



Proud past, promising future: Commemorating 50 years of HELCOM





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To all those who shaped HELCOM's proud past and those building its promising future

Programme

50th Anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Convention
Thursday, 25 April 2024, 14.30 (EEST)
Venue: National Library of Latvia (Mūkusalas iela 3, Riga)
Moderator: Sandra Kropa, Environmental Journalist, Latvia

Opening and welcome

Keynote speeches

A musical interlude by Latvian artists: Tautumeitas

Recalling the proud past of HELCOM

A segment devoted to the most remarkable milestones and achievements of HELCOM over the last 50 years.

Next generation “Are we fit for the future?”

A panel discussion on selected Baltic Sea environment challenges and ways of finding a balance between the value of the environment and the negative impact we cause.

Where do we stand?

HELCOM Executive Secretary and
HELCOM Deputy Executive Secretary

Congratulations

Partner organizations

Closing words

HELCOM Chair

Reception hosted by the HELCOM Chairmanship – Latvia

Closing surprise: HELCOM behind the scenes



The Baltic Sea is ours to protect

Not ours to master

It is ours to treasure, not ours to own.

There is still time for a happy ending to this story.

Let us write it together.

reface

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For HELCOM, 2024 is a very special year, as it marks our organization's fiftieth anniversary. On April 25th, 2024, the jubilee was commemorated by a celebratory event in Riga, Latvia. Held at the Latvian National Library's impressive Ziedonis Hall, the celebration brought together an array of distinguished speakers and panelists and around 150 other participants from around and beyond the Baltic Sea region and featured the famous Latvian band Tautumeitas. The atmosphere was festive but not self-congratulatory, which seems entirely appropriate. Because, while a fiftieth anniversary is generally considered a reason to celebrate, the case is less clear-cut for an organization such as HELCOM, which aims not only to protect but also to improve the state of the environment. Or, to quote the Helsinki Convention, "to promote the ecological restoration of the Baltic Sea Area and the preservation of its ecological balance."

And of course, we know that the Baltic Sea is not in balance. Sadly, half a century of joint ef-

forts has not been sufficient to realize HELCOM's vision of "a healthy Baltic Sea environment with diverse biological components functioning in balance, resulting in a good ecological status and supporting a wide range of sustainable economic and social activities." These are undeniable facts that cannot be explained away and of which the outcomes of the most recent HELCOM Holistic Assessment of the state of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS 3) provide additional, stark evidence.

And yet there is reason to celebrate! To celebrate and to pay homage to the prescience and ambition of the founders of HELCOM, who drafted a front-runner convention and established an organization that has weathered the challenges and crises of half a century and lost none of its relevance. To the countless individuals from across our region whose fifty years of tireless and dedicated work to improve the state of our Sea have not been in vain. Work that our organization can not only look back but also build on, work that is

ongoing and set to continue in the future. To a young generation that, far from descending into resignation and despair or disengaging, is not only rightfully demanding that we take this endeavor to the next level and spurring us on to greater speed and effort, but is also willing to play a decisive and central role in shouldering the tasks ahead.

All of this is reflected in the keynote presentations, speeches and panel contributions compiled in this commemorative volume. But so is the fact that there is no room for complacency and no time to rest on our laurels. We can no longer afford the luxury of hesitating and tarrying that previous generations may have had – or thought they had. The clock is ticking, and time is running out to save the Baltic Sea. It can still be done, but this will require immediate, redoubled and sustained efforts across the entire region, across sectors and silos. We can and we have to act now! Saving the Baltic Sea will be no small feat, but we owe it to those who came before us, to ourselves,

to future generations and to the Sea itself. As the Latvian Poet Imants Ziedonis—for whom the venue of our anniversary event is named—noted, "Nature too is human society, and one should treat it as such."

In addition to some rarely seen images from 50 years of HELCOM history, this publication compiles the many insightful and thought-provoking contributions of the speakers, panelists and moderators at our 50th anniversary celebration. We owe all of them, as well as the many people behind the scenes of the event and our generous Latvian hosts, a huge debt of gratitude. Once again, I would like to offer a heartfelt word of thanks and appreciation to all of them. We hope that you, our readers, will find this book a pleasant and inspiring read.

Until we meet again!

Rüdiger Stempel
HELCOM Executive Secretary

eynotes



Inga
Bērziņa



Kai
Mykkänen



Pekka
Haavisto



Karen
Ellemann



Leena
Ylä-Mononen



Alan
Haynie





Inga Bērziņa has served as Latvia's Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development since September 2023. Ms. Bērziņa was elected to the 14th Saeima (the parliament of the Republic of Latvia) and previously held the position of Chairperson of the Social and Employment Matters Committee.

Inga Bērziņa

Minister for Environmental Protection
and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia

Your excellencies, ministers, ladies and gentlemen, Dear HELCOM friends,

It's a great honour and pleasure to address you today in Riga to commemorate the landmark anniversary—50 years since the signing of the first Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area.

The importance of the sea for each one of us, and for all of us together, goes without saying. Following the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, growing concern about the degradation of the Baltic Sea environment and the realization that existing relevant conventions did not cover the specific needs and problems of the fragile Baltic Sea ecosystem prompted the Baltic Sea coastal states to conclude the first convention

covering all sources of marine pollution.

Given the cross-border nature of the marine environment, regional cooperation is essential to meet the convention's objectives. We are pleased to mark this important half-century during the Latvian chairmanship. This year also marks 30 years since Latvia became a state party to the HELCOM Convention.

Accession to the convention for Latvia came at a crucial time, with geopolitical changes and emerging environmental challenges in the region, immediately after regaining the independence of our country. The Ronneby Conference of the heads of governments of the Baltic Sea States in 1990 opened up an opportunity for Latvia to participate in the work of HELCOM to jointly plan actions toward a cleaner Baltic Sea, even

before Latvia had formally regained its independence.

Informed discussions require science-based knowledge. The science-policy dialogue has always been at the heart of HELCOM, providing the framework for scientific cooperation toward the science we need for the sea we want. Today, we celebrate the evolution of this wide-ranging cooperation—from initially focusing on scientific research and solutions to prevent pollution from ships, to adopting the ecosystem approach to sustainable marine management and implementing the strategic Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Nowadays, we are witnessing significant progress in terms of people's awareness and behavioral change. This has also been possible thanks to our trusted partners, the HELCOM observers. Today, HELCOM is a globally recognized example of regional cooperation. Latvia is proud to be a member of HELCOM and to participate in its work to meet the Convention's objectives, protecting and improving the marine en-

vironment of the Baltic Sea for present and future generations.

Dear HELCOM members and friends, we have continued to work together at crucial moments for the region, in times of change such as the EU enlargement. Today, we also face challenges, but we are confident about the future. HELCOM has proven to be an effective and well-functioning regional cooperation organization, capable of action even in unforeseen and force majeure situations.

With that, I declare the 2024 HELCOM Annual Session open. I wish you all an interesting and inspiring event.

Happy anniversary,
HELCOM family!

Thank you.



Kai Mykkänen is the Minister of Climate and the Environment of Finland since June 2023, leading the Ministry of the Environment. Within the Finnish Government, he is responsible for matters related to the environment, construction and housing. He has previously served as Minister for Foreign Trade and Development from 2016 to 2018 and Minister of the Interior from 2018 to 2019.

Kai Mykkänen

Minister of Climate and the Environment of Finland

Dear friends, Dear colleagues,

I would really love to be there, but I am here sick at home. Fortunately enough, technology enables me to reach you from home.

In a similar way, modern technology enables us to decrease nutrient loads and to decrease eutrophication of the Baltic Sea without compromising food or industrial production. We already have the technology, for instance, for animal manure treatment, which enables circulating nutrients away from overloaded areas in connection with biogas production.

More surprisingly, we already have inspiring pilots of collecting phosphorus, nitrogen, and other nutrients directly from our sea, for instance by farming algae and turning them into everyday goods. I recommend checking out the originby-ocean.com site for some inspiring examples from that.

Dear friends, people in their 50s nowadays seem to be at the peak of life, sometimes embarking on entirely new journeys and often taking on new challenges. This is inspiring to see, of course, for me personally, as I will be turning 45 next July, and five years go very fast. But this should definitely be the case for HELCOM as well.

HELCOM holds the position of the oldest regional seas organization in the world and is still a global frontrunner, both when it comes to assessing the status of our marine environment as well as in laying down measures to improve it. HELCOM continues to serve as a role model for many other regions.

Finland, acting as the host country of HELCOM, takes great pride in our regional cooperation and in enabling it as the host country. The HELCOM Secretariat, based in Helsinki, has evolved together with the

increased knowledge of our shared sea.

For me personally, HELCOM has always been the legitimate knowledge centre defining the reliable status of things at the sea. Thus, it was not very surprising that I visited the HELCOM Secretariat exactly 20 years ago when I was preparing a so-called Baltic Sea Initiative for a member of the European Parliament, for which I was working as an advisor. That member of the European Parliament, by the way, later became the current President of Finland, Alexander Stubb, who has always been interested in and has taken initiatives regarding the Baltic Sea, seeing it as something that should connect us and be at the heart of our cooperation.

High-quality expert knowledge has always defined the HELCOM Secretariat in Helsinki, and this knowledge base continues to be the crown jewel of our cooperation. There would be no HELCOM without the Secretariat.

Initially, the Secretariat consisted of six people; now, there are 46 people. The Secretariat

speaks 17 languages, and its personnel come from a range of nationalities, from British to Spanish to Brazilian. The staff is relatively young, with only 20% of the staff having reached 45 years of age. So, 80% are younger than me! No wonder this organization does not grow old, even when turning 50.

Excellencies, we are often reminded that the Baltic Sea remains among the most polluted seas in the world. As we all know, this is largely due to its nature as a semi-enclosed, shallow brackish sea with a catchment area four times larger than the sea itself. It's been a bit of an inconvenient fact for me to learn that if a phosphorus molecule enters the water in a Finnish river, it takes, on average, 50 years to exit the Baltic Sea. This explains why our measures are not immediately visible in the sea—it takes about 50 years to see the difference.

What is less often cited is the fact that the Baltic Sea is probably also the best-researched sea area in the world, with long continuous data sets and state-of-the-art monitoring and as-

Kai Mykkänen__{continued}

assessment. This wide network of scientists and researchers remains the backbone of our work and is also quite unique in global terms. We are already being asked to share our experiences beyond our own region, and we should be prepared to do so in the future. HELCOM has a lot to contribute, not least in solving pollution problems burdening coastal areas in other parts of the world.

Cooperation between trustworthy partners to improve our sea will be needed in any conditions. Unfortunately, eutrophication or sea pollution can't be suspended by geopolitical events or wars. We need to continue doing everything that we can, even in these circumstances. We neither have the luxury of being narrow-minded nor the ability to turn a blind eye to new arising challenges that may risk our main task. For instance, the increasing use of uninsured oil tankers without proper capability for ice water

navigation is unacceptable and defies common sense.

At the same time, all of us in the Baltic Sea region must work to limit the fundamental physical risks of the current situation. The first step should be for the European Maritime Safety Agency to take this reality seriously and send more fast response capacity here to the Baltic Sea region immediately.

We must all be grateful to those pioneers who took on the task of saving the Baltic Sea at a time when the topic was not yet in the daily news and the general public was far from being aware of it. Still, far-reaching decisions are sometimes difficult to achieve. If it weren't for those visionary decision-makers who established HELCOM decades ago, no one knows what kind of sea we would be facing today.

Dear colleagues, dear HELCOM veterans, I wish to thank those who have dedicated their time—some of you several decades—to HELCOM. The scien-

tists, policymakers, politicians, and of course the members of the Secretariat. I believe we have among us today both former members of the Secretariat as well as former members of national HELCOM delegations and national experts. It is you who have made HELCOM into what it is, and we are sincerely grateful for all the hard work you have put into this organization.

Now it is our turn to make sure HELCOM develops to meet the needs of the 2020s, becoming a lively and forward-looking organization in its 50s, finding new ways to be influential and a crucial organization for the sea of our common interest. We indeed have a proud past, and today we are here to make sure we also have a truly promising future.





Pekka Haavisto is a Member of Parliament and the former Foreign Minister of Finland. He is a peace negotiator and a defender of both democracy and human rights. Haavisto is especially experienced in foreign policy and international operations. He has led research into the environmental impact of wars and represented the EU and the UN in various crises all over the world. Haavisto has also authored numerous books

Pekka Haavisto

Member of the Parliament of Finland

Dear fellow friends of HELCOM and the Baltic Sea,

It is both an honor and a pleasure to be speaking here at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Helsinki Convention and HELCOM here in Riga.

We live in a time of great transformation. Even in Europe we are no longer part of the same security order we got used to after the Cold War. At the same time, we have an even more serious threat upon us. Climate change and the crisis in our ecosystems require immediate action everywhere on the planet.

The work of HELCOM is needed, today and in the future. It is crucial both for the wellbeing of the Baltic Sea, but also for security in the area, and in a broader, global context. Wellbeing of nature is a prerequisite of the wellbeing of mankind.

Unfortunately, world politics and all the ongoing conflicts

and crises do not take the environment into account. War and conflict have an immense effect on nature and the climate.

We already know that the environmental cost of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine will be dramatic. The effect will be reflected on the Baltic Sea as well.

Russian aggression against Ukraine has also been bringing war closer to us. We know the potential tensions around Kaliningrad, and we have been witnessing the hit against the Nord Stream pipeline and the damage caused to the Baltic-connector between Finland and Estonia. What goes on in the Baltic Sea has an effect on the environment, but also on the security of the area. A stable and secure Baltic Sea would benefit all the coastal states, not to mention the marine life itself.

