a fortunate situation; we have HELCOM co-operation covering all pollution sources around an entire sea. HELCOM is a platform for developing regionally coordinated and coherent approaches and solutions needed to achieve a good environmental status of the Sea. Because of 40 years of joint co-operation, we have made progress in various fields and as a result, several positive signals have been reported regarding the state of the Baltic Sea. But as we all know, we have not yet reached our goal - which is a good environmental status of the Sea. Long lasting pollution has resulted in pools of pollutants in the Sea and it takes time for those pools to be diluted and replaced with clean environment.

The Minister noted that in addition to HELCOM commitments, we have a number of EU directives, especially the Water Framework Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive that oblige us to work towards achieving and maintaining a good environmental status. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region supports us in reaching that goal together with several other international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Minister Tiilikainen outlined that today's discussion should be about how to balance the need to use the sea space and its natural resources with the need to ensure a good environmental status.

## Presentation: Status of implementation of the HELCOM commitments, including on eutrophication

Ms Monika Stankiewicz, HELCOM Executive Secretary, presented the progress in implementing commitments to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea.

Does HELCOM as a whole stick to its decisions? How about the Contracting Parties? How much influence do Ministerial meetings have on bringing the work to save the Baltic Sea forward?

According to the latest review focusing on the implementation of the 2007 Baltic Sea Action Plan and the two follow-up Ministerial Declarations, 2010 (Moscow) and 2013 (Copenhagen), 60 % of the regional commitments have been accomplished while 40% still remains to be fully implemented. Only half of the agreed joint actions to protect biodiversity has been carried out. Work also remains to be done in applying the ecosystem approach in fisheries, better conserving threatened species and biotopes, advancing the network of marine protected areas and improving maritime spatial planning, as well as reducing the impacts of marine litter and underwater noise.

The central task of reducing nutrients is both a success story and a challenge. Starting from 1950s there was a steep increase in inputs of nutrients, peaking in early 80s. But since then, there has been improvement. The final step, of course, is to reach the target set for 2021. It is ambitious and I hope to discuss today how we can make it possible.

The status of individual HELCOM commitments, both the ones to be taken jointly and the ones that can only be implemented nationally, can be followed with an online tool on the HELCOM web page <http://maps.helcom.fi/website/BSAPexplorer>. (PowerPoint presentation available [here](#)).

## Discussion point 1

***Cross-sectoral topics and actions that can contribute to achieving a healthy marine environment. Best practices and new ideas.***

*Both at HELCOM and elsewhere efforts are underway to reach out to sectors and jointly discuss possible solutions and measures for marine environmental protection. Some attempts are more successful than others. One reason is the mismatch of scales. The regional level is the most suitable scale to address marine environment problems in the Baltic Sea, due to special characteristics of the sea and transboundary effects; this is not necessarily true for sectoral policies.*

*HELCOM cooperation with the International Maritime Organization and industry stakeholders on the establishment of a special regime for ships operating in the Baltic Sea is an example of successful regional cooperation across sectors to implement global regulations. New regulations for sewage discharges from passenger ships and the upcoming designation of the Baltic Sea as a NOx Emission Control Area are examples of concrete measures to fight eutrophication. At the same time, the measures boost competitiveness, development of technology and innovation.*

*Traditional solutions and straight-forward measures to protect the marine environment have, to a large extent, been taken into use in the Baltic Sea. Further measures are more complex and require holistic thinking and innovative approaches, as well as greater involvement from sectors. Cost-efficiency and economic benefits derived from the marine environment protection play an increasingly decisive role.*

## **Finland**

Minister Tiilikainen stated that eutrophication is the main problem in the Baltic Sea and more cooperation is needed to further reduce nutrient loading. In Finland we are focusing on further reduction of nutrient loads from agriculture. Finland has high expectations on circular economy and nutrient recycling in agriculture, for instance the nutrients captured in municipal wastewater treatment plants could be recovered from the sludge and circulated back as fertilisers to the fields thus be of better use in sustainable agriculture. Furthermore, through the recycling of nutrients, we reduce energy consumption in fertilizer production, create demand for innovative technologies and give a boost to new growth and emerging job opportunities from more efficient use of resources. Another important area for Finland is bioeconomy.

Minister Tiilikainen also highlighted the importance of maritime safety to reduce risks for the Baltic Sea environment such as massive oil spills. He stressed the role of research and the need for monitoring data, indicators, and science based assessments of the pressures and status of the Sea and its ecosystem. All this information provides reliable and timely information to policy makers and decision-making. An open knowledge base – like the one enabled by HELCOM open data policy – can also support cross-sectorial integration.

