



Revised Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter


Baltic Marine Environment
Protection Commission

Marine Litter 

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HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/3

Supersedes HELCOM Recommendation 29/2 and 36/1

Adopted on 20 October 2021,
having regard to Article 20, Paragraph 1 b)
of the Helsinki Convention

REGIONAL ACTION PLAN ON MARINE LITTER (RAP ML)

THE COMMISSION,

BEING CONCERNED about the harmful effects of litter on the marine ecosystem such as entanglement in and ingestion of marine litter by marine organisms, litter as potential source of accumulation of toxic substances within the marine food web and pathway for transport and introduction of alien species as well as damage, degradation and smothering of marine habitats;

BEING ALSO CONCERNED about the harmful effects of marine litter on the human beings, including safety risks caused by marine litter such as sharp items at beaches or entanglement of divers, the potential introduction of toxic and endocrine disruptors in fish and shellfish for human consumption and of risk to navigation safety at sea;

RECOGNIZING that plastic may persist in the marine environment for a considerable period, possibly as much as hundreds of years, and that plastic pollution globally is a growing threat to the marine environment;

BEING AWARE of the severity of the marine litter problem in the oceans, while recognizing that more knowledge is needed to adequately react on the problem in the Baltic Sea;

BEING FURTHER CONCERNED about the harmful effects of marine litter, especially from fishing activities, on archaeological sites on the seafloor and therefore human heritage;

BEING ALSO AWARE that the main sources contributing to marine litter inputs in the Baltic Sea are associated with household related/municipal solid waste activities, coastal-based recreational and tourism activities, transport and waste collection/dumping, fishing activities as well as land-based activities involving the use and generation of microplastics;

NOTING at the same time the socio-economic losses that marine litter is causing to many activities carried out at the Baltic Sea, e.g. fishing, shipping, coastal tourism, cooling water systems;

RECALLING the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and its obligations for States to protect and preserve the marine environment (Art 192) including to take measures to prevent, reduce and control pollution (Art 194) and related United Nations General Assembly Resolutions on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, recently Resolution A/RES/75/239 (2020) and earlier submissions;

RECALLING FURTHER the United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 3/7 which stresses the long-term ambition of eliminating discharge of plastic litter and microplastics into the oceans and United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 4/6 calling to address the problem of marine litter and microplastics, prioritizing a whole-life-cycle approach and resource efficiency;

RECALLING ALSO the Rio +20 commitment to take action to achieve significant reductions in marine debris by 2025 and the achievement of the goals and strategy objectives of the Honolulu strategy, as outlined in Resolution A/RES/66/288 (2012);

RECALLING United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 and its target 14.1 to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds by 2025, including marine debris;

RECALLING FURTHER the London Convention 1972 and the 1996 Protocol thereto aiming to promote the effective control of all sources of marine pollution and to take all practicable steps to prevent pollution of the sea by dumping at sea of wastes and other matter generated on land;

ACKNOWLEDGING marine litter to be one of the eight contaminant categories of UNEP's Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Sources (GPA) as well as one of the key issues of the Regional Seas Programme (RSP) of UNEP;

RECALLING FURTHERMORE the provisions on ship generated waste management under Annex V of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL 73/78) as well as the IMO Action Plan to address marine plastic litter from ships;

RECALLING other relevant regional programmes and activities developed in the framework of structures stemming from international agreements such as the Regional Action Plan for Prevention and Management of Marine Litter in the North-East Atlantic and the Arctic Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter;

ACKNOWLEDGING the ecological and management objectives for marine litter set by the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP 2021) as well as the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter as a key tool to achieve the objectives;

BUILDING ON related commitments of HELCOM Ministerial Meetings and actions to reduce litter input in the Baltic Sea marine environment agreed in HELCOM Recommendations;

RECALLING that this complementary approach is without prejudice to the implementation of related regulations and policy initiatives applicable for HELCOM countries being EU members, related regulations of the Russian Federation as well as provisions concerning marine litter management contained in other national, regional or international instruments or programmes;

ACKNOWLEDGING related, including stricter, national and international legislation, provisions, criteria and guidance for marine litter prevention and sustainable management as complementary marine litter approaches;

RECOMMENDS to the Governments of the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention to jointly implement, assisted by the relevant HELCOM subsidiary bodies including *via* a lead country approach, the actions of this Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter.

