

**BSAC Statement for BSAC Executive Committee Chair at HELCOM 2024 Ministerial Meeting on the Baltic Sea Marine Environment, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Riga**

Dear Chair of the Helsinki Commission,  
Dear Ministers, high-level Representatives, distinguished Delegates,  
Dear HELCOM Secretariat,

I would like to thank HELCOM for giving me the opportunity to take the floor on behalf of the Baltic Sea Advisory Council members at this high-level Ministerial Meeting, marking the start of HELCOM's 50th anniversary celebrations.

HELCOM was, among other goals, established to ensure that all the coastal states pursue many commitments made for a healthier Baltic Sea. BSAC recognises the role of HELCOM in environmental protection of the Baltic. Our organisations have much to share since the awareness of the massive challenges, in particular climate crisis and biodiversity loss, has been rising.

I am therefore very pleased to recall that the Baltic Sea Advisory Council has been working with HELCOM since 2015 when my organisation was granted observer status. Our organisations have exchanged views on many topics of common interest. Among others, stakeholders' engagement, fishing gears, eel stocks, seals and other predators, and also climate change.

The BSAC members contributed actively to the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) proposing a series of measures for inclusion. Collaborating with your organisation, by taking part in the implementation of the BSAP, is one of the objectives of our work programme. The same applies to our participation in the HELCOM Group on ecosystem-based sustainable fisheries.

As recently as in March 2024, the BSAC members contributed to the implementation of one of the actions of the BSAP, by providing input on data and research needs regarding regulated and non-regulated fish stocks and non-fish species such as harbour porpoise and seals, as well as birds. All the interactions have both a direct (predation, prey availability) and indirect (food competition, diseases) impact on the fish stocks.

The BSAC members look forward to the Ministerial Meeting deciding on the next steps of the implementation of the BSAP, towards reaching a healthy Baltic Sea environment, and ensuring continued cooperation in the region, taking also into account specific current political challenges. In this context, the BSAC would like to point out the importance of balancing environmental, social and economic aspects when implementing those actions. With reference to fisheries, the BSAC would like to underline the importance of taking into account sustainable fisheries in the BSAP's actions. The BSAC also highlights that the requirements in the new Control Regulation may allow to fill some of the identified data gaps. In particular, the new reporting requirements for some fisheries (including recreational and small-scale) might allow for better records on key fish species.

The BSAC members look forward to our continued cooperation and stand ready to work closely with HELCOM for the benefit of the Baltic. Congratulations with the 50 years!