Dear audience, The roots of HELCOM, as we know, go all the

way back to the Cold War. In the 1970's and 1980's, when almost all international relations between the West and the East were on ice, it was the Baltic Sea which brought us together.

HELCOM was one of the first and one of the only forums for exchange of information between the coastal states. The role of this, of HELCOM being a forum for states from both sides of the Cold War, cannot be emphasized enough. Looking back, the founding of HELCOM seems like a small miracle. I doubt similar success could happen now, in today's world.

The fact that the Soviet Union could take part in HELCOM, share at least some of its information on the Baltic Sea, was crucial for the success of the HELCOM work. It must also have had a larger impact on the security and cooperation of the coastal states and the West and the East in general.

Going back to the early history of HELCOM, we might ask ourselves if all data given to the organization was reliable. In the early days, we perhaps viewed the state of the Baltic

Sea and marine life through rose-tinted glasses.

Now we know what is threatening us.

I have always paid tribute to those environmentalists and marine scientists, who at the very early stage raised environmental concerns around the Baltic Sea.

And of course, in 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm was the first world conference to make the environment a major issue. I was 14 that time, so I did not participate, but my best friend who was 15 went to Stockholm. He brought back a leaflet which was printed on recycled paper. We looked at it like a miracle - the future was in our hands.

In 1992, I had the opportunity to co-chair in a large forum called "Our Common Environment" in St.

Petersburg. More than 600 environmental activists from all parts of the former Soviet Union participated. You could feel how the environmental spirit was coming out from a closed bottle.

Pekka Haavisto__continued

Today we know how important public participation and the citizen's movements are for environmental awareness, and how citizens have also acted in a key role to push us decision makers forward on environmental decisions. Speaking about the Baltic Sea, the role of citizens in the riparian countries has been and will be crucial.

Even though cooperation with all the states around our Baltic Sea at the moment seems impossible, I believe that one day it will be possible again. For that day to come, we have to work hard and keep relevant institutions alive.

The work of HELCOM could be the first step towards cooperation. It won't happen today, most likely it won't happen tomorrow, but when the day comes, I hope that HELCOM will be there to continue its work with great energy. Of course, we must first see to securing the Ukrainian independence.

The Baltic Sea brought us all together despite the Cold War. It can bring us together once again.

Dear friends, the work of HELCOM and the spirit of the Helsinki Convention are still needed. I wish for an impactful next 50 years of work for the wellbeing and security of the Baltic Sea.





Karen Ellemann is a former Danish politician who currently serves as the Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers. She was previously a member of the Danish parliament (Folketing) where she represented Venstre (The Liberal Party) and held the positions of Minister of Fisheries, Equality and Nordic Cooperation, Minister of the Environment and Minister of the Interior and Social Affairs as well as Deputy Speaker of the parliament.

Karen Ellemann

Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers

Dear Ministers, Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

The ocean and the coastal areas of the world provide us with food, energy, jobs, and natural and cultural experiences. The ocean is also key to achieving several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. However, our ocean is under pressure from climate change, pollution, overconsumption, and the 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. The impacts of a warming climate add even more pressure and increase 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 involved in the work of HELCOM, on all your efforts for a healthy marine environment in the Baltic Sea over the last 50 years.

There is no doubt that HELCOM has played a crucial role on several fronts: reducing pollution, combating eutrophication, promoting ecosystem-based management, and providing data that underpins sound management.

HELCOM plays a key role in 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 recognize the important role that HELCOM

plays in providing and managing data. One notable example is the HELCOM Holistic Assessments. These assessments provide us with invaluable data. This data is essential for the implementation of both national and international policies and commitments, such as the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

The Nordic climate and environment ministers have long emphasized 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 related to protecting the ocean, ecological sustainability, climate

resilience, and reducing pollution, including nutrient input from land-based sources. 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 to provide the best new information that serves as 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 on how restoring ecosystems and deploying Marine Protected Areas can help in adapting to climate change.

We are also looking into how we can best reconcile ambitious targets for offshore energy with continued food production from the ocean, while making space for nature. The transition to renewable energy is urgent, but it must be fair to be sustainable.

Karen Ellemann__continued

That's why we are also exploring 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 drive 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 we can jointly contribute toward a well-functioning, resilient, and sustainable ocean.

My hope is that our efforts—through initiatives like the Ocean Decade—can also contribute to improved management, aligning with the work of regional sea conventions like HELCOM.

The Baltic Sea faces numerous interconnected challenges. It hosts many competing commercial activities at sea and is

also negatively impacted by activities on land. Issues facing the Baltic Sea—like eutrophication—are particularly challenging because they are urgent, multifaceted, and interdependent. This calls for a balanced and multi-sectoral approach.

I would like to highlight the important role HELCOM plays 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 facilitates the exchange of best practices and expertise.

As we look ahead to the next 50 years, it is clear that we face significant challenges. I take comfort knowing that we all share the vision of a restored and resilient Baltic Sea. What we have learned over the past 50 years is that progress can only be achieved in concert and partnership.





Leena Ylä-Mononen has been Executive Director of the European Environment Agency since 1 June 2023. Before joining the EEA, she was Director General at the Ministry of Environment of Finland, managing the Climate and Environmental Protection Department. She has previously worked in the European Chemicals Agency and the European Commission, on chemicals and pesticides policy files. Earlier in her career she worked in the Finnish Environment Institute.

Leena Ylä-Mononen

Executive Director of the European Environment Agency

Minister Bērziņa, Ministers, Executive Secretary, a Dear Members and Friends of HELCOM,

It is with great pleasure that I join you today to mark HELCOM's 50th anniversary. As a Finnish national, for me, the Baltic Sea is "our sea," Mare Nostrum. Now located in Denmark as Executive Director of the European Environment Agency, this sea is not only close to my heart but also part of my daily work.

The Baltic Sea continues to face increasing impacts from climate change and biodiversity degradation, catalyzed by eutrophication, pollution, land use, and resource extraction. In many ways, it is a very troubled ecosystem. But imagine what its state and future would be like without 50 years of cooperation and dedicated efforts under the Helsinki Convention.

HELCOM's work has significantly advanced the field of marine ecosystem protection,

and over the last five decades, the wealth of data, indicators, and assessments produced by HELCOM has set an example at regional, European, and global levels.

Among HELCOM's many contributions, I would like to highlight the importance of the HO-LAS reports, first published in 2010. These contain the core, pressure, state, and driver indicators that are so vital for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The regionalization of these indicators has been a significant contribution to the knowledge base of the Baltic marine environment.

HELCOM holds high-quality data on the Baltic Sea, with different working groups helping to gather information. One of the organization's great achievements has been its convening power – bringing together experts across diverse environmental fields, and enabling pioneering work, includ-

ing the mapping of the status of – and threats to – different species and habitats.

HELCOM is a driving force in preserving the Baltic Sea's delicate ecosystem and advancing overall environmental protection efforts.

The EEA is an independent agency of the European Union. Our role is to inform policymakers and the public about the state of Europe's environment, climate, and wider sustainability issues. In light of this, I would now like to say a few words about HELCOM and the EU.

The European Union and HELCOM have a longstanding partnership, with HELCOM playing an important role in facilitating the implementation of EU environmental and marine policies in the Baltic Sea. In fact, before their EU memberships, most HELCOM parties already had regulations in place due to their prior adoption of HELCOM recommendations.

HELCOM's strong standards have often served as inspiration for EU directives, particularly regarding issues such as urban wastewater treatment. In this way, HELCOM has played a key role in the implementation of critical directives.

HELCOM has also been instrumental in supporting the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The directive outlines the EU's approach to marine environmental policy, and HELCOM's contributions extend to its implementation. For example, it has provided critical inputs to the Directive's Common Implementation Strategy and has offered substantial assistance to Member States.

HELCOM's collaborative efforts among its contracting parties have helped tackle pressing environmental challenges in the Baltic, promoting sustainable fisheries, reducing marine litter, and mitigating nutrient pollution. These achievements closely align with the EU's environmental agenda, including the European Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for

Leena Ylä-Mononen_{continued}

2030, enhancing ecological resilience and supporting a greener, more sustainable future.

Additionally, HELCOM's ongoing focus on Marine Protected Area projects demonstrates a proactive approach to ecosystem restoration and resilience, strengthening the environmental goals of both HELCOM and the EU. These initiatives not only directly contribute to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 but also reinforce the implementation of EU nature legislation in the Baltic Sea region.

Last but not least, HELCOM's recommendations on shipping, maritime fuels, and port facilities have set a high standard, paving the way for the EU to adopt similar measures and support the transition to sustainability in the maritime sectors.

Our agency works across many different thematic areas covering climate, environment, and sustainability. What is clear from all our work is that the challenges we face are complex, interlinked, and systemic. Tack-

ling such challenges requires, above all, collaboration.

Collaboration across continents, countries, and regions, and collaboration across thematic fields of expertise and organizations. At the EEA, we highly value the excellent collaboration with HELCOM. By making use of HELCOM's data and assessment tools, such as those addressing biodiversity and eutrophication, the EEA has produced insightful reports on contaminants in Europe's seas and on marine protected areas, directly supporting EU Member States in implementing the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Moreover, our "Marine Messages" report used assessment tools originally developed by HELCOM in its second edition, and we will benefit from them again in the third edition, to be published in 2026.

To enhance the exchange of data and assessments, regular meetings are held between the EEA and the Regional Sea

Conventions in European seas — including HELCOM. Our shared objective is to streamline the exchange and management of marine data at regional and European levels and to distill reports for wider uptake across the EU, including through the EEA's WISE-Marine platform.

The ongoing collaboration between the EEA and HELCOM extends to preparations for the upcoming reporting cycle. We deeply appreciate HELCOM's invaluable assistance in this endeavor. Through our collaboration, we have been illustrating the synergies and complementarity of our respective mandates and deliverables.

To close, let me once again offer the EEA's congratulations on 50 years of excellent work by HELCOM and underline our agency's desire to continue the outstanding collaboration between our two organizations. Our close partnership — particularly on data and assessments — helps safeguard the Baltic Sea and its ecosystems for generations to come. Indeed, you have: "Proud past, promising future."

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to many more years of fruitful collaboration.





Alan Haynie has served as General Secretary of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) since 2022 and oversees the ICES Secretariat in Copenhagen. He has broad interdisciplinary experience with marine science and economics, fishery management and advice, stakeholder engagement, climate change research, policy analysis, and organizational excellence. Before ICES, Alan spent 18 years at NOAA Fisheries.

Alan Haynie

General Secretary of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

Good afternoon, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, friends. It is a great honour to join you today at this great time of celebration. Thank you very much for the opportunity to share a few thoughts on our current challenges and opportunities.

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea is a Copenhagen-based inter-governmental marine science organization, meeting societal needs for impartial evidence on the state and sustainable use of our seas and oceans. Since our creation in 1902, ICES has helped bring together scientists to address the challenges of the Baltic, the Atlantic, and beyond. We partner with HELCOM in a variety of activities.

More than 6000 scientists from our twenty member countries and many others are involved in our activities. Our system of scientific coopera-

tion means that we can draw on great marine scientists from around the world to help address the challenges of the Baltic. ICES has long provided advice on fishing opportunities including 19 annually in the Baltic. Fishing is no longer the only pressure on stock status considered and our assessments require information on a changing ecosystem. Our partnership with HELCOM is of growing importance.

Today is about dreams. We celebrate and reflect on the dreams of the past and we dream of how we can achieve greater success in the future.

In this spirit, I want to appeal to the everyday heroism of HELCOM and ICES to address the challenges of the Baltic. What I see is that we have the right people, tools, and institutions to solve our problems. Our challenge is putting all the pieces

together in an ongoing manner. How do we do this?

First, we need to fully appreciate the heroic nature of our common purpose. We don't usually think of managing data, doing science or being a bureaucrat as heroic roles, but they are. Together, the combination of data, science, and effective management is the basis for successfully addressing our challenges.

Over the past 10 years, HELCOM together with ICES have developed a system called the HELCOM Eutrophication Assessment Tool (HEAT). This system has served as a template for developing similar assessment products that are linked to hazardous substance databases also held in the ICES data centre. Actions like this help form the scientific foundation that we need.

There is great potential for HELCOM and ICES experts to work together to move us forward during the next 50 years to reach favourable status for the key commercial fish stocks. This success will maintain the culturally important Baltic fisheries and related activities that pro-

vide income and livelihoods for numerous coastal communities.

Our challenge — sustainably using and preserving the Baltic marine environment — is as important as any work in the world. In a broader sense, working across nations to find science-based management solutions for our world is THE central challenge of our time.

50 years ago, HELCOM was a bold idea and we again re-commit to its ambitions today. There is also great heroism in Cooperation and collective action. We are making progress, but there is more work ahead.

Across the Baltic and our nations, across disciplines and our personal histories, the collaboration between HELCOM, ICES and all of you enables us to break barriers to tackle the hardest problems of our age. Part of this challenge is supporting the heroes in all of us. Promoting gender equality and all forms of diversity is a central need of our community. We do this not only because it is right, but because it makes us stronger. This doesn't mean that all the change we want will happen overnight

Alan Haynie _continued

but at ICES, implementing our Gender Equality Plan is helping make ICES a more diverse and inclusive organization.

At the same time, our ICES Stakeholder Engagement Strategy is broadening the ICES community to bring the right people to the table to provide the knowledge needed to inform the complex trade-offs that we face.

Today both HELCOM and ICES are striving to support early career scientists. In ICES, our strategic initiative on the integration of early career scientists is thriving. We more senior scientists started the effort but the early career scientists have taken charge of all aspects of the initiative and it is revitalizing ICES.