DECIDES to base further work on fundamental principles, as contained in Articles 3, 6, 8, 9 and 15 of the Helsinki Convention, as well as the following approaches:

- a) “Public participation and stakeholder involvement”: Procedures and methods to create awareness of the problems of marine litter and ensuring a sense of public ownership for broad-based support to preventive and removal measures;
- b) “Sustainable consumption and production”: The use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing (1) the use of natural resources; (2) the generation of toxic materials; (3) the emissions of pollutants and waste generation over the life cycle of the service of product;
- c) “Best available knowledge and socio-economic effectiveness”: Actions and operational aspirational targets to be based on available knowledge of the predominant amounts, materials, items and sources of marine litter found in the Baltic Sea as well as social and economic costs of degradation compared to the cost and benefits of proposed measures and, where available, costs for non-action;
- d) “Integration”: Marine litter management to be an integral part of the solid waste management to ensure any environmentally sound anthropogenic management including rational use of resources;
- e) “Application of waste hierarchy”: Solid waste management to follow the five-step waste hierarchy, as introduced by the EU legislation in 2008¹, starting from prevention to preparing for re-use, recycling, other recovery up to final disposal;
- f) “Ecosystem approach”: Management of human activities according to the 2003 Joint HELCOM and OSPAR Ministerial Statement on the Ecosystem Approach to the Management of Human Activities;

RECOMMENDS ALSO to

- a) finalize, by the end of 2021, common indicator and associated definition of Good Environmental Status (GES) for beach litter and by 2022 for litter on the seafloor for regional application in the years to follow;
- b) finalize, by the end of 2026 at the latest, a common indicator and associated definition of GES related to microlitter for regional application in the years to follow;
- c) identify and further develop additional common indicators and associated definition of GES related to litter in other compartments;
- d) improve coordinated monitoring programmes for the beach litter and seafloor litter indicators including data collection for regular assessment of the state of marine litter in the Baltic Sea area;
- e) establish by 2026 at the latest coordinated monitoring programmes for microlitter including data collection for regular assessment of the state of marine litter in the Baltic Sea area;
- f) implement points a) to e) taking into account outcomes of the related work under the EU MSFD and involving close coordination with the EU TG Litter, as well as with similar work of the Russian Federation;

¹ *Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC (art. 4).*

- g) report on the implementation of actions and their effectiveness towards achieving corresponding targets for the first time by 1st December 2023 as part of the implementation plan to be drafted for each of the actions following the lead country approach and thereafter every second year;

RECOMMENDS FURTHER that the Contracting Parties assess the implementation of this Recommendation and the Action Plan by 2027, and, if necessary, based on the assessment, update it in 2028;

RECOMMENDS FURTHERMORE that the Governments of the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention foster cross-sectorial cooperation and seek close cooperation with other relevant regional and global organizations and initiatives to combat marine litter, including UNEP and other Regional Seas Conventions (i.a. OSPAR Commission, Barcelona Convention, Black Sea Commission), the International Maritime Organization, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Baltic Sea Advisory Council, and River Basin Commissions including via partnerships with the private sector and with non-governmental organizations.

ACTIONS TO REDUCE THE INPUT AND PRESENCE OF MARINE LITTER IN THE BALTIC SEA AS PART OF THE HELCOM REGIONAL ACTION PLAN ON MARINE LITTER (RAP ML)

HELCOM Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter is considered as the main regional tool to achieve the marine litter ecological and management objectives of the Baltic Sea Action Plan. This updated Action Plan is developed based on lessons learnt from the implementation of the first Regional Action Plan adopted in 2015 and on the best available information on amounts and composition of litter found in the coastal and marine environments as well as its sources and pathways to the Baltic Sea. Thus, the list of actions represents areas where, to the best knowledge, the Contracting Parties need to act.