## **European Union**

Commissioner Vella underlined that the cross-sectoral context also refers to the division between land and sea, and neither activities at land nor sea should hinder the opportunities at sea. A related factor is that as the introduction today reminded us, a number of activities at land – and at sea – may jeopardize the well-being of the sea areas. As an example, he raised the issue of marine litter: it is called marine litter even if generated mostly on land.

Maritime spatial planning is one example of a process, also promoted through EU policy, which can be used to solve the conflicting interests of various actors at sea which compete for the same space, Commissioner Vella said. Instead of conflict there could be more integration of the various activities – even complementary and mutually reinforcing to one other.

Commissioner highlighted that nature and economy should not be considered in isolation; instead, integration of policies is a key for successful ocean governance. The Commissioner argued that we often identify economic opportunities but the lack of environmental standards will eventually spoil these opportunities. That is why both integrated marine policies and maritime spatial planning are two very strong tools for the EU. Also the concept of circular economy is addressing both the economy and the environment.

Within HELCOM and in the Baltic Sea region, said Commissioner, sharing resources also means sharing responsibility. In addition to cross-sectoral we need cross-border cooperation, and it is important that not only sectors but countries coordinate their actions – and the latter has made HELCOM so successful. The Commissioner reminded that the EU not just accepts but encourages and supports regionalization.

Reflecting on the audience question on learning from the Baltic experience, the Commissioner said that the Baltic Sea region has got its own particular challenges while some of the challenges are common for different sea basins, and for this reason the EU Commission promotes dialogue between and learning from the regions. In the Baltic Sea region, there is commitment and high ambition when it comes to environmental standards. He also said that we often identify economic opportunities but if we are not careful about the environmental standards they will fatally compromise such opportunities. We used to talk about the balance between economy and environment – today the approach is full integration between the two.

Commissioner Vella underlined the cooperation between different policy sectors and incorporating environmental issues to their work. The Commission wants to protect the biodiversity both on land at sea and the latest reports show that while progress has been made it is overall insufficient to reach the targets set for 2020. More work is needed in some sectors, such as agriculture.

Importantly, the Commissioner pointed out, we often commit for more than we deliver, therefore, efforts should focus on the implementation. There are new ideas coming in before we have finished and implemented what has already been started. Commissioner Vella mentioned marine protected areas as an example. The EU countries are lagging behind in identifying protected Natura 2000 areas particularly at sea, while at the same time the existing areas are not properly managed.

### **HELCOM Chair**

Mr. Liiv mentioned maritime safety, agriculture and maritime spatial planning as the cross-sectoral topics that are promising in further efforts to improve the status of the Baltic Sea. In maritime safety we have achieved a lot and joint actions, where we exchange knowledge between countries, are in place. The joint actions create a good basis for upgrading our technical expertise. The agricultural sector is more complex to address due to many interests and few solutions that fit all. At the same time, there are changes in the agricultural market and new innovative approaches are emerging. We need to ensure that our activities do not jeopardise our environmental goals. In the future, HELCOM could do more to share practical examples and promote promising initiatives and progress between the countries. HELCOM offers the countries the possibility for this information exchange.

### **Germany**

Ms Imhoff said that HELCOM has continued successful work for 40 years in several sectors already mentioned today such as agriculture, shipping and marine litter. She pointed out that besides integrating policy sectors and bridging gaps we should talk about the bottom-up approach, from a single inhabitant up to the highest political level. There might be a gap between citizens' expectations and environmental policy implementation but it's also about acceptance of what should be implemented.

HELCOM works regularly with regional and global partners, such as VASAB and IMO up to the highest levels, and HELCOM also contributes to implementing global agenda in particular under UNEP and the regional seas programmes. A cross-sectoral approach should cover all levels, vertically and horizontally, from industries and private sectors to policies. She recalled that HELCOM cooperation involved both EU countries and Russia. A regional approach is increasingly recognized also by the EU and HELCOM has proven a suitable platform for coherent regional implementation of policies and requirements. One might say that the regional power is gaining recognition it deserves. Stronger cooperation at the regional level implies that countries are willing to shift some of the national considerations to common regional processes.