Becoming more inclusive in all ways will make us better able to attract great minds to help meet our challenges, but these efforts need our ongoing support and commitment.

Another challenge that we face is the reality that we need broader and more effective en-

gagement across disciplines in both science and advice. The challenges that we face are fundamentally multi-disciplinary and involve both social and natural sciences. Fortunately, both ICES and HELCOM have interdisciplinarity in our organizational DNA.

Our joint ICES/HELCOM Working Group on Integrated Assessments of the Baltic Sea plays a pivotal role in delivering evidence for the Baltic Sea ecoregion Ecosystem Overview. Social science is entering ICES advice through many avenues.

Another area where we need to improve our collaboration is in connecting scientists with managers, both informally and formally. As we work to develop new approaches to interdisciplinary science and advice, we need to have repeated interactions between policy makers and scientists to help focus scientific work on the right questions. This will also help policy makers better understand the limitations and

uncertainty of science and enable scientists to better present their research in a useful and understandable manner.

If you are a policymaker, I encourage you today and when you are home to communicate with the scientists who you think are the most interesting people around. Vice versa if you are a scientist, ask questions and listen. This sounds straightforward, but doing this consistently is transformative.

Diligence and urgency are both called for. Built on a common vision — that our challenges require teamwork and collaboration — we must go forward with a mixture of flexibility and determination.

Being flexible requires us to be vulnerable as leaders. We are innovating a new path and we need to recognize that we will have to continue to revise how we work. Acknowledging our mistakes and making corrections is essential.

Our biggest danger is not that we will be too bold, it is that we will be too timid.

We have all been entrusted by our countries, our citizens,

and our children to address the challenges of the Baltic.

We are at a pivotal moment where the challenges we face make it clear that business as usual is not an option. Climate change, the biodiversity crisis, the new goals that we have of using the ocean to generate renewable energy, all provide us with a choice. We can use science well, but we need to support and build our scientific capacity now to coordinate this work effectively over the coming decades.

While I anticipate the next 50 years of HELCOM accomplishments, I have a strong sense of opportunity and urgency. Our time is now. Let us draw upon

one another with vision and humility, and leave a Baltic for our children that is better than the one we find today.

To the HELCOM Secretariat, community, and family, the ICES Secretariat, network, and family extend our heartfelt congratulations. Our biggest challenges and successes lie before us and we are excited to work as partners now and in the decades that come.



1974

22 March

Signing of the Helsinki Convention
Interim Commission established

1980

First
HELCOM meeting



1980

1980
First HELCOM Recommendations

1981
First HELCOM Scientific Assessment
of the State of the Baltic Sea

1983
HELCOM Manual on cooperation
in combating marine pollution

1987
First Periodic Assessment
of the Marine Environment
of the Baltic Sea Area (1980–1985)

1988
Ministerial Meeting,
Helsinki, Finland
Adopts the Declaration on the Protection of the Marine
Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, calling for a 50% reduction
of nutrients and hazardous substances by 1995

1990

1990
Meeting of heads of government
of the Baltic Sea States, Norway, the
Czech and Slovak Federal Republic
and the representative of the EU
Commission, Ronneby, Sweden

Adopts Baltic Sea Declaration (Ronneby Declaration),
establishing the Joint Comprehensive Programme (JCP)
for ecological restoration

1993
Ministerial Meeting,
Gdańsk, Poland

Adopts a Declaration on Resource Mobilization for the Baltic
Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme
(Gdańsk Declaration)

1993
Workshop on implementing the
Helsinki Convention
in post-Soviet states, Riga, Latvia

1994
Ministerial Meeting,
Helsinki, Finland

Recommends, inter alia, the establishment of marine
Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs or HELCOM MPAs)

1998
Ministerial Meeting,
Helsinki, Finland

Adopts Communiqué

HELCOM
THROUGH HISTORY



1992

Diplomatic Conference on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area Helsinki, Finland

Signing of the revised Helsinki Convention
and adoption of the Baltic Sea
Environmental Declaration (9 April)

2024

22 March

HELCOM 50th Anniversary


2000

2000
Revised Helsinki Convention
enters into force (17 January)

2000
10-year review of the
Joint Comprehensive Programme

2001
Ministerial Meeting,
Copenhagen, Denmark

Adopts Copenhagen Declaration, focusing on the
safety of navigation and emergency response
capacity in the Baltic Sea area

2003
OSPAR/HELCOM Ministerial Meeting,
Bremen, Germany

Adopts the Bremen Declaration,
emphasizing the ecosystem approach

2010

2010
Ministerial Meeting,
Moscow, Russia

2010
Cooperation between
HELCOM and VASAB initiated

Joint HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial Planning
Working Group (HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG) launched

2010
The Baltic Sea becomes
the first region to reach 10%
marine spatial protection

2013
Ministerial Meeting,
Copenhagen, Denmark

Adopts Copenhagen Declaration on reaching
GES in the Baltic Sea

2020

2013
The Baltic becomes the first sea
to receive status as a Special Area
for Sewage under IMO

2017
Second HELCOM Holistic Assessment
on the Ecosystem Health of the
Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) published

2018
Ministerial Meeting,
Brussels, Belgium

Adopts Brussels Declaration

2019
The Baltic Sea becomes a Nitrogen
Oxide Emission Control Area
(NECA) under IMO

2021
Regional Action Plan
on Underwater Noise

2023
Third HELCOM Holistic Assessment
(HOLAS 3) published

2024
Ministerial Meeting,
Riga, Latvia

Adopts Riga Declaration and Geopolitical Statement

25 April 2024
HELCOM celebrates its 50th Anniversary
in Riga, Latvia



Left to right: Peter Ehlers, Monika Stankiewicz,
Lilian Busse and Andris Andrusaitis.

R

ecalling the proud past of HELCOM

A panel discussion

This segment in the programme was devoted to the most remarkable milestones and achievements of HELCOM in its 50 years. Discussion was moderated by Andris Andrusaitis, with contributions from Peter Ehlers, Monika Stankiewicz, Lilian Busse (on stage) as well as Juha-Markku Leppänen and Inese Vaidere (by video).

The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andris Andrusaitis

Chair of the Baltic Earth Science Advisory Board, Friend of HELCOM

Peter Ehlers

HELCOM Chair 1984-1986 and 2000-2002, Chair of the Maritime Committee 1987-1997, Head of the German delegation 1983 - 1987, member of the German delegation 1988 – 2008, Chair of the HELCOM Youth Forum

Monika Stankiewicz

Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and former Polish delegate in HELCOM cooperation, HELCOM Professional Secretary 2006-2012 and HELCOM Executive Secretary 2012-2019

Lilian Busse

Vice-President of the German Federal Environment Agency (UBA) and HELCOM Chair 2020-2022

Video message:

Juha-Markku Leppänen

HELCOM Professional Secretary 2001-2007

Inese Vaidere

Member of the European Parliament and HELCOM Chair 2002-2004

1970s

Establishing HELCOM

1974

Helsinki Convention signed, Interim Commission established

Andris Andrusaitis

“The first decade we called "Establishing HELCOM." During this time, there was the Stockholm Conference in 1972, and I believe there was some activity going on with wise and visionary men and women doing things in the direction of establishing something like a convention and commission already before. We know how prudently and slowly these big diplomatic things happen, but the Convention was signed in 1974, and an Interim Commission was established in the same year.

What is remarkable, at least to me as a scientist, is that there was already a lot of scientific communication and collaboration among the marine researchers of the Baltic Sea even

before HELCOM. Therefore, it was possible to start the periodic assessments and launch the first version of the Baltic Sea monitoring programme very shortly after establishing the interim commission.

How many people in this room remember Terttu Melvasalo? Terttu was one of the remarkable people I met in my youth when I was a PhD student, this was still during Soviet times. Terttu was one of those Professional Secretaries travelling frequently to the eastern part of the Baltic Sea, investigating and working to establish and facilitate the work of the Commission.

Returning to the 70s, I would like to give the floor to you, Peter. You were there very early on.



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1978

Start of periodic assessments

Peter Ehlers

“In the 70s, I was no longer a student but had started my professional life, working in the maritime department of the Federal Ministry of Transport, which at that time was responsible for marine environment protection since no environment ministry existed. Though I was not personally involved in HELCOM matters, I was very much interested in them because I was born by the Baltic Sea, grew up there, and still live in Hamburg. For those who don't know, Hamburg is closer to the Baltic Sea than the North Sea.

As already mentioned, that was a time of new beginnings for environmental policy. The Stockholm Conference took place, the Global MARPOL

Convention was adopted, as were the London Convention on dumping and several regional conventions like the Paris, Oslo, and Barcelona Conventions, and of course, the Helsinki Convention.

The Helsinki Convention was unique and innovative compared to the others, as it included regulations for all different sources of pollution. However, these regulations were general and needed further specification, which could only be achieved by continuous cooperation among the Contracting Parties. The Convention also established a Commission with a Secretariat as an international body, highlighting its importance, especially during the Cold War. Protecting the

1979

Launch of the Baltic Monitoring Programme (BMP)



Baltic Sea was one of the rare fields where the East and West, including Sweden and Finland as neutral states, were willing to cooperate.

Cooperation didn't wait until the Convention entered into force in 1980 but started immediately in 1974 with the Interim Commission. The Interim Commission developed organizational decisions, es-

established contacts with other international organizations, especially with ICES, and set up a scientific group. This group produced the first monitoring programme and assessment, concluding their work in 1981 with the very first status report of a marine area worldwide.

The Interim Commission also took technical decisions on reducing pollution from shipping, building on the work of IMO and others. By the time HELCOM officially began in 1980, they weren't starting from scratch. That's what I remember from the 70s, though I wasn't directly involved.

1980s

Learning to walk

1980

Helsinki Convention enters into force (3 May);
HELCOM Secretariat established, First HELCOM meeting,
First HELCOM Recommendations adopted

1981

First HELCOM Scientific Assessment
of the State of the Baltic Sea

Andris Andrusaitis

“ This brings us to the next decade, the eighties: learning to walk. During the 1980s, HELCOM was fully active. The Convention entered into force in 1980, and observer rights were granted to several important organizations, including the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, IMO (then called the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization), the World Health Organization, and later ICES and the OSPAR Commission. This signalled HELCOM's commitment to a holistic approach from the start and showed the trust and reputation the new organization had built.

Again, turning to you, Peter, what are your memories of the 1980s?



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Peter Ehlers

“ Well, in the 80s, I became more and more involved in HELCOM. I became Head of Delegation, then Chairman of the Commission, and later Chairman of the Maritime Committee. This was the decade when we started and learned how to work. HELCOM established three committees: the Scientific Technological Committee, the Maritime Committee, and the Expert Group on Co-operation in Combating Matters, later renamed the Combating Committee¹.

More important than just setting up structures, though, was creating an atmosphere of trust, reliability, and mutual understanding. This included a willingness not to overload each other, but to be considerate of

what could be expected from one another. This was not an easy task during the Cold War, and it could only be achieved by getting to know each other better and by establishing strong personal connections.

It helped that we didn't just have formal meeting sessions. We also had many social events, like receptions at embassies and, especially, evening gatherings at the Secretariat, which at that time was very small. This allowed people to bond more quickly.

I remember many evenings that ended with us singing together, including German folk songs. However, I sometimes found it amusing that colleagues from other countries had a better command of the

1983

HELCOM Manual on cooperation in combating marine pollution

1987

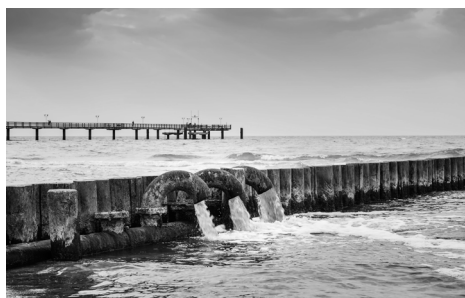
First Periodic Assessment of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area

1987

Launch of Pollution Load Compilations (PLC)

1988

Ministerial Meeting Helsinki: Agreement to reduce 50% of nutrient discharges by 1995



German lyrics than I did—but I learned from that!

HELCOM then began taking decisions on reduction measures. While these were only recommendations, much criticized by environmental organizations, more important was the political willingness to implement them. During my chairmanship, we encouraged member states to regularly re-

port on their implementation efforts, which provided a basis for pointing out any gaps or insufficiencies.

In 1984, HELCOM adopted a medium-term action plan, later expanded to a long-term plan. However, I noticed that the three committees were not coordinating well, so I initiated regular "CASH meetings" between the Chairs and the Secretariat. These helped coordinate the work, set objectives, and were held in different member states to raise awareness. While not all states were happy with this arrangement, it allowed for more open discussions and became a valuable brain trust.

By the end of the 80s, over 100 recommendations had

been adopted, many of which addressed specific pollutants and sectors. When the North Sea States decided in 1987 on a 50% reduction of harmful pollutants, HELCOM aspired to a similar decision in 1988. However, this was difficult to achieve, with some member states sceptical about whether such a target could be reached. I remember the Polish Minister, who remained sceptical until the very end. Even a remark from his Soviet colleague—"Forget about it, you won't be in office any more when this has to be implemented"—didn't manage to convince him.

In the very end, all ministers signed a Baltic Sea Declaration, aiming for substantial reductions in harmful pollutants by

1995. Although the wording was a bit soft, nonetheless it was a very challenging target and highlighted the willingness to take bold steps. That's why I regretted that, in the following years, this target didn't always receive sufficient consideration. In the end, it was replaced by more concrete but less ambitious goals. But that, too, is part of life, and we have to accept it.

