

**HELCOM Ministerial Meeting - Observer statement
NEFCO, The Nordic Environment Finance Corporation**

25.4.2024

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Dear Ministers, honoured representatives of HELCOM contracting parties, and colleagues devoted to the Baltic Sea's well-being. On this impressive occasion of your 50th anniversary, we extend our heartfelt congratulations from the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) for reaching this remarkable milestone.

NEFCO's journey in tackling Baltic Sea challenges began with a simple yet urgent mission: combating eutrophication, the biggest threat to our Baltic Sea. Since NEFCO's establishment in 1990, we've expanded our efforts, contributing to environmental goals not only in the Nordics but also in Ukraine and globally. Since our establishment, NEFCO has financed approximately 40 different projects to improve wastewater treatment, contributing to the reduction of phosphorus and nitrogen discharges in the Baltic Sea.

Today, one of NEFCO's central Baltic Sea related efforts is the Baltic Sea Action Plan Fund. The fund was initiated in 2010, as a combined effort from the governments of Finland and Sweden, together with NEFCO and the Nordic Investment Bank. Initially named in alignment with HELCOM BSAP, it has been pivotal in funding projects closely aligned with the BSAP's objectives. The fund serves as an efficient mechanism for its donors to take concrete actions to achieve and accelerate the BSAP goals for 2030, a commitment shared by all HELCOM countries.

The BSAP Fund's aim is to help concrete projects, regardless of national borders. During the past decade, the BSAP Fund has financed 74 projects in 8 different countries with a total investment of nearly 15 million euros. The fund has made significant contributions towards fostering a healthy and resilient Baltic Sea ecosystem. To name a few examples, the BSAP Fund has financed 11 projects related to reducing land-based nutrient input from agricultural fields and forests, 10 projects within wastewater treatment and 4 projects addressing the challenge related to shipping discharges and waste. About 80% of the funded projects address biodiversity conservation or pollution prevention.

Today, as we convene, NEFCO highlights the urgent requirement for varied financing mechanisms to accelerate our collective vision outlined in the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan. The continuity of the BSAP Fund relies on the combined dedication of both present and future donors. Today, we emphasize the importance of collective action, urging every Baltic Sea nation to participate in our shared responsibility of preserving a healthier Baltic Sea. We implore everyone present to acknowledge the significant impact of even modest financial contributions in catalysing substantial environmental improvements, as evidenced by the Fund's proven track record.

In closing, as we reflect on the journey of HELCOM and the pivotal role played by the Baltic Sea Action Plan, it is essential to acknowledge the progress made and the challenges that lie ahead. Over the past 50 years, HELCOM has been at the forefront of efforts to protect and restore the Baltic Sea ecosystem, bringing together governments, organizations, and individuals committed to its well-being. We look forward to continuing our fruitful collaboration knowing that our collective efforts today will shape the health of the Baltic Sea for generations to come.