

Keynote: Karen Ellemann. HELCOM, 25 april 2024

Dear Ministers, dear ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

- The ocean and the coastal areas of the world provide us with food, energy, jobs, natural and cultural experiences. And the Ocean is the key to achieving several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- However, our Ocean is under pressure from climate change, pollution, overconsumption and loss of natural diversity.
- The Baltic Sea connects us. Nine countries border the Baltic Sea and 85 million people live in its catchment area. The Baltic Sea is home to a rich cultural heritage, and a unique marine and coastal ecosystem.
- We are all well aware that our Baltic Sea faces serious challenges. The Baltic Sea is severely impacted by pollution, eutrophication and biodiversity loss. And the impacts of a heating climate add even more pressure and increases the urgency to act.
- At the same time, many of the solutions to climate adaptation and mitigation, renewable energy and food supply lie in the Ocean.
- I would like to congratulate HELCOM, and everyone who is involved in the work of HELCOM, on all your efforts for a healthy marine environment in the Baltic Sea in the last 50 years.
- There is no doubt that HELCOM has played a crucial role on several fronts: in reducing pollution, combatting eutrophication, promoting an ecosystem-based management, and in providing data that underpins sound management.
- HELCOM plays a key role for the establishment and management of Marine Protected Areas in the Baltic Sea. These areas help conserve biodiversity, protect habitats, and contribute to the sustainable use of marine resources.

- I also want to recognise the important role that HELCOM plays for providing and managing data. One notable example is the Holistic Assessments. These assessments provide us with invaluable data. This data is essential for the implementation of both national as well as international policies and commitments, such as the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
- The Nordic climate and environment ministers have long emphasised the importance of safeguarding our oceans, especially in the nexus between ocean, climate and biodiversity.
- In 2022, the Nordic Prime Ministers adopted a Joint Statement on a Sustainable Ocean Economy and the Green Transition.
- The Prime ministers emphasized that: “The marine ecosystems of the Nordic oceans are subject to multiple pressures. This calls for even stronger cooperation, an improved knowledge base, and more integrated and sustainable management. “
- The Nordic Prime Ministers also emphasized that they will seek to collaborate even more closely on issues relating to protecting the ocean. On ecological sustainability, climate resilience and reduction of pollution including the input of nutrients from land-based sources. And that they will strengthen the Nordic dialogue, aimed at sharing research and knowledge, including blue and green industries linked to the ocean.
- The Nordic Council of Ministers is committed to delivering on the Prime Ministers declaration for a sustainable ocean economy and strengthened cooperation on ocean issues.
- We are working hard on providing the best new information that is the foundation for political decisions. For instance on climate change and management in stressed Nordic sea areas - like Skagerrak, Kattegat and the Baltic Sea. And how restoring ecosystems and deploying marine protected areas can help in adapting to climate change.
- We are also looking in to how we can best reconcile ambitious targets for offshore energy with a continued production of food from the ocean, at the same time as we are making space for nature. The transition to renewable energy is urgent, but the transition needs to be fair in order to be sustainable. That is why we are also looking in to best practices for involving local stakeholders and their interests.

- The UN has designated this decade as the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. A decade to stimulate global action and create transformation.
- From the Nordic Council of Ministers, we are committed to contributing to this momentum for ocean knowledge-based solutions. This means working with a variety of stakeholders to align research, investments and initiatives around a common framework. So that we can jointly contribute towards a well-functioning, resilient and sustainable ocean.
- My hope is that our efforts – for instance through the Ocean Decade - can also contribute to improved management. And aligning with the work of regional sea conventions, like here in HELCOM.
- The Baltic Sea faces a number of challenges that are interconnected. The Baltic Sea is host to a many competing commercial activities at sea, and is also negatively impacted by activities on land.
- The issues facing the Baltic Sea – like eutrophication – are particularly challenging because they are urgent, multi-faceted and interdependent. This calls for a balanced and multi-sectorial approach.
- I would like to highlight the important role that HELCOM has in solving many of these challenges. HELCOM serves as the main platform for cooperation between countries in the Baltic Sea region on environmental issues. This collaborative approach across borders enhances the effectiveness of efforts to protect the marine environment, and it facilitates exchange of best practices and expertise.
- As we look ahead for the next 50 years, it is evident that we have our challenges cut out. I take comfort knowing that we all share the vision for a restored and resilient Baltic Sea. And what we have learnt in these last 50 years, is that progress can only be achieved in concert and in partnership.