By the late 80s, it became clear that the Iron Curtain was coming down, and this change was confirmed at the Prime Ministers' Conference on Baltic Sea Protection in Ronneby, Sweden, in September 1990. It marked the end of old times and the beginning of new ones, but that leads into the next decade.

1990s

The new era

1990

Meeting of the heads of government of the Baltic Sea states, Norway, The Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the representative of the EU Commission in Rønneby: The Baltic Sea Declaration, establishing of the Joint Comprehensive Programme (JCP) for ecological restorations

1990

Start of BALEX exercises for pollution incident response

1992

Diplomatic Conference on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, Helsinki Finland: Signing of the revised Helsinki Convention and adoption of the Baltic Sea Environmental Declaration (9 April)

Andris Andrusaitis

“This brings us to the nineties, a new era. In the early 90s, troop carriers were still visible in the streets of Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius, and other cities. In Riga, people were building barricades to protect their newly formed governments. Suddenly, there were several new independent states on the Baltic Sea.

HELCOM was quick to capitalize on this new situation. Already in 1990, there was a ministerial meeting in Rønneby with the Baltic Sea Declaration, which established the Joint Comprehensive Programme—a targeted approach to address pollution hotspots in the drainage basin of the Baltic Sea. The revised Helsinki Convention was adopted, and HELCOM was

able to assess the previously closed coasts of these new independent states. By 1993, the First Assessment of Coastal Waters was issued. The nineties also saw the establishment of the first Marine Protected Areas in the Baltic Sea, something previously unimaginable.

At that time, the Helsinki Secretariat staff attended numerous meetings, bringing their own printing paper and those large Olivetti computers with them. During one of those working group meetings focused on the programme's revision, I met a young Finnish marine scientist, Juha-Markku Leppänen, with whom I later collaborated. We argued a lot, but I always admired his determination, smartness, and leadership.



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1993

The First Assessment of the State of the Coastal Waters of the Baltic Sea

1993

HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Gdańsk: Declaration on Resource Mobilization for the Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (Gdańsk Declaration)

1993

Workshop on implementing the Helsinki Convention in post-Soviet states, Riga, Latvia

1994

Ministerial Meeting in Helsinki: The establishment of First HELCOM Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) (former BSPAs)

Juha-Markku Leppänen

Dear esteemed participants of the HELCOM anniversary celebration meeting,

It is with great honour and joy that I extend my heartfelt congratulations to HELCOM on reaching its remarkable milestone of 50 years of activities.

As a member of the HELCOM "Senile Club," I have been invited to reflect on the early days of HELCOM's work. In fact, I have followed HELCOM since its inception and have had the honour to work together with two extraordinary "Mama Baltica". Already during the interim commission time I had the pleasure of having coffee table discussions with Ritva Kostakow. Later, Terttu Melvasalo presented the HELCOM world of monitoring and assessment to me.

Reflecting on my journey with HELCOM, I have, of course, forgotten most of the serious and funny details of the work, but everyone's enthusiasm, the joyful working atmosphere, and especially colleagues who turned into friends remain etched in my memory.

In the proud past, there were some events which might be impossible to organize in today's reality. The intercalibration exercises at sea—research vessels big and small from all the coastal states of the Baltic Sea gathered at the same spot, took water and bottom samples, and analyzed them on board. The sampling, analysis, and comparison of the results were, of course, highly interesting, but the memorable part was the



great parties organized in the ports. Later, the work in EC-MON and MONAS, and at the Secretariat was more serious, but fun and cheer were not missing.

Ladies and gentlemen, there were some memorable statements made by the Contracting Parties that I would like to mention:

"It is not acceptable that HELCOM work includes projects operating with external funding."

"It is meaningless to develop indicators to assess the state of the Baltic Sea."

"It is impossible to define environmental target values, and our authorities will never, ever accept that approach."

"It will never be possible to assess the state of the Baltic Sea as a whole, not even by subregion."

Well, James Bond was right: better never say never. The Baltic Sea Action Plan and the latest HELCOM assessments are perfect proof of that.

During HELCOM's 40th anniversary celebration, I said that I was dreaming of seeing the Baltic Sea again as it was in

the 1950s, when I was a child—clear water and an ecosystem functioning in balance. So, Contracting Parties, hurry up, since I'm already 74!

Anyway, ladies and gentlemen, I wish HELCOM a great and excellent future in its challenges to reach good environmental status for the Baltic Sea.



2000s

Embracing the ecosystem approach

2000

Revised Helsinki Convention of
1992 enters into force

2001

Ministerial Meeting in Copenhagen:
Copenhagen Declaration on safety of
navigation and emergency response capacity
in the Baltic Sea area

Andris Andrusaitis

“Well, we are now in the 2000s, embracing the ecosystem approach. This is the title we gave to this decade because, indeed, during these years, the Helsinki Convention gained full power as a new convention. A historic ministerial meeting—a joint meeting of the Helsinki Commission and the OSPAR Commission—was largely devoted to embracing and accepting the ecosystem approach as a guiding principle.

Perhaps you can disagree with me, but for me, at least as a scientist, it was very important. I remember many people quoting documents surrounding the ministerial meeting in Bremen in 2003. I must say, we are still grappling a little with the practical meaning

of the ecosystem approach. I've been asked many times, "Please, could you explain what it means to have an ecosystem approach to fisheries, or to maritime spatial planning, or to managing protected marine areas, or organizing sustainable harvesting of ocean energy, and so on?" This is still somewhat of a "hot potato," but I believe we are on the right track.

Those years culminated with the adoption of the Baltic Sea Action Plan in 2007, and I vividly remember that November in Kraków, Poland, where the meeting took place. Many people were disappointed because, during the discussions, the text lost some of its boldness. But that's how it went.



Following on from Juha-Markku's list of the "never-ers," I remember someone from the European Commission standing up at the meeting and saying, "Don't touch fish. This is not your business." That was the attitude at the time.

However, one remarkable person who took charge during the 2000s was my fellow countryperson, now a member of the European Parliament, Professor Inese Vaidere.



2003

OSPAR/HELCOM
Ministerial Meeting in Bremen

2006

Baltic Sea becomes SECA (Special Area for Sulphur) and Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) area under IMO

2007

Introduction of the HELCOM Nutrient input reduction scheme

2007

HELCOM's Ministerial Meeting in Krakow: The Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP)

Inese Vaidere



Dear friends, dear ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for the opportunity to address you remotely. I wish I could have been among you in Riga because the time from 2002 to 2004, when I was Chair of HELCOM, was very memorable and fruitful, especially working together with Executive Secretaries Ostojki and Brusendorff as well as many other excellent people.

It's a great honour for me and for Latvia that this celebration takes place in Riga. Back in 2002 to 2004, as Latvia and the Baltic States were joining the European Union and NATO, taking up the Chairmanship was both a challenge in the political context of Europe and a great opportunity

for Latvia to make a meaningful contribution to addressing the environmental challenges of the Baltic Sea region.

The early 2000s was a remarkable time, not only during the Latvian Chairmanship. I would like to highlight just a few of the key milestones. I was very happy to chair the first joint Ministerial Meeting in Bremen in 2003. It was significant because all parties acknowledged the need for an ecosystem-based approach to the management and sustainable development of the marine environment, which is now one of the main overarching principles.

The following year, in 2004, we hosted the 30th Anniversary Conference of HELCOM in



Riga, just a few months before the historic EU enlargement. It changed the legal landscape of the Baltic Sea, as it then became an internal EU sea, excluding the waters under Russian jurisdiction.

I remember back then having an optimistic outlook

about involving Russia in the protection of the Baltic Sea. There was very good collaboration with the staff in the technical meetings. However, I experienced that at the ministerial level, they opposed many of the commonly agreed ideas. Russia very quickly proved it does not care for the environment and common Western values, but only for using the Baltic Sea to threaten and provoke its neighbours.

Lastly, perhaps one of the most important achievements of this decade was the adoption of the first Baltic Sea Action Plan, and eventually in 2009, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which was the first of the macro-regional strategies in Europe. Overall,

during the decade, as Latvia and other Baltic Sea countries joined the EU, HELCOM became the platform of the region. Indeed, there lies its importance because environmental protection requires a common approach.

Going forward, we should continue to address the issue of the large amounts of chemical weapons dumped into the Baltic Sea after the Second World War. I started working on it already in HELCOM and continue doing so now in the European Parliament.

I wish you a very fruitful event. Thank you very much.

2010s

Seeking the wholeness

2010

First HELCOM
Holistic Assessment
(HOLAS) published

2010

Cooperation between HELCOM
and VASAB initiated, Joint
HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial
Planning Working Group launched

2010

Baltic Sea becomes the first
region to reach 10% marine
spatial protection target

2013

Ministerial Meeting in
Copenhagen: Copenhagen
Declaration on reaching
GES in the Baltic Sea

Andris Andrusaitis

“This brings us to the 2010s, which we refer to as the “Decade of Seeking Wholeness.” This designation is largely due to the First Holistic Assessment issued during this period, which was a tremendous achievement. I believe this was something that had never happened before on a global scale. Based on indicators and the idea that everything is linked to everything, we were able to assess the entire ecosystem.

Unfortunately, as it was in 2010 and continues to be now, there are still quite a few red spots on those maps in our holistic assessments. Nevertheless, this was the decade of wholeness—embracing wholeness.

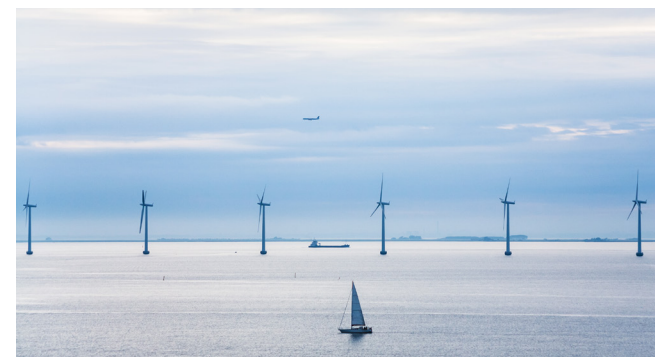
I would also like to emphasize this point regarding the estab-

lishment of the Joint Working Group on Maritime Spatial Planning between the Helsinki Commission and VASAB. I remember that around that time, the office of VASAB, an intergovernmental organization focused on visions and strategies around the Baltic Sea, was primarily working on regional development and spatial planning. VASAB was developing its approach to maritime spatial planning, and HELCOM was working independently on this as well.

This was all due to the realization that the space in the Baltic Sea was becoming limited. We were indeed facing a deficiency of space for all the activities we wanted to undertake in the region. It involved quite a bit of commuting be-

tween Riga, where the VASAB office was located at the time, and Helsinki until this group was established. These are my personal memories, and when I eventually write my memoirs, I will certainly recall this.

The Baltic Sea became the first region in the world to protect 10% of its area, designated as a special sustainable use area under the International Maritime Organization. The Second Holistic Assessment occurred during those years, and the Executive Secretary—previously the Professional Secretary—of the Helsinki Commission was Monika Stankiewicz.



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2013

First HELCOM Red List of endangered Baltic Sea species published

2013

The Baltic Sea becomes the first sea to receive status as a Special Area for Sewage under IMO

2015

The Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter adopted

2017

Second HELCOM Holistic Assessment on the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) published

2018

Ministerial Meeting in Brussels: Brussels Declaration

2019

The Baltic Sea becomes Nitrogen Oxides Emission Control Area (NECA) under IMO

Monika Stankiewicz

“When traveling to Riga, I realized how greatly and positively my work with HELCOM has impacted me, both professionally and personally. I believe HELCOM has a glorious past and will have a thriving future.

As you, Andris, mentioned, there are many milestones that fit under the theme of wholeness, so to speak. Since this is a somewhat informal part of our celebrations, I am tempted to offer you my completely subjective reflections on HELCOM's work over the past decade. I have three points to share, which are not necessarily related to one another except for the fact that there were truly remarkable women at the centre of all these developments.

Firstly, significant work was undertaken during this decade to further develop the core indicators used in the holistic assessments. These environmental indicators are not easy material for any intergovernmental negotiations, as they require a great deal of scientific consolidation. This is especially true for environmental indicators with threshold values, which are often considered impossible to agree upon globally. Therefore, it is remarkable that the Contracting Parties to HELCOM were able to agree on a substantial set of core indicators. It must have been 2016 or 2017 when this agreement was reached, particularly in relation to the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The decision carried



2010s

Seeking the wholeness

2010

First HELCOM
Holistic Assessment
(HOLAS) published

2010

Cooperation between HELCOM
and VASAB initiated, Joint
HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial
Planning Working Group launched

2010

Baltic Sea becomes the first
region to reach 10% marine
spatial protection target

2013

Ministerial Meeting in
Copenhagen: Copenhagen
Declaration on reaching
GES in the Baltic Sea

significant weight, with 26 indicators derived from HOLAS II.

I still remember the meeting of Heads of Delegation at which this agreement was made. It was chaired by Marianne Wenning from the European Commission, who made us in the Secretariat—at least me—feel a bit taller and part of a larger world. It was a tough negotiation, but a very successful one, where the best available science led to the best possible outcomes. Thanks to each and every Head of Delegation, HELCOM operated at its full strength.

It's great to see that this work has continued, with now over 50 indicators—simply amazing. I would also like to connect this to the Minamata Convention

work, to which I am now dedicating my professional career; all the data related to mercury could be directly relevant and useful in the ongoing process of assessing the effectiveness of the Minamata Convention.