Actions in this Action Plan are designed for joint regional implementation with assistance and follow up by the relevant HELCOM working group. The implementation also assumes lead country approach with subsequent assignment of actions to countries which are willing to develop them further into concrete measures. An implementation plan for each action will be developed by the end of 2022. The implementation plan will include concrete steps and target years as well as a follow up process with respective milestones and indicators of accomplishment. In doing so, cost-effectiveness of measures and ongoing activities which can be used for the implementation should be considered. The implementation plans will be considered by relevant HELCOM groups as part of the regional communication on marine litter, which is one of the key issues for the success of this Action Plan. The implementation plans will be revised, if necessary, based on the follow up assessment.

Some actions in this Action Plan, for instance, addressing other organizations or institutions having specific competence to act (e.g. exclusive competences of the European Union, the International Maritime Organization regarding new regulations for shipping) require a coordinated approach. Cooperation with other Regional Seas Conventions is an essential part of this work ensuring mutual learning and coordination of actions. Furthermore, the Contracting Parties commit to a global agreement on plastics and microplastics, which could include national *management plans on plastics and microplastics as an element within the agreement*.

Actions in the Action Plan are divided into two themes: (i) actions to combat land-based and (ii) sea-based sources of marine litter which include also actions on removal and disposal of litter already present in the marine environment. Actions aimed at reducing input of litter by means of smart production as well as education and outreach are integral parts of these themes. Contracting Parties will continue regional and national work to increase public awareness and literacy on occurrence and harmful effects of marine litter as well as on measures to prevent plastic pollution of the Baltic Sea.

Successful accomplishment of the Action Plan involves engagement in a dialogue and enhanced cooperation with business and industry, sea users, local communities and other relevant civil society groups as well as national stakeholders focusing on marine litter, at appropriate level, to promote the removal of litter from the marine environment in a practical, feasible and environmentally sound manner, to develop best available techniques (BAT) and best environmental practice (BEP), including identification of circumstances of “escapes” of litter into the marine environment as well as new waste management and adaptation practices to achieve a good environmental status.

Contracting Parties agreed to reach a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea. The implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter will be assessed by 2027 and, if necessary, based on the assessment, the Action Plan will be updated in 2028 to ensure that the implementation of the Action Plan serves to the achievement of this ambitious goal.

1. Actions addressing land-based sources of marine litter

CODE	ACTION
	Waste prevention and management
RL1	Share best practices and guidelines for municipalities and other responsible authorities regarding environmentally sound and effective cleaning, sorting and collection infrastructure of plastic litter on beaches and other coastal areas.
RL2	Evaluate top findings according to the knowledge available and recommend environmentally sound alternatives to phase out top plastic and rubber litter items.
RL3	Establish a regional pilot project in collaboration with river basin authorities to assess input of macro litter by rivers to build sound regional knowledge base.
RL4	Reduce marine litter by sharing best practices on national return and refund deposit systems for drink packaging striving to establish such systems in all HELCOM countries and investigate possible bilateral and multilateral solutions to prevent littering and enhance recycling of drink packaging in relation to passenger ships and border shops.
RL5	Identify environmentally open applications using plastics (e.g. agriculture foil, coastal erosion protection, etc...) which need to be addressed and recommend relevant actions.
	Microplastics
RL6	Based on the evaluations made in the EU and among the contracting parties of the most significant products and processes that release both primary and secondary microplastics, assess if they are covered or not by legislation, and act, if appropriate, to influence or adjust the legal framework, or identify other necessary measures to reduce emissions to the aquatic environment.
RL7	Evaluate the possibility to introduce regional recommendations to reduce release of microplastics from WWTP utilizing the outcome of related studies.
RL8	Development of a HELCOM guideline on establishment and operation of artificial turfs, to prevent plastic losses, taking into account the ongoing work within the EU including the proposal by ECHA.
	Single use plastics
RL9	Investigate opportunities for substitution with subsequent phasing-out non-degradable shot wads and launch information campaigns targeted at hunters.
RL10	Provide guidance on best-practice examples and regulatory options for municipalities in the Baltic Sea region to reduce the generation of single use plastic litter.
RL11	Prevention and reduction of single use plastics consumption and littering at major events and promotion campaigns through the establishment of a catalog of possible measures to be utilized by the organizers and authorities.
RL12	Phase out intentional releases of inflated balloons
RL13	Consider phasing out the use of plastic components of firework and confetti outdoors.

