**Statement of the Coalition Clean Baltic – CCB at the 2024 Ministerial Conference of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)**

**Riga, Latvia, 25 April 2024**

*(embargo for publishing before 25 April 2024, 09:00 EEST)*

Dear Ministers, High-level representatives, distinguished guests,

As WWF colleagues before, we stand here in front of you to speak on behalf of the Baltic Sea. Protecting this Sea, restoring what humans have already destroyed, is not a luxury that would be nice to have. It is not optional. It is essential for the survival of the region – now more so than ever. Healthy oceans can be our strongest allies in the climate crisis – a functioning marine ecosystem will help store carbon and regulate the climate.

Again, likewise WWF, we speak to you in your representative function, but also as fellow human beings.

What is missing, why has there not been enough progress, and why do you allow for even more pressures to affect our sensitive Sea? Why expand cities and reclaim land from the Baltic Sea, why expand harbours, why build pipelines through spawning grounds, why plan CCS?

Are you really going to keep prioritizing industrial growth over common sense? Haven't we learned in the last 50 years that there needs to be a balance between use and protection?

We have a joint Baltic Sea Action Plan, we have several other plans under the EU and other conventions. We have knowledge, we have tools and legal frameworks. Sometimes we even have the funds to act. And we’ve just heard about the costs of inaction. Now you need to stick to these plans. Only a sustained effort and long-term political commitment will yield sustainable improvement for our Sea.

The next 50 years need innovation, and we don’t mean just technical innovation, but new strategies, new political thinking, bring policies together, think big, act small, local and big - but act. Think beyond borders and the legislative period, call on your neighbours and plan together, free resources, learn from mistakes in the past, use the precautionary principle when uncertain.

“Proud past, promising future” – you chose those words for these celebrations today. YOU are HELCOM, YOU are the ones choosing where to go from here. Let‘s do something you, we all, can be really proud of.

Three years after the update of the BSAP, we are concerned to see delays in the implementation of the plan. Thus, even though every single action in the BSAP is of greatest value, we have identified around 25 measures that should be prioritized – for a start. These include suggestions for a green recovery of Ukraine.

For the Baltic Sea to be saved from further deterioration you will need to be bold.

You will need to be bold and say no to destructive industries such as seabed mining and geoengineering.

You will need to be bold and make protected areas that are not ashamed of their name.

We repeat ourselves from the beginning: marine protection and restoration is not a luxury, it is a necessity and you need to start treating it as such.

We stand here with you for a healthy Baltic Sea.