Secondly, I was thrilled to see the Thematic Assessment on Economic and Social Analysis in HELCOM's HOLAS III. Did you know that the first-ever HELCOM social environmental economist was employed in the Secretariat during the previous decade? This brilliant expert, Heini Ahtiainen, was indeed a long-overdue addition. It was refreshing and inspiring to see HELCOM expand its area of expertise and engage in interdisciplinary work as part of HOLAS II. We were fortunate to have access to some

major outcomes from the BONUS research programme.

Thirdly, the decade was marked by significant achievements in reducing nutrient inputs from shipping. In 2011, the Baltic Sea became a special area for sewage from passenger ships under the IMO MARPOL Convention. Many individuals were involved in making this happen, particularly under the remarkable leadership of HELCOM's Maritime Working Group chair, Lolan Eriksson from Finland. Never before had the shipping industry—especially the cruise shipping industry—been so involved in HELCOM's work.

Then, in 2016, the Baltic Sea was designated by the IMO as a NOx Emission Control Area under the MARPOL Convention,

again under the leadership of another amazing woman, Anna Petersson from Sweden. The processes leading to the NECA and the designation as a special area exemplify what I would call good governance and exemplary cooperation on a national level between environmental and maritime authorities among HELCOM Contracting Parties, as well as between two international organizations.

Dear colleagues in the Secretariat, I cannot conclude without expressing how privileged I was to work with you, given your dedication and talent in one workplace. I mentioned to some of you that I have a little regret from my time here; I feel I could have done more for your well-being

in balancing work and personal lives. I would like to close my remarks by calling on the Contracting Parties to continue this important work and, of course, on all observers to stay engaged. I wish you the best.

I would also like to mention just a few great women; there were many more. You may remember Anne Christine Brusen-dorff, the first female Executive Secretary of the Convention, as well as many women chairs and heads of delegation across different groups.

However, there were also great men who made significant contributions to HELCOM's work in the past decade. So please do invite me to celebrate HELCOM's 60th birthday, and I will bring a sequel.

2013

First HELCOM Red List of endangered Baltic Sea species published

2013

First HELCOM Red List of endangered Baltic Sea species published

2015

The Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter adopted

2017

Second HELCOM Holistic Assessment on the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) published

2018

Ministerial Meeting in Brussels: Brussels Declaration

2019

The Baltic Sea becomes Nitrogen Oxides Emission Control Area (NECA) under IMO

Andris Andrusaitis

Do you remember ten years ago when the Helsinki Commission was celebrating its 40th anniversary? What was the slogan?

Monika Stankiewicz

Thank you for prompting this! I'm as old as the organization so the obvious choice was: "Life Gets Better After 40."



2020s

Resilience

2021

Ministerial Meeting in Lübeck:
Updated Baltic Sea Action Plan (2021 BSAP)
and accompanying documents adopted

2021

Regional Action Plan
on Underwater Noise

Andris Andrusaitis

“Now, as we celebrate our 50th, life continues to get better and better. We refer to the present decade as the “2020s” and call it the decade of resilience. This is because we have experienced events—what some might call “black swan” events—that were once unimaginable. However, as we gather here, we all believe that the Helsinki Commission is going strong and moving toward the future. Lilian, you have been the HELCOM Chair during this current decade. What are your reflections and thoughts on these times?”



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Lilian Busse

“Hello, HELCOM family. I truly feel like we are a family. I joined HELCOM in early March 2020, and I remember it well because my first day coincided with my birthday on March 2. I met so many people during those initial side conversations and was genuinely excited to begin my Chairmanship of the German HELCOM delegation in July 2020.

With my background in marine biology, I had heard many great things about HELCOM and was eager to start. At that March meeting, I saw a sign that read, “Milkshakes Yes, Handshakes No.” It seems HELCOM already anticipated that something was coming. As you all know, by mid-March 2020, the world shut down.

Consequently, the entire German Chairmanship took place online. I collaborated with two Co-Chairs: one from the Ministry of Environment in Schleswig-Holstein, Mr. Oelerich, and another from the Ministry of Environment in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Mr. Röpke. It was crucial for us to work together, especially since Germany has 16 federal states, and those two border the Baltic Sea. We needed to coordinate closely with them to ensure they implemented the measures we discussed and adopted in HELCOM.

The transition to online meetings was swift and effective. We quickly adapted our format for meetings, which HELCOM members know can

2023

Third HELCOM Holistic Assessment (HOLAS 3) published



2024

Ministerial Meeting in Riga: Riga Declaration and Geopolitical Statement

2024

HELCOM celebrates its 50th anniversary in Riga, Latvia



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be numerous in a week or a month. It was a relief that we could switch to virtual meetings without losing momentum. One of our significant projects during those two years was updating the Baltic Sea Action Plan, which we successfully adopted at a Ministerial Meeting in the fall of 2021.

We were fortunate to have a brief window to meet in person for our Ministerial Meeting in Lübeck that fall. Many of the professionals from the Secretariat and other stakeholders I met in person for the first time after a year and a half of negotiating the Baltic Sea Action Plan in countless meetings. We adopted several important documents during this time, including the Regional Action Plan for

Underwater Noise, the Climate Change Fact Sheet, and a new HELCOM Science Agenda.

As we started to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, we prepared for HOLAS 3 and continued discussions on munitions in the Baltic Sea. We also explored topics like blue carbon. Recognizing that many HELCOM members have families, we aimed to reduce travel time, costs, and CO₂ emissions. As a result, we decided that about two-thirds of our meetings would be held online, with a few in-person gatherings each year.

Everything was going relatively smoothly until February 2022 when Russia began its war against Ukraine, creating a new geopolitical crisis. This necessitated further discussions

about how we could proceed with our agenda in light of this changing landscape. I believe HELCOM managed this situation remarkably well, finding temporary solutions to adapt to the new geopolitical reality. We were able to continue preparing for HOLAS 3 and implement the newly updated Baltic Sea Action Plan.

In June 2022, I attended the UN conference in Lisbon, Portugal, where we showcased some of the good work we had accomplished in HELCOM over the previous two years. I then handed over the Chairmanship to Latvia, and I heard from this morning's discussions that you had a very successful Ministerial Meeting here in Riga, where you adopted your

2020s

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Lilian Busse__{continued}

Ministerial Declaration. Congratulations on that!

I want to reflect on a few reasons why HELCOM has been able to navigate these multiple crises over the past two years and emerge successfully. First, we have an excellent Secretariat with outstanding Professional Secretaries and a supportive Executive Secretary. They have provided immense support to the entire HELCOM community. I can personally attest to the exceptional preparation I received for each meeting, thanks to their efforts. This professionalism has been key to our ability to move forward.

Moreover, all the Contracting Parties, though at times tough negotiators, share the common vision of a healthy

Baltic Sea environment, which unifies us. This shared vision has been essential for advancing our work through these crises. Additionally, I want to acknowledge the outstanding and dedicated experts, many of whom are present in this room, who work in various Expert and Working Groups to advance the scientific foundation for HELCOM.

We must also recognize the contributions of non-profits, observers, and stakeholders involved with HELCOM. Their engagement over the last two years has been invaluable and is one of the critical ingredients for HELCOM's strength. Furthermore, many individuals have supported HELCOM since its inception in 1974, a

remarkable commitment over such a long period. I was thinking about what I was doing in 1974—I started elementary school! It is impressive to see so many people continue to support HELCOM after all these years, which is a testament to our success.

Looking ahead, we will face numerous challenges in the coming decade and beyond. We already heard about the biodiversity crisis, the climate crisis, and ongoing pollution issues. Additionally, we need to implement the Baltic Sea Action Plan and the Sustain-

able Development Goals by 2030. However, I believe HELCOM is well-equipped to tackle these challenges. We have the necessary tools and dedicated people to succeed. With that, you can look back at the proud past and look forward to a promising future.



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Andris Andrusaitis

Indeed, we are looking forward, unafraid of the future. However, we must also engage with the next generation—those to whom we will leave the outcomes of our actions, for better or worse.

Peter, during our preparations for this anniversary event, you shared some fascinating memories about the youth and the importance of their involvement. You also discussed previous attempts to establish a youth wing of the HELCOM. Could you share those insights with us?



Peter Ehlers

I firmly believe that making further progress in protecting the Baltic Sea depends significantly on engaging the younger generation, the leaders of tomorrow. Back in 2004, HELCOM decided to regularly organize a HELCOM Youth Forum. This initiative came about when I attended a meeting alongside an international group of PhD students from Hamburg. The day before that meeting, we organized a seminar with students from Helsinki, where they developed proposals for the protection of the Baltic Sea. One of these proposals was to establish a Youth Forum that

would alternate between different member states.

Germany was prepared to host the first meeting, and when no other country volunteered, we also organized a second meeting. Over the years, we even managed to hold a third meeting. However, no other Contracting Party followed our example, and eventually, the initiative faded away. I'm pleased to hear that now, there's a new impetus for youth involvement, albeit in a slightly different form. I encourage you to do everything you can to get the younger generation more engaged in these issues.



Proud past,
promising future

HELSINKI CONVENTION
1974 - 2024



Vides aizsardzības un
reģionālās attīstības
ministrija



Left to right: Silva Laure, Lisa Klemens, Stanisław Kos,
Josefin Jonsson Gehrke, Regan McEnroe and Aurēlija A.

N

ext generation: "Are we fit for the future?"

Panel discussion

The discussion focused on selected Baltic Sea environment challenges and ways of finding a balance between the value of the environment and the negative impact we cause. Will we manage to make the ecosystem approach to management and the concept of ecosystem services work in real life?

The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Facilitator:

Silva Laure

Vice-Chair of the Baltic Sea Region Committee of Youth Representatives

Panellists:

Aurēlija Armoskaite

Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology

Mika Josefin Jonsson Gehrke

WWF Sweden Youth

Lisa Klemens

German Oceanographic Museum

Stanisław Kostulski

Baltic Sea Region Youth Forum

Regan McEnroe

Nature & Youth Sweden

Silva Laure

“It is truly an honour to facilitate this conversation today. Now, I have a bit of an unorthodox suggestion: could you all take a moment to look to your left, and then to your right, and just appreciate what a distinguished gathering we have here today? With these sharp suits and crisply ironed blazers, we certainly look the part for this celebration!

But let's not allow the formality to dampen our spirits as we embark on exploring the promising future ahead. In the previous discussion, we delved into the vibrant history of the Helsinki Convention, spanning five decades. While we commemorate the past, we are also symbolically opening a new chapter for what lies ahead.

When I was invited to facilitate this discussion, I chuckled a bit at the whirlwind of topics we have to cover in such a short time. What does it mean to be "fit" for the future? Are we talking about cardio exercises for those working in marine conservation? Or are we discussing something else entirely? And whose future

are we talking about? Is it the future of the sea, HELCOM, or perhaps even the ringed seals?

There are endless possibilities, but I suggest we simplify things. Let's think of HELCOM as a person celebrating their 50th birthday. Today, we celebrate everything about them—their experiences, habits, both delightful and, perhaps at times, a little annoying. And just like any gathering, we have a diverse crowd here today, from family to friends and everyone in between.

For this panel discussion, we've invited the next generation—the inheritors of today's successes and challenges concerning the Baltic Sea. It's clear that the policies and ac-

tions we implement today will shape how future generations interact with our sea.

So, what's on the minds of young scientists and activists in the Baltic Sea region? What are the pressing issues of today, and what is their outlook on the future? To delve into these discussions, we have five speakers from the new generation, each with a unique background but all deeply invested in the current happenings around the Baltic Sea.

To start, I'd like each of you to highlight what you deem the most pressing issues regarding the marine environment of the Baltic Sea, through the lens of your specialties and activism.



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Lisa Clemens

It's really complicated to identify just one issue that is the most important to address right now because the Baltic Sea is a large ecosystem where everything is interconnected. It's difficult to pick one because there are multiple factors that require our attention. So, rather than picking just one, I think we need a multi-pronged approach to everything.



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Stanisław Kostulski

I completely agree. As an activist, I believe we should take a holistic approach to these problems. It's not just about focusing on the environment or the green transformation of industries. We should also include factors like navigating the social changes that correspond with economic and green transformation. The economy, environment, and social issues are all interconnected, and we

need to approach them as a whole, and try to navigate towards the same harbour that is green, sustainable, and fair.

Mika Josefín Jonsson Gehrke

I agree. I think we need to focus on the sources of what's damaging our Baltic Sea, like mining sludge and other pollutants that flow into the sea. I may not have a background in marine biology—I am studying political science—but I care

deeply about how issues like mining and waste disposal impact our waters.

Regan McEnroe

Honestly, I have to disagree. I believe that those of us who study political science are among the best equipped to deal with what Silva described as a whirlwind of topics in a short amount of time. This isn't just true for a panel discussion, but especially rele-

vant as we prepare for a future marked by 2030, just six years from now. That being said, from my perspective, there are two massive problems we need to address head-on: the issue of eutrophication—both the long-term impacts of 100 years of eutrophication in the Baltic, which we are continuing to worsen—and the issue of overfishing. Without addressing these incredibly vital

issues, which play a central role in so many trophic systems within the Baltic Sea, we can never hope to restore any aspect of it.

Aurēlija Armoskaite

I completely agree. That's the funny thing about being at the end of the row, isn't it? And I also completely agree that, as political and social scientists, we might not know everything



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about the sea. For example, I work at the Institute of Aquatic Ecology, and people often assume I'm a biologist. But no, I'm a social scientist. I study planning, and I think we, as people with a social sciences background—sociologists, geographers—also have valuable knowledge about the sea. This interdisciplinary knowledge is what's going to help us overcome these challenges. We need to pull all of this knowledge together; it's not just about biology.

