# Hard questions and easy answers towards a healthier Baltic Sea

**Do you sometimes find yourself wondering what you, as an individual, can do for the Baltic Sea?**

**ACTING TOWARDS A HEALTHIER BALTIC SEA** in everyday life can feel like a daunting task – but small efforts add up and individual actions can make a difference. We are making a positive impact when we do our best within our current circumstances. It can be easiest to start small by choosing one or two of these to consider in your life - you might find yourself inspired to do even more!

**Do individual actions contribute to a greater cause?**

**TOGETHER, OUR COLLECTIVE EVERYDAY ACTIONS** have the power to turn the tide. We may not see each other, or the immediate effects of our actions, but we are all around the Baltic Sea region working towards a common goal. Our well-being and society are deeply connected to the health of the environment—not only for its resources but for our mental health and overall happiness. So next time when you see news, for example, about reduced inputs of nutrients or litter into the sea, remember that your actions, and those of others, have made this happen.

**BE PART OF THE SOLUTION TO TURN THE TIDE TOWARDS A HEALTHIER BALTIC SEA!**

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**IT'S EASIER TO SEE HOW** our everyday actions are linked to the Baltic Sea when we understand how those can impact the environment. The icons below will help you keep track of the areas where your actions are making a difference:

**Litter** enters the sea from activities on land and at sea and is of many types (packaging, discarded fishing gear, cigarettes, etc.). It pollutes habitats and makes places less beautiful, making the Baltic Sea a less attractive place to visit and can be deadly to wildlife.

**Nutrient pollution,** nitrogen and phosphorus, flows into the sea from agriculture and sewage, causing eutrophication. Inappropriate or excessive use of fertilisers or use of less advanced water treatment technologies results in inputs and leads to harmful algae blooms that cloud water and can harm marine life.

**Biodiversity and habitats** can be very sensitive to pressures, resulting in disturbance of even loss of the habitat. Activities like construction, dredging, or even boating can disturb species and habitats, leading to behaviour changes and population declines.

**A huge array of chemicals** is used in the manufacture of products, many of these can be toxic if they enter the environment. Even after passing through water treatment, chemicals from homes and factories may remain and be harmful in small amounts and can be lethal or cause growth and reproductive defects in marine life. They often bioaccumulate, becoming more harmful as they move through the food web.

**Unsustainable fishing** reduces fish stocks and disrupts the food web, especially where unsustainable fishing occurs. Less fishing pressure helps populations recover.

Science in a Seashell Series

# Everyday actions towards a healthier BALTIC SEA

**A shared responsibility and a shared possibility**

Nordic Council of Ministers

HELCOM

## Around the home

**Dispose of unused and old medicines** in your local pharmacy – it is free of charge.

**Always check product packaging** for disposal instructions before throwing something in the bin. Hazardous substances-containing products, such as batteries, bulbs, or certain construction materials, should be taken to appropriate collecting points.

**Consider using non-stick cookware** (e.g. pans) without PFAS like ceramic or cast iron

**Use detergents** according to product instructions and even skip softeners altogether. Do full loads of laundry and dishes. Choose biodegradable, phosphate-free detergents and cleaners. Look for eco-labels.

**Don't shower straight after** applying ointments, such as pain-relief gels including diclofenac. Wipe off excess from your hands after application before washing your hands

**Sustainably grown or caught fish** make a healthy and Baltic Sea-friendly diet.

## Outdoors

**Your indoor and outdoor plants** deserve the best but use garden fertilisers only when needed and the minimum amount possible. If you must use herbicides and pesticides, make sure you choose environment-friendly options.

**Litter travels to the sea** via incorrect disposal at sea or near the coast, and through rivers or melting snow. Use litter bins or take waste home to recycle whenever possible.

**Food and beverage packaging, along with cigarette butts,** are some of the most common litter items in the Baltic Sea. To help reduce this, use reusable thermos mugs, water bottles and containers, and always dispose of cigarette butts in the bin.

**PFAS' are chemicals** used to make paper dishes and other products resistant to liquids and grease. Consider reusable options

# Everyday actions to achieve A healthy Baltic Sea

**During nesting season,** observe birds only from a safe distance, as they are very vulnerable to disturbance during that period. Keep pets on leashes to make sure they don't disturb birds and other wildlife.

**When you're out fishing make** sure you return any large female fish you catch. As the best breeders they are often the ones strongly sustaining fish populations.

**Many of us around the Baltic enjoy a good boat** ride but make sure your boat primers and antifouling paints are as environmentally friendly as possible. Many biofouling or cleaning agents can be toxic – explore less toxic alternatives or clean the bottom of your boat with a pressure washer or a brush.

## Through your wallet

**When buying new products** or disposing of old, such as furniture or construction materials, consider the need and chemicals they may contain. Favour recycled and sustainably produced products and check no harmful fire retardants have been added to the product.

**Favour natural fibres in clothing** and home décor, whenever possible, to reduce the amount of microplastics.

**When purchasing new waterproof products,** make sure they're made of eco-friendly fabrics without harmful chemicals like PFASs', which are commonly found in waterproof products and waterproofing sprays.

**Use a canvas bag** when shopping as it reduces the number of plastic bags used, one of the most commonly found single-use plastics in the Baltic Sea.

**Buy and eat only** sustainably caught and grown fish.

### Today's actions shape tomorrow's outcomes

**NOT SEEING THE IMMEDIATE EFFECTS** of our actions on the Baltic Sea doesn't mean they are not happening. Understanding how our actions, even the distant ones, connect to the Baltic Sea, and recognizing that its health is vital to our welfare, is essential for creating more positive futures for everyone. Something as simple as tossing a cigarette butt into a bin can help turn the tide, giving the Baltic Sea, its creatures, and the people around it a better future.

**THE ACTIONS OUTLINED HERE** are based on HELCOM's third holistic assessment of the state of the Baltic Sea, HOLAS 3. The study is a collaboration involving nearly 1,000 experts, the governments of nine countries, and the European Union, all working together for a healthier Baltic Sea.

**BY CONSIDERING THESE ACTIONS** in your daily life, you can contribute to the positive trends already visible in the HOLAS assessments and help drive further improvements.