HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/10

Supersedes HELCOM Recommendations 25/4 and 37/3

Adopted 28 March 2025,
having regard to Article 20, Paragraph 1 b)
of the Helsinki Convention

SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

THE COMMISSION,

RECALLING Article 3 and 6 and Regulation 1, Annex II of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, 1992 (Helsinki Convention), requiring the Contracting Parties to prevent and eliminate pollution of the Baltic Sea Area from land-based sources by using, *inter alia*, Best Environmental Practice (BEP) for all sources and Best Available Technology (BAT) for point sources, minimizing or eliminating inputs to water and air from all sources by providing control strategies,

RECALLING ALSO Article 3 of the Helsinki Convention, in which the Contracting Parties shall individually or jointly take all appropriate legislative, administrative or other relevant measures to prevent and abate pollution in order to promote the ecological restoration of the Baltic Sea Area,

HAVING REGARD to the HELCOM 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, as well as the 2021 HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP)aiming at a healthy and resilient Baltic Sea ecosystem unaffected by eutrophication, hazardous substances and litter.

RECALLING FURTHER the 2013 HELCOM Copenhagen Ministerial Meeting agreement to develop a new HELCOM Recommendation on sustainable aquaculture by 2014 to substitute the existing HELCOM Recommendation 25/4 aiming at limiting potential environmental impacts of aquaculture activities such as the introduction of non-indigenous species, ecological and genetic impacts on wild fish stocks from unintended releases of farmed species, nutrient pollution, as well as introduction of antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals,

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT that in the 2021 HELCOM BSAP and its follow-up process the Contracting Parties agreed, *inter alia*, on the following provisions to reach a healthy Baltic Sea:

- to work continuously towards making the Baltic Sea a front-runner in the field of environmentally sustainable sea-based activities, including aquaculture
- to stress that the achievement of good environmental status for the Baltic Sea will require major efforts and transformational change in all sectors of the economy affecting the sea, including aquaculture
- to fully implement by 2027 at the latest all nutrient input reduction measures necessary to achieve the Net Nutrient Input Ceilings
- to ensure that the occurrence of hazardous substances does not jeopardize the functioning of ecosystem services and does not pose any risk to human health
- to ensure that non-indigenous species are not introduced to prevent litter from all sources and address aquaculture as a source of litter

RECALLING the Regional Maritime Spatial Planning Roadmap 2021-2030 as adopted by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2021 and the VASAB CSPD/BSR 85th meeting, aiming for sustainable development of the region and building a sound basis for an adaptive Maritime Spatial Planning process applying the ecosystem-based approach,

RECALLING ALSO EU Directive 2014/89 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning,

RECALLING FURTHER the 2003 HELCOM/OSPAR Ministerial Meeting Statement on the Ecosystem Approach to the Management of Human Activities,

RECALLING FURTHER that Ecosystem Approach to fisheries, as defined by FAO, is "an approach that strives to balance diverse societal objectives, by taking into account the knowledge and uncertainties about biotic, abiotic and human components of ecosystems and their interactions and applying an integrated approach to fisheries within ecologically meaningful boundaries",

SUPPORTING the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy, by adhering to the Maximum Sustainable Yield goals that also form a part of the BSAP and to ensure that aquaculture activities contribute to long-term environmental, economic, and social sustainability,

RECOGNIZING, *inter alia*, **that** direct discharges and losses of nutrients and organic material from marine and freshwater aquaculture, have potential negative impacts on the aquatic environment,

RESPECTING the need to prevent or minimize other possible environmental pressures and their negative impacts on marine ecosystems that can be associated with aquaculture, in particular the introduction of non-indigenous species, ecological and genetic impacts on wild fish stocks from unintended releases of farmed fish, introduction of antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals, as well as hazardous substances and litter,

RECOGNIZING the need to fill, on a sustainable and ecologically sound basis, the growing gap between general seafood demand and supply globally,

RECALLING the need of strengthened regional self-supply with aquaculture products and, hence, reduced dependency of global imports, in contributing to global responsibility *via* use of sustainably developed and managed domestic resources,

RECALLING the indirect current and expected effects of climate change to aquaculture, as depicted in the HELCOM-Baltic Earth 2021 Baltic Sea Climate Change Fact Sheet.

TAKING NOTE OF:

- the need for a differentiated approach to specific types of aquaculture production for effective application of BAT and BEP in freshwater and marine fish farming;
- the possible supporting role of certain extensive aquaculture systems, particularly freshwater ones, in habitat conservation, if developed and maintained sustainably,

BEARING IN MIND that aquaculture has globally been the most rapidly growing form of primary food production during the past 30 years, while it was constant or decreasing in the EU and that the industry's technological and functional development has been fast; therefore, **ENCOURAGING** the industry to realize its great potential to develop and apply environmentally friendly technologies and production methods, both in marine and freshwater,

DESIRING to limit the negative impacts on the environment from aquaculture facilities located in the catchment area of the Baltic Sea and in the Baltic Sea by applying Best Available Techniques (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP),

RECALLING the Regulation (EU) No 304/2011 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 708/2007 concerning the use of alien and locally absent species in aquaculture, creating a framework governing aquaculture practices in EU member countries in order to ensure adequate protection of the aquatic environment from the risks associated with the use of non-native species and locally absent species in aquaculture,

RECALLING Article 5 of the Helsinki Convention requiring the Contracting Parties to prevent and eliminate pollution of the Baltic Sea Area caused hazardous substances from all sources, implemented *inter alia* through HELCOM Recommendation 20/4 recommending a ban on retail sale or use of anti-fouling paint containing organotin compounds for fish net cages, and to further work to minimize the release of biocides from antifouling products through replacement by biocide-free alternatives as per the BSAP 2021 action HL30.