I also want to add to Lisa's initial comment that there are so many factors to consider, and it's really difficult to know where to start. But in a way, all human activities on land end up affecting the sea, right? So, I think we need to address what's happening on land, like eutrophication and its root causes.

One of the most pressing issues, as you said, is human

activities. Our increasing population is having a growing impact. We've got agriculture, nutrients, wastewater runoff, and yes, climate change. The processes on land are changing, and these changes are increasingly affecting the sea. So, I think climate change is also a really important challenge.

Silva Laure

Now, to follow up one open question with another: How do we find balance between the values we extract from the environment and the negative impacts we cause?

Regan McEnroe

I think what you've already mentioned is crucial: we have to believe—wholeheartedly—in cross-sectoral approaches. This means focusing not only on what we do on land but also on integrating science into everything we do. For example, HEL-

COM has done fantastic work, particularly in rural water management. These efforts may not seem immediately connected to mitigating pollution and degradation in the Baltic, but they are. We need a cross-sectoral approach, and we need to ensure that science is the backbone of everything, from restoration projects to environmental impact assessments for offshore wind farms. Science must be at the heart of every action we take near the Baltic.

Lisa Clemens

I totally agree, and maybe I'm opening a hot topic here, but in my opinion, I don't think we need to find balance, because in the end, everything has a common goal: establishing a healthy, sustainable Baltic Sea. We may have different reasons for wanting this, but we share the same goal. It's unfortunate that it often seems like a con-

flict between two sides—politicians or companies seeking profit versus scientists and conservationists. In reality, we're all on the same side. We shouldn't be trying to find balance; we should be working together toward our shared goal, whatever our reasons may be.

Aurēlija Armoskaite

But it's really difficult to see this, isn't it? For instance, when we establish Marine Protec-

ed Areas (MPAs), it seems like we're restricting something.

Lisa Clemens

But are MPAs really that restrictive?

Aurēlija Armoskaite

That's a good question.

Lisa Clemens

Because it's often framed as if MPAs are only for conservationists. You close off a small



habitat, and people say, “Oh, it’s bad for the fishermen because they can’t fish there.” But if we close off small areas and protect them, fish stocks will recover, and in the long run, there will be more fish available for the fishermen. So, it’s all connected—it’s just different reasons for the same outcomes.

Regan McEnroe

It really is, and I feel that, especially in the context of fisheries, we’ve traditionally excluded fishers from the conversation. They’re not part of agriculture, and they’re somehow independent from the environmental movement. But these are people who are intimately aware of the fact that we are running out of fish.

For the stakeholders in the audience, those who work with these issues, investing in ecosystem-based management of our fisheries—and other ma-

rine resources—is an investment in our future. It’s about food security, energy security, and even sovereignty for the Baltic states. With the geopolitical crises we’re facing, it starts with ensuring we can sustainably live off our resources—not just turning Baltic herring into fish meal or letting non-Baltic countries own the majority of our offshore wind farms. As Lisa said, when we work together, when stakeholders really join together and achieve the collaboration that HELCOM has been spearheading, we invest in our future.

Stanisław Kostulski

Coming back to the question of balance, I believe balance should come from responsibility. We all have the responsibility to make the Baltic Sea region green, sustainable, and safe. And we shouldn’t be afraid to hold polluters ac-

countable. Maybe that sounds radical, but as young people, I think we should be radical in what we say and do. Without responsibility, and without consequences for those who disregard it, we won’t move forward as a society or reach our goals for the Baltic Sea.

Silva Laure

Well, thank you for these wonderful insights and reflections on the complexities of finding balance, or the lack thereof, between our environmental values and the impacts we generate.

Perhaps now it’s time to delve deeper into the practical side of environmental management, building on what was already discussed. Andris, in the last panel, briefly mentioned the ecosystem approach and how difficult it is to explain, let alone manage. How do you think we can make the ecosystem approach to management

and the concept of ecosystem services work in real life in the Baltic Sea region?

Regan McEnroe

One of the big challenges we face in implementing ecosystem-based management—whether it’s on land, in the sea, or somewhere in between—is the question of subsidies and to whom they are allocated. We have a lot of discussions about big corporations versus

small-scale fisheries or industrial agriculture, for example. To create incentives for ecosystem-based management, we need to secure funding for those who are already doing it right. We cannot continue to funnel federal and international finances into practices that harm the environment without yielding significant economic returns.

As radical as it might sound, as Stanisław mentioned earlier,



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some sectors focus solely on profitability. However, industries like fisheries and agriculture in the Baltic aren't necessarily the most profitable, yet they receive massive subsidies, especially for fuel and fertilizer. We could shift our focus to reward those who avoid over-fertilization or help small-scale fishermen meet the demands of the recently passed Fisheries Control Directive. We need to support those who contribute to both environmental sustainability and keep cultural significance alive. I think we really need to look at the capital in order to reward those who are already doing it right and hopefully allow ecosystem-based management and low impact sectors to expand.

Stanisław Kostulski

We also need to acknowledge that capital regulation won't happen on its own. Govern-



ments must take action—as fast as possible—and hold polluting companies accountable for their environmental irresponsibility. The time to act was yesterday, actually, and today's the next best opportunity.

Mika Josefin Jonsson Gehrke

We cannot focus on short-term fixes; we need long-term solutions that promote healthy ecosystems and address the root of the problem. Society,

companies, and policymakers should understand that the longer we delay, the higher the costs will be—not just financially but environmentally. We need more biodiversity to fix this, and that means avoiding destructive practices like mining in the Baltic Sea. We can't afford to repeat the mistakes we've made on land with mining waste and sludge. How will that affect the sea, the fish, and the broader ecosystem?

Lisa Clemens

Immediate action is necessary, and it must be science-based. As a marine biologist, I am part of two amazing HELCOM groups and I see the hard work and dedication of the experts. People spend their lives developing scientific indicators and solutions. I work with harbour porpoises and every day I see how they are emaciated. We as scientists have the knowledge and we provide solutions and yet it feels like the steps taken towards us are very small, while there's more significant action toward profit-driven agendas. There needs to be a shift, with bigger steps toward sustainability and conservation.

Aurėlija Armoskaite

I completely agree—ecosystem-based management must be rooted in science, using observations from marine biolo-

gists and other experts. It's also essential to communicate these findings effectively, so they are accessible and understandable to policymakers and the public.

Lisa Clemens

HELCOM is a great example of an organization that translates scientific data for broader audiences, but we need to see more collaboration and communication between different sectors and stakeholders.

Regan McEnroe

HELCOM is not only a massive intergovernmental body, which is radical just in its nature. HELCOM has massive data assessment muscles and has done critical work in making vital data accessible. What we need is for other sectors to make use of this.

Beyond HELCOM, there are so many ways in which we can integrate other stakeholders

into science—citizen science as well as engaging, for example, fishers in monitoring of the porpoises. We can engage people with local knowledge in how we develop planning.

We need to treat science as a stakeholder because otherwise, we'll never be able to create a market for these ecosystem services, because we won't know what they are.

Stanisław Kostulski

I believe that governments have all the resources to start transforming our economy and our society as a consequence of this—towards a more greener, fairer, and more sustainable reality. And the only thing to do is take action, take responsibility for the action, and have the courage to actually do something that is science-based, that you actually know what to do. You just have to do it.

Lisa Clemens

And also do it now. Because we're talking about the future, but we all know the future does not exist. The only thing that actually exists is the now, so we need to take actions now.

Aurėlija Armoskaite

There will never be a time when we are 100% confident, there will always be some uncertainty.

Silva Laure

On the topic of ocean literacy, young scientists and activists often face challenges in communicating the urgency of their work to the general public. If the broader society isn't aware of what's happening with our oceans and why change is necessary, it becomes difficult to garner the support needed for meaningful action. How do we ensure that ocean and climate literacy is promoted and developed in the Baltic Sea re-

gion? And what specific contributions can HELCOM make to support this?

Regan McEnroe

As Lisa mentioned earlier, we tend to talk about the future, but we need to focus on the present. We're not the youngest generation. This is a panel of people who—we've been lauded as young experts—but this is a room full of people with kids,

maybe even grandkids. It's just that our generation is the last one who can act.

Take the chance to get involved with engaging children. HELCOM has a unique opportunity, if for no other reason than it's a gathering of so many states with so many different curricula, but we could unite around this. This is an encouragement to all of us: get involved, find other youth organizations, chil-

dren's organizations who represent these future generations, and teach them.

Lisa Clemens

I think it's important, especially with small children, but also with older students, to go beyond primary education. Many students have already decided to pursue careers in science, politics, or fields like environmental studies, such as those related to HELCOM, so it makes sense to target universities. Sending experts to give lectures, or offering online courses, would be valuable. In this digital age, we have the internet, so reaching students is easier than ever. When I was a bachelor's student, I had only heard that HELCOM existed, but I didn't really know what it was or what it did. Providing more information to students who are already interested in environmental science could help them engage more deeply.



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Aurēlija Armoskaite

HELCOM's data is open, dependable, and accessible, and I wish I had known that sooner during my studies. If students knew about the availability of this data earlier, they could explore tools like QGIS and get hands-on experience.

Looking back on my studies, my master's was in Marine Spatial Planning, I now realize how absurd it was that so much of our work focused on land data,

despite the abundance of marine data available. We have so much good data that you can play around with and study.

Stanisław Kostulski

I've also noticed that Generation Z is very focused on activism, particularly online. A lot of this activism centres on self-education and educating others.

Many activist groups and individuals on social media focus on raising awareness about

important issues that young people care about, like climate change. This kind of knowledge-sharing fills gaps left by the public education system.

If the governments would really take action towards fighting climate change, the online activism would shift towards more specific topics, such as ocean literacy. We could then focus on educating ourselves more deeply in these areas instead of simply raising awareness about the broader climate crisis.

Mikajosefin Jonsson Gehrke

On a personal note, I'm a little ashamed that I only heard about HELCOM a few weeks ago, even though I'm passionate about nature. But I think this reflects a broader issue—more institutions need to engage on social media, especially to reach the younger generation. We don't read newspapers or

watch traditional TV, so these institutions need to meet us where we are, like on TikTok or Instagram. They could invest in short, engaging clips to get their work into our feeds.

At WWF Sweden Youth, we go to schools to teach students about vegan food and eco-friendly living. HELCOM could start doing that, teaching both younger and older generations how to better protect the environment and our seas.

Stanisław Kostulski

One last thing I'd like to add is that the need for self-education should be in all generations, not just the youngest. I believe public institutions have largely failed to establish a strong online presence. Our generation—late Millennials and early Gen Z—still manages to find these institutions, but I worry that future generations might not. It's crucial that in-

stitutions like HELCOM focus on reaching younger people, especially those as young as 10 or 12, through education and outreach. By the time they are old enough to join activism, they will already have the knowledge and resources to make an impact.

Silva Laure

I would like to raise one last question, briefly, in just two sentences. Firstly, to those most knowledgeable on this topic, I'd like to ask about something that extends beyond the Baltic Sea: the EU Nature Restoration Law, and the discussions surrounding its adoption or lack thereof. This seems to be a highly relevant topic for major youth organizations working on biodiversity in our region. Although it goes beyond the confines of the Baltic Sea, how do you perceive the implications and potential

impact of this law? Moreover, why should stakeholders in the Baltic Sea region specifically take note of its significance? Regan, I know you're passionate about this subject.

Regan McEnroe

Guilty! The first thing about the Nature Restoration Law is that to all of you, you have to be ready for it to fail—and you have to be ready to act anyway. While it would hold immense, legally binding significance for what we've outlined in the Baltic Sea Action Plan, it isn't the only pledge our member states have made. We need to fight tooth and nail to ensure it goes through the ministerial but we also have to remember that we have pledged and we've promised from everything through the Habitats Directive to the Paris Agreement, and even during our coffee chats downstairs, that we're actually



fighting for our environment. Remember that—and act.

Stanisław Kostulski

What can you say after that closing? I believe that the current generation of politicians has failed to take a holistic approach to this issue, treating ecosystems, social actors, and the economy separately. Now, we're seeing societal backlash.

Without bold and brave actions, we, as a political class, will fail to deliver on these European programs.

Lisa Clemens

It's crucial to mediate between opposing sides, like the pro-conservation and agricultural sectors, as there's a common misconception that implementing the law will mean a loss

of benefits for farmers. In reality, everyone stands to gain, and we need to stress this point.

Silva Laure

We have developed nine short recommendations for you. As we bring our Next Generation panel discussion to a close, it is important to emphasize that both the frustration and admiration we have for what

is happening stem from deep care and love. As sentimental as that may sound, I think it's clear from what we've discussed that the next generation is eager to be part of your conversations—whether by listening in, asking questions from time to time, or, as we hope we've done today, gently offering suggestions.

We are very proud and thankful to HELCOM for all the hard work in preserving our sea over the past 50 years, and for ensuring we can witness its ever-changing nature alongside you. We hope we can collectively make sure to pass on this legacy to the generations to come—the next-next ones, the upcoming ones, the succeeding ones, and beyond.

To top it all off, we want to extend our gratitude to the panellists, and to all of you for your open ears and boundless patience in listening to us.