2. Actions addressing sea-based sources of marine litter

CODE	ACTION
	Actions addressing shipping related activities
RS1	Identify opportunities for developing ELB management and recycling methodologies including potential financial arrangements (e.g. producer's responsibility, eco-fee for registered boats).
RS2	Encourage the development and use of buoys, floats and docks, which do not release expanded polystyrene (EPS) and other problematic materials to the marine environment with the aim to phase out the use of those containing unprotected EPS and problematic materials.
RS3	Cooperate with maritime stakeholders to optimize onboard waste management enhancing separation, fostering recycling, and phasing out the use of single-use plastics in shipping, including in cruise operations.
RS4	Investigate the problem with cargo losses causing plastic littering of the marine environment and, based on the findings, together with national competent authorities, consider developing a common guidelines for accident management taking into account ongoing work within the IMO and EU.
RS5	Investigate the problem caused by spills of plastic pellets from ships and, based on the findings, consider developing common guidelines for accident management in such events.
	Actions addressing ALDFG and other fisheries related litter
RS6	Encourage collection of ALDFG and separation of collected ALDFG from end-of-life gear with a view to establish regional targets for collection of end-of-life fishing gear.
RS7	Elaborate guidelines on the best practices and undertake relevant measures to reduce the input of ALDFG to the Baltic Sea from recreational fisheries with a focus on gillnets taking into account geographical particularities.
RS8	Evaluate the amounts and composition of lost angling gear in the Baltic Sea including fishing lures and casting weights with corresponding hooks, soft plastic baits and light components and develop appropriate measures to prevent their further loss.
RS9	Investigate available options for fishing gear marking as a tool to prevent and reduce gear losses and produce recommendations to improve gear marking to increase the effectiveness of this tool
RS10	Consider innovative constructive features of fishing gear as a tool to prevent and reduce gear losses and a tool to prevent and reduce lost fishing gears from ghost fishing.
RS11	Continue the mapping of areas with high potential for ALDFG accumulation (hot spots) in all HELCOM countries with subsequent update of the HELCOM Map&Data service.
RS12	Initiate removal of ghost nets and their safe management on land applying the best practices for ALDFG removal in national or international campaigns.
RS13	HELCOM to join the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) which is the world's largest cross-sectoral alliance committed to driving solutions to the problem of ALDFG worldwide.
RS14	Engage fishermen (both recreational and commercial) and general public to report on lost and observed ghost fishing gear utilizing related reporting tools (e.g. Swedish example of GhostGuard app or German Geistertaucher).
RS15	Consider the development of HELCOM Recommendation and guidelines on the reduction of marine litter through the implementation of Sustainability Education Programmes for Fishers taking into account results of the ongoing work on the revision of IMO STCW-F.

Appendix I – Reporting format on implementation of actions

With reference to item g) of the HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/3 the implementation of actions is to be reported to HELCOM for the first time by 1 December 2023 and thereafter every second year.

Country	
Date	
Contact person	
Affiliation	
E-mail	
Code of action ¹	
Action	
Status of the action ²	
Justification of the achieved progress ³	
Estimation of the achieved reduction of the environmental pressure where appropriate⁴	
Estimation of costs of the implementation.	

1 – Please provide the code of the action as listed in the Annex to the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter.

2 – Please select accordingly: not initiated, on-going, accomplished.

3 – Please briefly describe progress achieved or justify the accomplishment of the action.

4 – Please provide an estimation of quantified reduction of the input of litter achieved through the implementation of the action where relevant.