RECALLING FURTHER the prohibition laid down in Annex XVII to the EU Regulation (EC) 1907/2006 on the registration, evaluation and authorization of chemicals (REACH), on the use of hazardous substances in anti-fouling of cages, floats, nets and any other appliances or equipment used for fish or shellfish farming,

ACKNOWLEDGING existing national and international legislation and competences, criteria and guidance for an ecologically sound aquaculture, including for the HELCOM countries being EU members the Common Fisheries Policy, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the Habitats as well as the Birds Directives, the Biodiversity Strategy for 2023, the Farm to For Strategy, the Nature Restoration Regulation, the EC Guidance on Aquaculture and Natura 2000, the EC Regulation No. 710/2009 as regards rules on organic aquaculture animal and seaweed production, and for Nordic countries the Nordic Council recommendation on RAS aquaculture (Rek. 5/2014), as well as **NOTING** the forthcoming development of similar guidance documents under the EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism and the Commission staff working document on the application of the Water Framework Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive to aquaculture, as applicable,

ACKNOWLEDGING ALSO the law of Russian Federation 148-FZ 02.07.2013 "On aquaculture (fish-farming) and amendments of some other related legal act of Russian Federation" as well as legal framework on protection of the water environment,

NOTING ALSO the targets and priorities outlined by the Strategy of aquaculture development in Russian Federation to the year 2020, and the Strategic National Plans on Aquaculture of EU members on the basis of the CFP,

RECALLING ALSO the EIA Directive (2011/92/EU) and its amendment 2014/52/EU which are in line with the UN ECE Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a transboundary context and similarly the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC),

RECOMMENDS that the Governments of the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention should apply Best Environmental Practice (BEP) and Best Available Technology (BAT) for sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic Sea as contained in BAT/BEP descriptions of sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic Sea region (BSEP number 200)[1], based on Annex II of the Convention and the following general principles:

1. to establish new or enlarge existing aquaculture facilities only upon granting permits or according to prior regulations by the competent authority or appropriate body in accordance with existing legislation (including EIA and SEA directives for EU Member States)[2]
2. to manage marine and freshwater aquaculture on the basis of the Ecosystem Approach;
3. to endeavour, when developing marine and freshwater aquaculture, to maintain or restore ecosystem functions and services, to prevent or minimize emissions and discharges, minimize negative environmental effects (by e.g. spatial planning) and to relieve pressure on wild fish stocks;
4. to ensure that possible negative impacts from aquaculture will not hinder the achievement of a good environmental/ecological/chemical status, as agreed upon in HELCOM BSAP and relevant national and international legislation;

[1] However noting that some Contracting Parties have national practices and legislation on monitoring of aquaculture that differs from BEP and BAT as laid out in the Chapter "BAT BEP for monitoring" in BSEP number 200, in which case the BEP/BAT on monitoring will not fully apply.

[2] taking into account that according to national legislation of some CPs, permits are not required for smaller aquaculture units/facilities.

5. to take full account of nutrient discharges and losses from marine aquaculture in an overall endeavour by the Contracting Parties to keep inputs within Maximum Allowable Inputs for nitrogen and phosphorus for the Baltic Sea sub-basins, as agreed at the 2013 HELCOM Copenhagen Ministerial Meeting and in its possible future updates;

6. to foster development and innovation towards ecologically sustainable farms and aquaculture technologies, including nutrient neutral and nutrient extractive ones, to avoid or minimize 1) discharges of nutrients, organic matter, litter, chemicals and 2) handling of escapees and diseases, as relevant;

7. to employ regional planning as an instrument for directing aquaculture activities to suitable areas and for mitigating conflicts between aquaculture and other uses of that area. Fish farms should not be placed in areas reserved for nature protection, if that might conflict with the aims of protection for that area;

8. to avoid or minimize potential negative impacts when establishing new or enlarging existing aquaculture facilities in the Baltic Sea Region;

9. to minimise potential risks and impacts on the environment arising from the introduction of non-indigenous species, and the ecological and genetic impacts on wild fish stocks and from unintended releases of farmed species,

RECOMMENDS ALSO

10. data collected and reported to the HELCOM PLC database should be used to establish, maintain or improve national databases of aquaculture or water permits and monitoring data in co-operation with the aquaculture sector. to develop specific measures aimed at reduction/mitigation/prevention, as appropriate, of nutrient release into the Baltic Sea, which have to be implemented simultaneously with the growth of fish production, consistent with measures foreseen in the national aquaculture development strategies;

11. to avoid the use of genetically modified organisms;

12. to ensure that the use of hormones does not negatively impact the environment;

13. in areas where the good water quality is not achieved and if suitable, aquaculture that contributes to achieving good environmental and ecological status should be encouraged. The promotion of such aquaculture systems should not detract from measures to address nutrient input close to source,

RECOMMENDS that actions taken by the Contracting Parties to implement this Recommendation should be reported by utilizing the reporting form as included in Annex 1 for the first time in 2025 and thereafter every six years.

Annex 1

Reporting form for HELCOM Recommendation 37-3 Sustainable Aquaculture in the Baltic Sea Region

Contracting Party:	
Reporting period:	
Technical Attachment as included in Annex 2 of *BAT/BEP descriptions of sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic Sea region* (BSEP number 200) completed and provided	[Yes/No]
Implementation reporting on recommended actions, described as general principles	
1	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
2	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
3	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
4	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
5	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
6	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
7	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
8	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
9	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
10	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
11	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
12	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
13	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]
14	[fully implemented / partially implemented / not implemented]