Next Generation recommendations

1. Implement measures to restore the coastal ecosystems of the Baltic Sea, effectively addressing the issue of agricultural runoff
2. Integrate Marine Protected Area management with Maritime Spatial Planning, promoting a balanced approach to ecological, social, and economic sustainability goals
3. Enforce Marine Protected Areas in the Baltic Sea to be free from human activities like fishing or construction work; safeguarding biodiversity and preserving the integrity of vital marine habitats
4. Enact sustainable fisheries management practices in the Baltic Sea, with a particular focus on herring
5. Increase engagement and funding for establishing thresholds, such as for pollutants or fish stock carrying capacity
6. Create an interdisciplinary forum for ecosystem-based decision-making for effective policy development and sustainable resource management
7. Further consider the impact of proposed mining in the Baltic Sea on water quality and marine life
8. Incorporate diverse stakeholders, including youth, in formulating policies for climate and economic transformation in the Baltic Sea for comprehensive and effective decision-making
9. Ensure the collaboration between contracting parties and social partners, prioritize integrating partners' demands and policies, with compromise rooted in principles of social justice and open dialogue

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W here do we stand?

Rüdiger Strempe
HELCOM Executive Secretary

Jannica Haldin
HELCOM Deputy Executive Secretary

Rüdiger Stempel

“Welcome, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, dear friends. We know it's late, but we can't possibly let you go without asking one essential question, and that question is, of course: where do we stand after 50 years of HELCOM? Where do we stand?

We've just heard many inspiring remarks about HELCOM, we've taken a walk down memory lane to reflect on HELCOM's proud past, and we've listened to some thought-provoking views on the future of HELCOM and the protection of the Baltic Sea from the next generation. Having done that, I think we can all agree that we've come a long way and achieved a lot—in some cases, in fact, as noted by Juha-Markku Leppänen, we've even achieved the impossible, or at least what was once deemed impossible.

But have we achieved enough? And what, for that matter, would be enough? Enough would mean achieving our HELCOM vision of a healthy Baltic Sea environment, with diverse ecological components

functioning in balance, resulting in good ecological status and supporting a wide range of sustainable economic and social activities. Enough would mean achieving a good environmental status, or GES. But we haven't—not yet.

One of the reasons we know this is because we undertake periodic assessments of the state of the Baltic Sea—the so-called holistic assessments, or HOLAS in HELCOM speak. The third and most recent of these assessments, HOLAS 3, has just been completed. The report was published last year, and it contains food for thought.

Allow me at this point to ask Jannica to tell you more about HOLAS 3 and share some of the knowledge and insights we've gained through that assessment.





Jannica Haldin

“Thank you, Rüdiger. So, my name is Jannica Haldin, and I was lucky enough to be the coordinator of the HOLAS assessment.

The third holistic assessment shows that the pressures on the environment—from eutrophication, hazardous substances, resource extraction, and the introduction of non-indigenous species—all remain above sustainable levels. We can also increasingly see the effects of climate change on the Baltic Sea, something likely to become even more prevalent in the future.

These pressures are a direct consequence of human activities, and we've heard a lot about that here today. These activities take place not only at sea but also on land, so we need to consider the broader context to understand and address these pressures.

These pressures, in turn, affect biodiversity and impact the entire ecosystem. The assessment shows an inad-

equated status of biodiversity and the food web across the entire Baltic Sea. Only a few biodiversity indicators show acceptable levels, and those are limited to certain areas.

Persistent, unsustainable human activities threaten habitats, populations, and the overall ecosystem functioning—an ecosystem we depend on—and they increase the risk of further degradation by reducing the ecosystem's resilience to future changes, such as climate change.

While the assessment reflects the consequences of many decades of unsustainable use—unsustainable use that HELCOM was established to prevent—the results are not the only aspect of the assessment I'd like to highlight today.

As an endeavour, HOLAS 3 is extraordinary, thanks largely to

the dedication of the national experts and the HELCOM Secretariat team.

This is the most comprehensive assessment of the Baltic Sea ever produced. Almost a thousand experts were invited to take part in the review of the results, and over the course of nine months, the HELCOM Secretariat processed close to 3,000 comments on these products to ensure that they are robust and can actually be used for management. This is key to the work we're doing—not just to let everyone know what's going on, but also to consider how they can take that into action, how they can make it actionable.

Never before has our understanding of the ecosystem been better, and for the first time, this assessment strives to actually link together information on activities with



Jannica Haldin_continued

pressures and status so that we understand how the socio-ecological system functions. It takes a leap towards a truly holistic approach that we haven't been able to do in the past.

From millions of data entries through the 59 indicator reports, 14 integrated assessments, and five thematic assessments, all the way to the State of the Baltic

Sea summary report, all of the HOLAS material is made publicly available, and interested parties can access the information at the level that makes the most sense to them. So we have also tried to make this information accessible to those who actually need to use it.

One of the most important messages that this assessment can provide us is that when we have the right measures and we implement them, they actually work. It's the first time we can show a concrete link between the measures and a change in status.

We see this because there is a downward trend in some of the indicators that tackle pressures, which are more directly linked to our human activities. So we see a change in them before we see it in the ecosystem as a whole. We see a downward trend for hazardous substances

and a downward trend in the input of nutrients, for example.

That said, there is, of course, a lot of work still to be done. Pressures at sea don't recognize our anthropogenic borders, so a regional approach is key. And the ecosystem does not experience just one of these pressures at a time; rather, it's experiencing all of them all the time, simultaneously. This is why we are not expecting to see changes in the status of the ecosystem as quickly as we see changes in the pressures. But it also means that we need to implement measures for a broad set of pressures simultaneously to truly see a change.

This brings me to the second important message that the State of the Baltic Sea report has provided for us: the work of HELCOM over the last 50 years has been instrumental in securing the positive changes

that we can see—not to mention the fact that it has made it possible to see any changes at all. Without the kind of data sharing and information sharing we have between the countries, we wouldn't be able to track changes in the Baltic Sea environment at all.

When there is a will, there is a way. I think many of the speeches we've heard today have shown that throughout HELCOM's 50-year history, there has been a strong will. Now, what that will has been directed toward has changed over time, and that needs to be considered in the future as well, so we can direct it to where it does the most good. But when there is a will, there is a way, and the relevance and value of tackling challenges together under the umbrella of HELCOM is likely to only increase in the future.

Rüdiger Strempe

“Thank you very much. So you can see the picture is mixed. On the one hand, we all know this—our Baltic Sea is not in good shape. On the other hand, a silver lining is discernible.

Firstly, as Jannica said, HOLAS 3, like all its predecessors, in itself constitutes a remarkable achievement. As a result of this, we now have a better understanding of the nature of the problem and the state of affairs than ever before.

We know enough to act. Never let it be said that we don't know enough to act, because we do. And we also know that if we act in concert based on that knowledge, we can make a difference. We can fulfil our HELCOM vision.

So really, all we need to do is do it, right? Except, of course, it's not that easy. It's not a matter of just throwing a switch. We're faced with a complex

issue—or in fact, a complex of complex issues. Taking appropriate action requires a plan—an action plan.

And this, of course, is where our 2021 Baltic Sea Action Plan comes in. That plan, with its 199 actions and final target year of 2030, is our roadmap to progress on the way to good environmental status. We're now roughly at the halfway mark, and implementation is progressing reasonably well, though there's a distinct discrepancy between joint actions and national actions, with the former advancing more speedily than the latter.

So we have a sound scientific basis, we have the requisite

knowledge, and we have a plan. But two other elements are required for success: determination and tenacity. If we are to achieve our ultimate goal, we cannot, and we must not, lose momentum now. We must stay the course and step up efforts until we reach our destination.

Now, that would be a tall order and very challenging at the best of times—and, of course, these are not the best of times, as we battle a triple planetary crisis against the backdrop of geopolitical upheaval. But we have no choice, and there's no time to waste.

In closing, I'd like to quote Secretary John Kerry, who at last week's Our Ocean Confer-

ence in Athens, Greece, said: “In a race against time itself, even our current ambition is not enough. Our commitment must keep growing, and we must still accelerate.”

If we do that—and HELCOM's proud past makes me feel confident that we can—HELCOM, and most importantly the Baltic Sea, will indeed have a promising future.

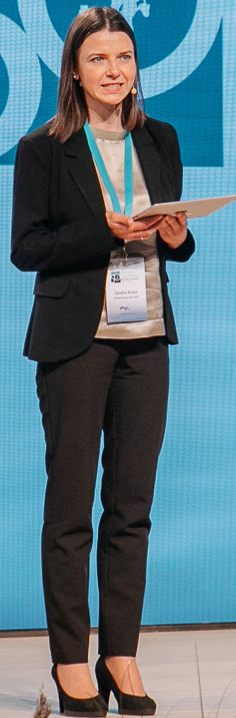
So let's go out there and do it. Thank you very much.





Proud past,
promising future

HELSINKI CONVENTION
1974 - 2024





as aizsardzības un
onālās attīstības
ministrija

Congratulations

by partner organizations

Gun Rudquist

Head of Policy, Baltic Sea Centre at the Stockholm University

Inger Andersen

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Bodo Bahr

Secretary General, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)

Alda Nikodemusa

Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea (VASAB)

Carole Durussel

OSPAR Commission

Razan Al Mubarak

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

Mikhail Durkin, Bettina Taylor and Johanna Fox

Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

Gun Rudquist

Head of Policy, Baltic Sea Centre at the Stockholm University

On behalf of The Stockholm University Baltic Sea Centre,
Gun Rudquist, Head of Policy

We congratulate HELCOM on fifty successful years and many more to come.

We, the Stockholm University Baltic Sea Centre, would like to congratulate you on your significant contribution to improving the environmental status of the Baltic Sea.

My name is Gun Rudquist and I work as Head of Policy at the Stockholm University Baltic Sea Centre. I speak on behalf of my colleagues, the researchers, who have been and would like to continue to be, deeply involved in HELCOM work.

The Baltic Nest Institute, BNI, is worth highlighting here. In 2007, HELCOM adopted the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) — a

strategic programme of measures and actions to achieve good environmental status in the sea, initially by 2021. At the time of the development of the BSAP, the Swedish MARE project, led by Fredrik Wulff at Stockholm University, had the necessary tools to support a sophisticated assessment of the maximum nutrient input that could be allowed into the Baltic Sea in order to achieve the eutrophication targets. The concept and quantification of the Maximum Allowable Inputs (MAI), and the resulting necessary reductions in inputs, were incorporated into the BSAP. This successful work led to the institutionalisation of scientific decision support as the Baltic Nest Institute (BNI). After 17 years, BNI continues to provide independent scien-

tific advice to HELCOM from its base at Stockholm University's Baltic Sea Centre.

"With BSAP 2007, it was really ground breaking to quantify, on a scientific basis, how much nutrient inputs needs to be reduced and how much each country should contribute with reductions," says Bo Gustafsson, who has been part of the scientific process from the beginning and is now the head of BNI. "To do this, we had to develop new models and collect data from all countries on the basis of including 'the whole Baltic Sea and the whole catchment area'. This cooperation, this dialogue, improves the important cooperation between the countries."

Associate professor Bo Gustafsson, Director of BNI, says "Without the successful cooperation within HELCOM, the Bal-

tic Sea would probably be in a much worse state today."

HELCOM's contribution has not been limited to environmental progress — although that would have been enough — but HELCOM has also played an important role in improving cooperation between all the countries. By agreeing on actions, the ground has been prepared for legislation at EU level.

Another strength of the HELCOM approach, was its ability to bring together different stakeholders in society. Being open and organizing stakeholder meetings has been an important component in bridging the gap between research and the rest of society, especially policy makers.

So, with that — we salute the HELCOM and wish it many more successful years.



Bodo Bahr

Secretary General, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)

Excellencies, esteemed members of HELCOM, distinguished guests, and fellow advocates for the Baltic Sea,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to bring you today the best greetings and wishes of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference on the occasion of celebrating the milestone of the signing of the first Helsinki Convention and the establishment of HELCOM.

Even if essential goals that we have all set ourselves have not yet been reached, or not to the extent that we would all like, one thing remains fundamental on a day like this: For fifty years, HELCOM has exemplified the power of multilateral cooperation in addressing the complex environmental challenges facing our region. We have made significant strides in promoting the sustainable development and

preservation of the Baltic Sea ecosystem.

You, HELCOM, and your partners have worked tirelessly to combat marine pollution, promote biodiversity conservation, foster sustainable maritime practices and safety, contribute to combatting climate change and find solutions to the challenge of removing sea-dumped ammunition – to mention only a few.

You have worked with dedication and passion to achieve your goals and made progress even in extremely difficult geopolitical situations, be it during the Cold War in the beginning or now facing Russia's unprovoked, unjustifiable, and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. From the early days of its work in the 1990s, the BSPC has repeatedly referred to the results of HELCOM's work; since the start of the 2000s, when the BSPC attained observer status

at HELCOM you have been one of our closest partners.

Responsible ministers of the presiding states, the chairpersons of HELCOM, and the Executive Secretaries inform the parliamentarians. They regularly report on the results of HELCOM's work at the annual conferences, the Standing Committee, and working group meetings.

Since the early 2000s, our three observers at HELCOM have submitted comprehensive reports on the work of HELCOM to the BSPC every year. In almost all of our resolutions, we refer to the work of HELCOM and call for the broadest possible implementation of HELCOM's objectives by the governments of the BSPC member countries. The parliaments have always been on the progressive and ambitious side of implementing HELCOM's goals.

For many years, parliaments in the Baltic Sea region have placed great importance on involving the younger generations in our discussions and decision-making processes. I am therefore particularly pleased that the young generation has been so intensively involved in this event, as we have just experienced. This is reminiscent of the extremely successful, lively and well-founded HELCOM Youth Forums of the past, which are still fresh in my mind.

