

Statement by Rüdiger Stempel, Executive Secretary of HELCOM, during the 41st Meeting of the Helsinki Commission

Dear colleagues,

Much has already been said about the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan since its announcement during the 2018 Ministerial Meeting – effectively providing the strongest mandate possible to the renewal of a plan that is a cornerstone of our work towards collectively addressing the environmental challenges the Baltic Sea is facing. And in 2019, too, the BSAP update was high on the HELCOM agenda. Building on the political will expressed by the ministers in 2018, we are now progressing from words to action, as 2019 marked the beginning of more concrete work on the new BSAP.

Last year saw the start of the review of the BSAP's ecological and management objectives, leading to the conclusion that the updated plan will retain the overall structure and approach of the current BSAP while also encompassing new aspects to ensure its continued relevance for at least a decade to come. We are, so to speak, not reinventing the wheel, just rebalancing it. The update will be characterized by an increased focus on topics such as underwater noise, seabed integrity, pharmaceuticals and climate change.

To underpin the update, HELCOM also initiated an assessment of the sufficiency of existing measures, carried out by the SOM Platform (the ad-hoc HELCOM Platform on sufficiency of measures) and the HELCOM ACTION project, co-financed by the EU. The results will show us where we need to do more and lead to the formulation of new actions to be added to the BSAP.

With regard to new actions, a call for proposals launched in late 2019 on new measures yielded over 120 entries that are now being processed within the relevant HELCOM bodies. In that context, I would also like to briefly mention the 2020 HELCOM Stakeholder Conference, held two days ago, that resulted in a further 56 actions from stakeholders to be considered for the BSAP.

To help us monitor the progress of BSAP implementation, the revision of the HELCOM Explorer, a database displaying the progress by the HELCOM Contracting Parties made with regard to the 177 actions contained in the current BSAP and helping to monitor implementation, was also initiated in 2019.

These actions – and therefore our efforts to monitor their progress – will remain relevant, given that the 2018 Ministerial Meeting also clearly stated that existing actions should be implemented regardless of the update, and that all pending actions are to be carried over into the new plan.

In that regard we should bear in mind that while about 70 percent of the joint regional actions from the BSAP have been completed, only 26 percent of the national actions have been fully implemented to date by all Contracting Parties. We can do better, and we must, for the sake of our sea!

Clearly, the BSAP is currently taking up a lot of space and receiving a lot of thought in HELCOM. It is, after all, our central programme of actions and measures for a healthy Baltic Sea, the strategic tool that was designed to attain our environmental objectives, as stated in the Helsinki Convention.

But for all that, we never lose sight of the fact that we also have other pressing tasks, other avenues to pursue and other tools at our disposal in our quest to achieve good environmental status in the Baltic Sea. I cannot address and

elaborate on all of the various activities that HELCOM and its contracting parties were involved in in 2019, but I would at least like to highlight a few salient points.

Maritime spatial planning, or MSP, is one of these, as it is gaining more and more traction in the region as an integrated management instrument for effectively addressing the environmental challenges our sea is facing.

In applying an ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities at sea, MSP can effectively contribute to reducing the anthropogenic impacts on various components of the marine environment, safeguarding biodiversity, promoting the sustainable growth of maritime economies, and the sustainable use of marine resources.

In 2019, together with VASAB, we made significant progress on the implementation of the Regional Baltic Maritime Spatial Planning Roadmap and its main interregional goal of integrating the ecosystem approach into MSP.

We are, furthermore, pleased to note that almost all Baltic Sea countries significantly advanced their national maritime spatial plans in 2019.

On another issue, we were gratified in 2019 by the removal of one of the oldest HELCOM hot spots – the wastewater works of Kaliningrad – from the list after two years of showing satisfying monitoring results.

Another point worthy of mention is that, in a bid to further address land-sea interactions and different policies in place regulating different land, riverine and sea-related matters, HELCOM held the first of a series of workshops with river basin management authorities in 2019, particularly touching on the reduction of

nutrient inputs. More workshops will be conducted, further improving the coordination between HELCOM objectives and those of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the corresponding Water Code of Russia, to generate synergies and foster coherence between these key policies, especially on the nutrient issue.

Furthermore, in 2019, HELCOM agreed on the vision and objectives of the Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy, calling for the Baltic Sea region to become a global model area for nutrient recycling and preventing runoff to the sea. The goals of the strategy were formulated to reduce environmental impacts, ensure safe nutrient recycling, increase knowledge on nutrients and sustainable agricultural practices, raise awareness, create new business opportunities as well as improve policy coherence across the region.

With regard to climate change, HELCOM, together with Baltic Earth, established a Joint Climate Change expert network, currently consisting of over 80 experts from the region. The network, referred to as EN Clime, is currently preparing a Baltic Sea climate change fact sheet to ensure that decision makers have access to the latest quality assured science on climate change and its impacts.

Looking beyond the immediate Baltic Sea region, we are also working to connect the regional to the global, in keeping with HELCOM's long tradition of establishing and maintaining links from other international and global frameworks and processes, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Aichi Targets. The update of the BSAP and its integration with the SDGs is a case in point.

At the operational level, HELCOM has also recognized the necessity to partner with likeminded organizations. Building on a solid relationship established in the past, HELCOM closely collaborated with the UN Regional Sea Programme, or UN RSP, throughout 2019 and will continue to do so in 2020, which is a global “ocean year”.

We co-hosted the RSP’s Annual Meeting in Berlin, Germany, in October 2019, sharing general experience on ocean conservation with 16 regional sea organizations. In November 2019, as a follow-up, HELCOM also hosted a workshop of the UN RSP on the oceans and seas-related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 14) at its premises in Helsinki, marking the start of preparations for the UN RSP’s joint outlook report to the 2020 Ocean Conference.

In closing, therefore, I would like to emphasize that while 2019 was of course strongly determined by the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (as, indeed, the years to come will be), regular HELCOM work has continued and not decreased in importance. All of these efforts jointly lead to the achievement of one common objective: a healthy Baltic Sea.