### **Sweden**

Mr. Olsson was of the opinion that in the past we have not been bad at cooperating with each other and the sectors, but, there is still room for improvement in the future. Fighting eutrophication needs more innovative measures. While environmental aspects need to be included in economic policies and vice versa, nothing should be done at the expense of the environment anymore. He stated that regionalization is the right approach to address the challenges of a common sea. HELCOM is a very good example to other regions of the world, and can be used as such in the discussions concerning United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development). Citizens have great expectations of environmental policies and they expect politicians to deliver results, but also individuals have difficulties to do their part. HELCOM can help by providing scientific information for the politicians. But maybe HELCOM could also put some pressure on the policy makers who in turn could put pressure on the citizens.

## Estonia

Mr. Vahtra took the recent HELCOM Recommendation on sustainable aquaculture as a good example of cross-sectoral collaboration where the environmental, economic and social dimensions are taken into account. Aquaculture can bring environmental benefits e.g. when farming of mussels or seaweed take up nutrients from the Baltic Sea. Also, in the previous HELCOM Fish Group meeting, there was a good example of how fishing management can help fight eutrophication and this is one of the best practices which HELCOM can share forward. Another positive case is the HELCOM Marine Litter Action Plan that brings together different stakeholders for finding solutions in mitigating the issue of litter.

## Poland

Ms Kopczyńska said that the outcomes of the recent HELCOM Fish Group meeting are a good example of cross-sectoral collaboration. We need to get together, discuss and seek for solutions that would benefit all parties. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that all parties cannot always achieve all their goals. Also, the work on programmes of measures required by the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which joins all stakeholders, is a catalyst for national discussion. Hopefully, she said, the actions indicated in the programme will turn into real actions in the local level and the programme will increase awareness of the problems of the Baltic Sea marine environment.

## Discussion point 2

### ***Protecting marine environment for the blue economy to thrive. Are we doing enough for the Baltic Sea?***

*Baltic Sea may appear to some as a quiet corner of Europe. However, according to a 2013 study on blue growth in the region, maritime sectors have high economic value. Coastal tourism, fish for human consumption, shipbuilding, short sea shipping, and passenger ferry services in the Baltic Sea have a combined largest gross added value (GVA) of €16.6 billion. The sectors together also account for 360,000 jobs in the region.<sup>1</sup>*

*A healthy marine environment underpins sustainable blue growth. Some sectors are more dependent on a healthy marine environment than others. Moreover, activities on land have major impact in the sea. Fisheries are already affected by heavy eutrophication and hazardous substances pollution in the Baltic Sea, and a number of human activities can be further impacted by competing uses of the sea and pollution from land.*

*Expectations are being placed on Maritime Spatial Planning that it will help to both achieve environmental goals and boost blue growth.*

## Finland

Minister Tiilikainen said that sustainable use of resources is the high priority globally and also in the Baltic Sea Region. Maritime spatial planning is one key tool to responsibly deal with the demands of blue growth. He reminded of the Commissioner's earlier remark on shared resources bringing shared responsibilities and here planning has a key role. A good example in the Baltic Sea region is the BALTFISH cooperation. Agreeing on fisheries policies in the EU level is a time-consuming task, but when most of the challenges can be addressed and solved in the regional level it will facilitate the process on the bigger scale.

He said that at whatever level, finding the balance between growth and the environment is about using natural resources in a sustainable way. The damage we have done in the past can be fixed if we are wise enough not to repeat our mistakes and personally, he said, he has faith in people for having such sense. On a larger scale, the COP21 in Paris last year tried to find solutions on a global scale to the same issue, for

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Study on Blue Growth, Maritime Policy and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. European Commission/EUNETMAR 2013, p. 23.[http://www.sustainable-projects.eu/downloads/Final\\_Report\\_Revision\\_6\\_Dec\\_2013NEW\\_TEMPLATE.pdf](http://www.sustainable-projects.eu/downloads/Final_Report_Revision_6_Dec_2013NEW_TEMPLATE.pdf)

solving the puzzle of population growth and limited resources of the environment, and ensuring that economics are always on a sustainable basis.

## **European Union**

Commissioner Vella considered blue growth as a huge opportunity. The seas cover 70% of our globe's surface, yet most of our economic activities take place on land. However, one must take into account that the economic activities on land are highly dependent on sea cargo, as most transport of goods happens at sea. We should increase the awareness of the contribution of the oceans to biodiversity, climate change prevention and food production. The proportion of ocean biodiversity as compared to land is 90 %, and the oceans are the real providers of oxygen, and regulators of the temperature which means they have a great role in managing the impacts of climate change.

The error according to Commissioner Vella has been that the ocean governance should have started earlier, and that biodiversity matters should have never been separated from us, the people. This also connects to the issue of seeing activities on land integrally connected with the sea, and the circular economy package of the EU addresses this, too.

