



HELCOM Statement at the Rotterdam Stakeholder Conference on the European Marine Strategy

General

The 1974 and 1992 Conventions on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area were created, signed and ratified by the riparian countries for two reasons, firstly due to the special nature of the Baltic Sea and its environmental problems, and secondly because measures for the prevention and elimination of the pollution entering the Baltic Sea must be developed and implemented first and foremost by the riparian countries. The added value has been a sincere interest by all stakeholders in doing their utmost for their common marine environment.

The Baltic Sea States, while emphasising the importance of the European Marine Strategy for overall protection of the marine environment, reaffirm the significance of HELCOM as a spokesman for the Baltic Sea area in particular, with adjusted role and priorities. For example, the Helsinki Commission holds an established record and will continue to play an important role in assessing the environmental state of the Baltic, and in elaborating appropriate protective measures.

HELCOM underlines that it has a well-organised network of scientists, administrators and decision-makers that today serves and will continue to serve as the environmental focal point for the Baltic Sea region in relation to other international organizations and actors.

In the 2003 Bremen Declaration, HELCOM ministers acknowledged a need for a new focus of the HELCOM work as consequence of the EU enlargement. They were convinced that through their own actions, jointly or individually, the Baltic riparian countries can influence the state of the marine environment and the direction of its future state. They agreed that a new and adjusted HELCOM approach will be built on several elements: the future European Marine Strategy, political commitment within HELCOM, provision of a sound scientific basis, timely and proactive reactions, inclusion of social and economic aspects, effective resource management as well as harmonization and synergies. The work has to be focussed on activities that bring added value and avoid double work. This will be ensured finally by making use of HELCOM's legal mandate to develop Recommendations and supplementary measures, taking into account the specific requirements for the Baltic Sea area.

HELCOM reiterates this support, and takes this opportunity to describe how it relates to the themes of the Rotterdam Conference. The views expressed here are aimed at promoting the debate on the European Marine Strategy and may be further developed in future in the light of that debate. The HELCOM Contracting Parties will also make their own contributions to that debate.

Coordination of work

HELCOM underlines that for the effective protection of the Baltic Sea marine environment, membership of the European Union and the fulfilment of the appropriate EU directives might not always be sufficient, nor the only means.

The development of the European Marine Strategy has highlighted the need for coordination of the future work between EU and the Regional Marine Commissions, e.g. HELCOM and OSPAR. In the case of HELCOM, this is emphasised by the unique character of the Baltic Sea. At the same time it is important to cooperate with adjacent regions, to obtain synergetic effects for solving similar environmental problems.

HELCOM agrees that the European Marine Strategy and the work of HELCOM aim at coming to grips with many common challenges and priorities (e.g. implementing an ecosystem based approach, combating eutrophication, curbing land-based sources of pollution and enhancing the safety of navigation). However, the principle should be that the actions are taken at the most appropriate level. The old slogan “think globally – act locally” should still be very valid.

In this regard HELCOM has a renowned competence with respect to monitoring and assessment as well as for identifying appropriate measures which are adapted to special regional needs. In some cases (reducing nutrient loads, controlling land-based sources of pollution), actions at the EU level may be a very effective way to address the problem. In other cases (like shipping safety), a combination of actions on all levels – the national (Baltic Sea coastal state), the regional (HELCOM), the European (European Marine Strategy) and the global (IMO) – may be necessary.

Due to the changing political environment in the Baltic region there is a clear need for division of the work between EU and HELCOM. After the EU enlargement, the Russian Federation is the only HELCOM Baltic Sea country that is not an EU member. HELCOM shall contribute to enhancing its relation to the EU in order to ensure that the same environmental measures are implemented in the whole Baltic catchment area. Close and proactive co-operation between Russia and the EU member states is a vital prerequisite for any further progress in environmental protection also in the Baltic region. A common approach to develop the regions potential will lead to the sustainable development goal we aim for – which no one can do alone.

HELCOM stresses its important future function to support and mediate environmental development issues also in relation to Belarus and Ukraine, which are not EU members but whose territories lie in the Baltic Sea drainage area. Given the changes foreseen in the near future, it is important to include them in the HELCOM co-operation for the protection of the Baltic marine environment.

Added value

In the changing framework, it is only natural that HELCOM concentrates on activities that bring added value to the ongoing work within the Baltic Sea States and also in the whole catchment area. Examples of such areas where added value can be obtained are to:

- jointly pursue initiatives of the nine Baltic Sea States within international organizations and processes;
- harmonize the implementation by the nine Baltic Sea States of international regulations, where possible with the strictest demands; and
- initiate Baltic regional actions, either to make use of the possibility of HELCOM to act quicker than what is typically possible in international organizations, or to pursue specific Baltic interests that have not been taken into account in other international organizations.

Some positive examples of HELCOM activities with added value are:

- increased and deepened scientific knowledge of the state of the Baltic Sea and factors affecting it;
- the implementation of HELCOM and other requirements (Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive and the Water Framework Directive) in the Baltic

Sea region have resulted in a significant reduction of nutrient loads from point sources such as industry and municipalities;

- positive effects on biodiversity, such as the recovery of the white-tailed eagle around the Baltic Sea, the return of the cormorant to the whole region, early signs of recovery in Baltic wild salmon populations and increasing numbers of seals in northern areas of the Baltic Sea; and
- procedures of co-operation in the case of pollution incidents at sea which have been jointly developed and are regularly being tested during national and international exercises, and Contracting Parties carrying out regular aerial surveillance flights in order to detect pollution incidents and identify polluters.

HELCOM priority areas and working tools

HELCOM has a role in developing a regionally specific approach adapted to the needs of the Baltic Sea region in collaboration with EU. The European Marine Strategy could be an important tool to establish common principles and guidelines for this.

HELCOM's priority areas comprise monitoring and assessing the state of the entire Baltic Sea including the efficiency of protection measures, curbing eutrophication, preventing pollution from hazardous substances and ensuring safety of navigation and response to accidents. All these tasks should be tackled using an integrated management approach.

The backbones in this work are the HELCOM monitoring and assessment programmes as well as the HELCOM information on ecosystems and habitats.

The monitoring and assessment programmes of HELCOM provide information on pollution loads entering the sea as well as the impacts of human activities on the state of the marine environment. Hereby, problem areas and new-emerging issues threatening the marine environment are also identified.

This information is used for the implementation of the four priority areas of HELCOM's work, namely:

- reducing nutrient input to the sea in order to combat eutrophication,
- reducing inputs of hazardous substances into the Baltic Sea;
- addressing the environmental risks related to increasing maritime and offshore activities; and
- halting the decline of biodiversity and destruction of habitats.

Interaction with the European Marine Strategy

Summing up the above, HELCOM holds a common view that in achieving the goals of the European Marine Strategy it is very important that this strategy:

- Builds upon and complements the HELCOM objectives and actions;
- Allows HELCOM and other regional marine conventions to continue their work to ensure that specific regional conditions are taken into account and that the same environmental standards are being implemented in the whole catchment area including non-EU countries;
- Ensures that the potential impacts on the marine environment are taken into account in all policies/programmes.