



Your Excellencies, Ministers, High-level representatives, HELCOM observers and invited guests,

Today we are here to celebrate 50 years of continuous regional cooperation under HELCOM, leading to a reduction of DDT, PCBs and dioxins in Baltic Sea wildlife, recovery of iconic and important species such as the white-tailed eagle and grey seal, and a reduction of nutrient hot spots and oil spills. Even through difficult times, cooperation persists, which is commendable.

Yet, after 50 years and several successes, the Baltic Sea is far from a good state. Today, you are here as ministers and state representatives, deciding on the future of the Baltic Sea. Thus, I'd like to ask you, as ministers but also as individuals with a personal stake in and a responsibility for the health of our sea - what do you want your legacy to be?

Do you want to leave a healthy and restored sea, with vibrant ecosystems that attract tourists to our region to see the Baltic harbour porpoise and fish in our salmon-rich rivers? A sea with clear waters, sustained by sustainable farming, that provides food security and where coastal fishing is profitable? A Baltic Sea in good environmental status worth EUR 5.6 billion annually to society, with additional billions to be saved every year from natural carbon and nutrient sequestration?

Or do you want public outcry due to expanding iltsvind, dead seafloor, in Denmark? Do you want the culturally important Swedish surströmming, fermented herring, to be lost due to ever decreasing fish stocks? Tourists to stop coming to the beaches of Rügen, Palanga, Pärnu and Jurmala because of algal blooms, with EUR 9 billion of recreational value lost every year throughout the Baltic Sea region?

It is difficult to fully estimate the true cost of losing vital ecosystem services provided by a healthy Baltic Sea, but the latter scenario paints a rather grim picture that, I hope and trust, none of you would like to leave as your legacy. Yet, the results of the State of the Baltic Sea report are a stark reminder that this is the future we risk seeing, unless we – you – take action now.

Dear ministers, saving the Baltic Sea makes cultural, social, environmental, and economic sense. It will require transformative change across all sectors that influence or interact with the Baltic Sea. Ask yourselves, do your decisions truly reflect your ambition to protect and restore our Sea? Thankfully, actions have impact and your role as politicians is to convincingly provide solutions for a healthy Baltic Sea, something people around the region care about.

As WWF, we ask you to:

- Implement the Baltic Sea Action Plan in full - it provides many solutions, but only completed actions have impact.
- Continue and strengthen regional cooperation, particularly when planning nature-friendly expansion of offshore renewable energy and implementing the 30x30 protection target in the region.
- Jointly mobilize the necessary funds for Baltic Sea action - both public and private.
- Ensure restoration of Baltic Sea ecosystems becomes a priority - financially and legally.

- Reassess and reform subsidies that degrade the Baltic Sea environment, aligning them with the Baltic Sea Action Plan goals.

It comes down to your priorities - do you want to be remembered as ministers taking decisive action or as those leaving the challenges for future generations to address? So, I ask you once again - what do you want your legacy to be?