He continued by saying that the EU is putting a lot of weight on blue growth and there is particular focus to a few sectors such as coastal tourism and ocean energy. But along with the economic opportunities we have also environmental responsibilities and we need to take immediate action on marine protection.

If we start acting now we may still have time for preventive, not just remediated action. Seas and oceans can even provide solutions for land-based problems, for instance, aquaculture for the shortage of food supply and ocean energy sources – wind, wave, tide and currents – for the growing demand for energy.

The Commissioner said that the Baltic Sea is one of the most threatened sea areas but also one of the most sustainable ones, because precautions have been taken. The cooperation between the Baltic coastal countries has been successful. The Commissioner wished for good environmental standards and successful collaboration efforts in all sea regions in Europe, for which regionalization work is important.

Commissioner Vella said that the EU is promoting ocean governance also on a global agenda, and half of the world oceans' area is beyond national jurisdiction. One can ask if there is the right legal framework to address today's and tomorrow's challenges, as many of the frameworks – UNCLOS, CBD, UNFCCC – were created decades ago. We have to start implementing the ocean rules that are already in place and we need stronger legal jurisdiction.

## **HELCOM Chair**

Mr. Liiv thought that we already have many actions ongoing to minimise the impact of economic activities on the environment. There are possibilities to do more taking into account the ecosystem approach. It is not enough to improve the situation only on land because the challenges are also at sea. The recent HELCOM Recommendation on sustainable aquaculture is a good example of promoting BAT and the aquaculture pilot projects. We could also use our coastal areas more for tourism but we need to take the marine protected areas into account.

## **Germany**

Ms Imhoff wanted to know what the definition of blue growth really is. She thought that we are still in the transitional period whereby no clear guidance is available on how to ensure sustainability of the growing human activities at sea. We have not yet had sufficient success in having evidence on the environmental added value and bringing in cost-efficiency in all what we do.

Importantly, she continued, the next HELCOM Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health (HOLAS II) will take the social and economic aspects into account. Blue growth must be more than just increasing the maritime industry – shipping, fisheries, tourism, dredging – because we are not able to enhance our environmental protection measures as much as we did in the past. The Marine Strategy Framework Directive clearly states that we need to restore our seas while enabling their use. It is *not* the other way

around. However, there is still a gap between policies in which ecosystem approach and sustainability are included and the reality, and a bridge is needed between the two.

Ms Imhoff pointed out that we have already made some mistakes on sea and that it is high time to reduce the growth speed of maritime industry until we are able to monitor what is the economic benefit of using the sea and environmental policies e.g. in creating jobs.

HELCOM has taken up a lot of hot topics, Ms Imhoff said. HELCOM Recommendation on aquaculture was adopted in March and banning sewage discharges from passenger ships is another example. Of course, when dealing with shipping we are playing at the global level because that is regulated by the International Maritime Organization. We have the ambitions at both the regional and EU policies to reach the good environmental status of the sea.

She added that we however really need to get into the eye level in blending in and integrating the economic with the environmental, at the early stage of any policy formulation and also at the national level. Now environmental actions are more add-ons, as the whipped cream on top of economic policies.

### **Sweden**

Mr. Olsson specified that one cannot start from the economy and then balance it with the environmental aspects. While sustainability is mentioned in the discussions on blue growth, it comes in quite late in the discussion. We have the obligation just like any other country and region to reach the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14. Sweden has taken an active role by hosting a conference on SDG 14 together with Fiji where they will bring up HELCOM as a good example of implementing the goal.

### **Poland**

Ms Koczyńska stressed that we need innovation to ensure ecosystem based economy. New technologies may provide opportunities to achieve sustainability easier. We also need to take into account that the current situation will change in the future.

Poland has produced a document on smart specialization including examples connected to waters and the sea. There are possibilities to develop these ideas further with the help of EU funding.

## **Wrap-up by Minister Tiilikainen**

Minister Tiilikainen thanked all the participants for the debate, the moderator and also the audience for the many interesting questions. He noted that two thirds of HELCOM joint commitments since the 2007 Baltic Sea Action Plan have been accomplished. However, we have now done the easiest part and to reach the good environmental status for the Baltic Sea there is still work to do.

He stressed that we need regional and cross-sectoral cooperation, vertically and horizontally, and cooperation with the private sector, too. As mentioned by many here today, healthy marine environment is a precondition for sustainable blue growth. Hopefully, after 5 years we will be in the position to report that the targets set in the Baltic Sea Action Plan have been reached.