And let me mention one more aspect: Very few people realise that when nothing is visible because nothing is happening, HELCOM's work is particularly successful and comprehensive. More than 20 years ago, in a tremendous effort that was strongly supported and promoted by the parliaments, it was possible to enforce and implement far-reaching measures to strengthen maritime

safety in the Baltic Sea based on binding agreements under international law. This was a decisive contribution to preventing catastrophic tanker accidents in the Baltic Sea. In my view, this is one of the great examples of a successful, forward-looking, and responsible prevention policy.

I have been following HELCOM's work for 45 years – since the first Helsinki Convention came into force – and have been deeply involved in it for more than 25 years. From the experience of this time, only one demand can be derived with regard to the objectives of HELCOM: Implement, implement, implement! And accompany that with holistic assessments and reports about the status of the implementation as you are doing now!

We express our sincere appreciation to all who have contributed to the success

of HELCOM over the past five decades. Unwavering dedication and tireless efforts have been the driving force behind collective achievements. I am confident that HELCOM will continue to make meaningful progress in safeguarding the Baltic Sea environment.

Due to Russia's ongoing brutal and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine and the geopolitical situation, close and united cooperation between the democratic states in the Baltic Sea is more important than ever to achieve our goals of protecting the Baltic Sea and realizing the goals of HELCOM's current action plan. Beyond that, it is crucial in these times that all efforts are made to ensure that the Baltic Sea remains a Sea of Peace.

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference wishes you all the success and support you need to continue significant and

ground-breaking progress in protecting the Baltic Sea and far beyond in marine policy and ocean protection.

Congratulations to HELCOM, congratulations on everything you have achieved in the past five decades with your highly committed work. May our partnership continue to thrive as we strive towards a peaceful and sustainable future for the Baltic Sea region and beyond.



Carole Durussel

OSPAR Commission

Dear HELCOM Chair, distinguished Ministers, EU Commissioner, fellow Observer organisations, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the OSPAR Commission, it is my honour to extend our warmest congratulations to our esteemed colleagues at HELCOM on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Convention.

Half a century ago, the Baltic Sea coastal countries came together to establish a regional platform to protect the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution, to preserve biodiversity, and to promote the sustainable use of its marine resources. Many of these issues were identified by OSPAR's predecessors, the Oslo and the Paris Conventions, that also entered into force in the early 1970s.

This commitment to tackle common environmental issues and responsibility towards ma-

rine environmental protection is something that HELCOM and OSPAR share. The close cooperation between our organisations is an excellent example of what can be achieved when States come together in pursuit of a common goal. OSPAR and HELCOM have a long and successful history of cooperation, and we have made significant progress over the last decades in addressing the pressing environmental issues facing our ocean. For example, HELCOM and OSPAR have been frontrunners in limiting shipping emissions, in assessing and addressing nutrient inputs, which is the root cause of eutrophication, and in reducing the inputs of some of the most serious hazardous substances.

Our recent holistic assessments, HELCOM's HOLAS 3 and OSPAR's Quality Status Report 2023 are further examples of our contributions to improving the

collective understanding of the marine environment and the pressures impacting on it. Both these assessments have shown that the North-East Atlantic and Baltic Sea continue to face challenges and require regional cooperation to ensure the effective protection and sustainable use of the marine environment.

As we celebrate this important occasion, OSPAR reaffirms its commitment to continue our collective action towards a healthy marine environment. Now, more than ever, Regional Seas Conventions continue to play a crucial role in delivering the ocean we need for the future we want.

In conclusion, we would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to HELCOM on their remarkable journey thus far and we look forward to continuing working with you towards a more sustainable future for our ocean.





Razan Al Mubarak

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

Your Excellencies, Dear Ministers, Distinguished Delegates,

As President of the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), it is a privilege to join you in celebrating the Helsinki Commission's 50th anniversary. Congratulations on crossing this significant milestone—half a century of dedication to the Baltic Sea.

Though I am not with you today in beautiful Riga, I extend a heartfelt thanks to you via video for your relentless pursuit to prioritize nature in every decision affecting the Baltic Sea. Your efforts are widely recognized and respected across the global conservation community.

The Helsinki Commission's visionary Baltic Sea Action Plan and your alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework are commendable. IUCN is proud to have partnered early with

the Helsinki Commission on advancing area-based conservation, and we're eager to continue supporting your leadership towards the ambitious 30x30 target.

I am excited to inform you that IUCN will be initiating an application for observer status within the Helsinki Commission. Several parties to the Helsinki Commission are also State Members of IUCN, and many of our member organizations and Commission members are deeply engaged in the Baltic region.

Lastly, I invite you all to the upcoming IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi in October 2025. It will be a pivotal moment for our community as we tackle the pressing biodiversity and climate challenges.

Thank you, and I look forward to continuing our vital work together for a thriving Baltic Sea and a resilient planet. Thank you.





Inger Andersen

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and
Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

My congratulations to the Helsinki Convention for marking 50 years since the signature of this important deal. The 10 Parties to this convention have, during this time, worked together to protect the Baltic Sea from pollution—whether from the air, the land, or the sea—to preserve biological diversity, to promote the sustainable use of marine resources, and, of course, to cushion the sea against the growing impacts of climate change.

Your work has been a valuable complement to UNEP's Regional Seas Programme, which this year also marks its 50th anniversary. When founded, the Helsinki Convention and the UNEP Regional Seas Programme were ahead of their time. Truly, we both saw the need to address accelerating environmental

degradation of the world's shared marine and coastal environment through research, through international cooperation, and through concrete action plans. And we have to say that both have brought very real results.

So, my thanks to you for your commitment. But, as I also told the meeting of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme in Bridgetown last year, the triple planetary crisis is accelerating. And here, of course, I'm referring to the crisis of climate change, the crisis of nature and biodiversity loss, and the crisis of pollution and waste. Resultant threats to marine and coastal environments are, in fact, accelerating—and you are living that on your coasts.

You highlighted this trend in your 2023 report on the State of the Baltic Sea, which shows

concerning environmental pressures across the whole sea. So, we must all up our game for all the regional seas, and we must do so fast. And we must lean on multilateralism as the best way to bring results.

This means all nations committing to strong implementation of every international deal that protects the environment—from regional accords like the Helsinki Convention to global deals like the Paris Agreement, like the instrument on plastic pollution which we're now negotiating, like the new global framework on chemicals, and like the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

In this regard, it is very encouraging that the Baltic Sea region is on track to reach the global target of 30% protected by 2030.

My thanks and congratulations once more. I look forward to seeing more concrete action under the Baltic Sea Action Plan for a healthy sea that sustainably serves the needs of all who rely on it.





Alda Nikodemusa

Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea (VASAB)

On behalf of VASAB, with its more than 30 years lasting co-operation of ministers responsible for spatial planning and development of the Baltic Sea Region countries and its community, I have a pleasure to greet the HELCOM in relation to the half-century anniversary of the Helsinki Convention.

We all are aware how fragile is the Baltic Sea due to the natural circumstances and because of the growing pressure of human activities at the sea as well as on the land. To ensure safeguarding of biodiversity and achieve good environmental status of the sea, HELCOM plays a remarkable role and makes enormous efforts. VASAB's contribution to reach that goal is by enhancing the coordinated maritime spatial planning across the entire region and

balancing interests of various sectors and stakeholders.

I would like to use today's celebration occasion to emphasize the close cooperation of HELCOM and VASAB which is continuing effectively since 2010. The HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group was established to ensure cooperation among the Baltic Sea Region countries for coherent maritime spatial planning processes in the Baltic Sea. Our cooperation has been noted at the European scale and even beyond. The Baltic Sea Region is recognized as a frontrunner in maritime spatial planning, and other sea basins, like the North Sea, are eager to learn from our collaboration and experience.

We do implement the common and specific policy frameworks of both organizations,

for example — Baltic Sea Action Plan, Regional Maritime Spatial Planning Roadmap 2021-2030 and the last year endorsed 'VASAB Vision for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region in 2040'.

Furthermore, I want to emphasize that together VASAB and HELCOM contribute to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region by executing the coordination of the Policy area 'Spatial Planning'.

And finally, big thanks go to the HELCOM Secretariat for a good and smooth cooperation with us — VASAB Secretariat — to make the Baltic Sea Region sustainable and resilient.





Mikhail Durkin and Bettina Taylor

Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB)

Johanna Fox

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

We are a network organization that represents environmental NGOs that are active in all parts of the Baltic Sea. As observers to HELCOM, we're the watchdogs, we are the broken records that say, 'Implementation, implementation, implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan.'

Hopefully, you've been inspired and perhaps pushed by us for some of the actions that we're here to celebrate today. We really want to thank you for allowing us to take such an active part in the HELCOM family. We are here to celebrate this middle-aged HELCOM, and I have to say, as someone who learned to walk at the same

time as HELCOM, it's quite amazing to learn about the history and the progress that has been made in HELCOM.

Yet, the state of the Baltic Sea also speaks for itself—so we need more action. Be proud, but don't be satisfied, as was said during the ministerial meeting earlier today.

But who is HELCOM? I would like you to look at this community, look around you, look at us—this is HELCOM. So please, when you go home, do not go back to business as usual. Go back, be bold, be brave, and act. Go back and save the Baltic Sea! Congratulations to us for being HELCOM.





HELCOM



HELCOM



Proud
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HELSINKI
1974 - 2024

Proud past,
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1974 - 2024

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Vides aizsardzības un
reģionālās attīstības
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ENTION

HELCOM

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Closing words

Evija Šmite
HELCOM Chair

Evija Šmite

HELCOM Chair

Dear HELCOM family and friends,

Now, it's just us — the HELCOM family — left in the room. Listening to all the speeches of today, one thing is clear: We all share a deep and personal relationship with the Baltic Sea.

Each of us also has our own unique history with HELCOM, filled with special memories.

Now, 50 years later, Latvia's chairmanship organized the 50th anniversary celebration of the Helsinki Convention. The anniversary slogan 'Proud Past and Promising Future' speaks volumes. Allow me to translate what that really means: 'Many thanks to everyone who has worked tirelessly for the Baltic Sea, and may you all enjoy your well-deserved retirement by a healthy Baltic Sea with peace of mind!'

As we have spoken a lot about indicators today, I'll

say this: HELCOM's sense of humour remains as strong as ever, and that's a great indicator of our spirit!

Now, I would like to invite all of you to raise a toast to this great event and occasion together. Let's celebrate!





Latvian artists: Tautumeitas





HELCOM behind the scenes

A chat with Leena Heikkilä and Ritva Kostakow





Leena Heikkilä

Freelancer for HELCOM 1980-1987,
HELCOM staff 1987-present



Ritva Kostakow

Freelancer for HELCOM 1972-1980,
HELCOM staff 1980-2010

Leena Heikkilä

Currently, I'm an administrative assistant at HELCOM. I started in 1987 as a maritime assistant, so I've been working here for a few decades, starting from clipping and glueing. Already before 1987 I was helping during the bigger meetings when the Secretariat was established in 1980, keeping track of documents and so forth. Nowadays, I'm the "money lady"; I'm the one doing the bookkeeping and paying the bills.

Ritva Kostakow-Kämpe

I've been working for the commission ever since the beginning, meaning the preparatory phase, which started in 1972, continuing to the interim phase. Then on the 1st of July, 1980, I was supposed to come here to replace one of the ladies who had promised to come and help Aarno Voipio [HELCOM Executive Secretary 1980-1984]. So, I promised to be here for

a month, and that one month turned into 40 years.

Leena Heikkilä

In 1994, when we travelled to meetings, we had to pack not only our personal items but the entire office. Back then, it wasn't just a small PC; we brought along large typewriters, a copier, paper files, copy paper, and other essentials.

For a trip to Klaipėda, we planned to leave Saturday morning, with the meeting starting on Monday. We calculated that to bring the Finnish

delegation, our staff, and all the equipment it would be both time- and cost-effective to lease a plane. So we had a private jet flying us to Klaipėda and back. I acted as stewardess—serving coffee, tea, and Coke (no beer on board)—which, looking back, was quite funny.

Ritva Kostakow-Kämpe

On another occasion, we had rented a bus with everything we needed for the meeting and were set to go to Leningrad. Everything was going smoothly until we reached the border.

From there to Leningrad, we had a police escort—and they were driving at around 150 km/h, with us in a bus trying to keep up! The police were not exactly polite to other cars, taking the middle of the road and swerving to the left when a car came toward us. It was quite exciting, but we made it; we're still alive.

Leena Heikkilä

Looking out from the bus and seeing the police clearing the way felt almost like we were VIPs or royals.

Ritva Kostakow-Kämpe

At the same time, it felt quite dangerous, at least for me. I was scared.

Back then, I had small children. My young daughter—this was in September or October of 1980—would sit on my lap, twirling my hair, and ask, "Mother, when is the fence ready?" I wondered, what fence? She meant the one around the Baltic Sea, as her way of understanding protection.

Leena Heikkilä

It was hectic. Committee meetings usually lasted a full week, starting on Monday and wrapping up around noon on Friday. On the last day, we had to provide a draft report of the meeting—a hard copy—so once it was finalized, we'd spend the night making copies. That's just how it was back then. It starts on Monday and—at some point, our slogan became, "Friday always comes."







HELCOM Executive Secretaries



Aarno Voipio
(Finland) 1980-1984



Harald Velner
(USSR) 1984-1988



Fleming Otzen
(Denmark) 1988-1992



Ulf Ehlin
(Sweden) 1992-1996



Tapani Kohonen
(Finland) 1996-1999



Mieczysław S. Ostojki
(Poland) 1999-2003



Anne Christine
Brusendorff
(Denmark) 2003-2012



Monika Stankiewicz
(Poland) 2012-2019



Rüdiger Stempel
(Germany) 2019 - Present







Baltic Marine Environment
Protection Commission