



### HELCOM voluntary commitments to the UN Ocean Conference 2022

The UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) 2020 was postponed due to COVID 19 and was eventually organized from 27 June to 1 July 2022. Due to the delay, some of HELCOM's contributions and outreach on global ocean matters, including its voluntary commitments to the UNOC, have already been accomplished.

The following HELCOM voluntary commitments for the UN Ocean Conference 2022 have now been submitted (as of August 2022) to the UN Ocean Conference Registry of Commitments. Some of the commitments have been modified from the 2020 proposals while some are newly created.

#### About UN Ocean commitments

Voluntary commitments for The Ocean Conference are initiatives voluntarily undertaken by Governments, the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations, international and regional financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations, academic and research institutions, the scientific community, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and other actors - individually or in partnership - that aim to contribute to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

Any voluntary commitments made within the framework of the 2030 Agenda targeting SDG 14 can be registered as voluntary commitments for The Ocean Conference.

**More information:** <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/oceans-and-seas/vcs>

#### 1. Stakeholder conference on the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan

In 2021 HELCOM adopted the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), HELCOM's strategic programme of actions and measures for achieving good environmental and ecological status of the Baltic Sea. The 2021 BSAP provides increased support for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (especially SDG 14 on life below water).

The BSAP update process engaged a wide range of stakeholders in the Baltic Sea region and stakeholders are also essential in implementing the agreed actions. Stakeholder involvement and broad ownership will also be key to successfully implementing the 2021 BSAP, including those components that contribute to implementing SDG 14 and other SDGs.

To foster this involvement, promote the necessary sense of ownership and accelerate the implementation of the 2021 BSAP, HELCOM commits to organizing a stakeholder conference.

#### 2. Continue supporting efforts towards a binding global instrument on plastic litter

HELCOM notes with concern the high and rapidly increasing levels of marine plastic litter and microplastics as a global environmental problem and a serious threat to the marine environment.

HELCOM commits to the prevention and significant reduction of marine plastic litter and microplastics from both land- and sea-based sources, which constitutes a contribution to achieving the sustainable development goals.

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In particular, HELCOM finds that strengthened global action is needed to prevent further discharge and reduce levels of marine plastic litter and microplastic in the marine environment stemming from current global and market-driven consumption of plastic products. The problem of marine litter, including plastic, cannot be solved by any one country alone and effective, dedicated global governance is needed to address existing gaps and promote coherence, coordination and effective prioritization of our efforts. Therefore, HELCOM commits itself to support the development of a global binding instrument to more effectively and comprehensively deal with the issue of marine plastic litter and microplastics on a global level in an integrated manner in alignment with decisions that the resumed Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 5-2) may make on the matter.

### 3. Sharing experiences with other Regional Seas Organisations

HELCOM commits to sharing experiences on the protection of the marine environment and environmentally friendly and sustainable maritime activities with other regional seas organisations, notably within the framework of the UN Regional Seas Programme and through cooperation with other regional seas organisations.

By sharing knowledge and experiences among regional seas organisations, HELCOM seeks to facilitate and accelerate the global response to the current challenges our seas and oceans are facing (notably originating from anthropogenic pressures such as our economic activities or climate change) while sparing resources that could be used to drive the response even further.

The regional seas share certain similarities, be they the same pressures on the marine environment caused by similar human activities, the same biochemical characteristics and biodiversity, or similar geopolitical situations. Sharing knowledge and information on how a regional sea deals or has dealt with its own challenges can be a valuable and resource-efficient contribution to the work of other regional sea organisations facing similar issues relating to the protection of the marine environment.

In particular, HELCOM commits to sharing its experiences with other regional seas organisations on carrying out holistic assessments of the marine environment and on the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, including the analysis of sufficiency of measures and the achievement of good environmental/ecological status through improved implementation of these measures.

### 4. Contribution to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)

HELCOM commits to contributing to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), taking on an active role in its related processes, notably by participating in related events and activities.

HELCOM has adopted the HELCOM Science Agenda that outlines existing and foreseen Baltic Sea regional science needs, supporting the UN Decade of Ocean Science. In addition to supporting processes under the UN Decade of Ocean Science and linking to its strategic objectives, the HELCOM Science Agenda also provides the necessary scientific underpinnings for future HELCOM work, including the implementation of the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan. HELCOM further commits to linking the HELCOM Science Agenda to national science plans and scientific research.

HELCOM commits to preparing a regional scale holistic assessment of the state of the Baltic Sea environment. The assessment will collate and make publicly available both national and regional level monitoring data and products across a wide range of topics, contributing to the decade outcome on accessible oceans. It will target drivers, human activities and the subsequent pressures on the environment, the impact of these pressures on the state of the ecosystem and the consequences this has on human wellbeing, thus directly providing support to achieve a further four of the seven decade outcomes.

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#### 5. Improving the spatial coverage, management and coherence of the Baltic Sea marine protected area network

HELCOM commits to establish a resilient, regionally coherent, effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected system of HELCOM marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Baltic Sea, supported by those other spatial conservation measures, under alternative regimes for marine protection, which can contribute to the coherence of the network.

HELCOM commits to ensure at least 30% of the marine area of the Baltic Sea is under protection, of which at least 1/3 will be strictly protected. Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) can be counted towards the 30% targets only if they, as a minimum, comply with the OECM criteria agreed by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Where scientifically justified, HELCOM commits to consider including no-use zones within marine protected areas, which can also serve as scientific reference areas.

HELCOM further commits to expanding conservation efforts to actively include areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, including important ecosystem elements such as species or areas recognized to be ecologically significant based on function for the ecosystem/provisioning of ecosystem services and broad habitat types, but which may not necessarily be rare or threatened.

#### 6. Common understanding of the Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) criteria and identification of OECMs in the Baltic Sea region

HELCOM commits to coming to a common understanding of criteria for identifying Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), as well as their use in HELCOM, based on definitions agreed in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the EU.

HELCOM further commits to working to define how OECMs can support the coherence of the Baltic Sea marine protected area (MPA) network and identify OECMs in the Baltic Sea region.