

## **Baltic Sea Action Plan: A good Start on a long Journey**

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*Ms. Paula Lehtomäki, Minister of the Environment of Finland,  
Mr. Yuri Trutnev, Minister for Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation,  
Mr. Igor Maydanov, Chairman of HELCOM,  
Ms. Anne Christine Brusendorff, HELCOM Executive Secretary,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I would like to start by saying that I believe that the broad participation of stakeholders we see here today shows the strong interest and will in making the Baltic Sea Action Plan a success. This is very encouraging.

We all know that the Baltic Sea Action Plan is setting up ambitious goals, and the journey to reach those goals only has begun. It is clear that commitment is needed at all levels and by all stakeholders to reach our destination.

Therefore, I would also like to stress our gratefulness to the important work carried out by the Russian Chairmanship and by the HELCOM Secretariat. You give us great guidance and support in the initial phase of our journey. A good start is important to reach the destination in time – and in good shape! Thank you.

Sweden will be the next incoming HELCOM Chair in 2010 and we will make our best to see to that we do not lose speed on our journey the coming years!

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind us that HELCOM is a frontrunner. The issues which HELCOM has worked with for thirty years are now being acknowledged by its merits. The critical environmental status of the Baltic Sea is becoming increasingly present on the political agenda and important to the citizens of the region. The political processes need to, and increasingly are, responding to this concern.

Responding to the needs of the region must also take place at EU level. In BSAP we have negotiated and agreed on about 150 concrete actions for improving the status of the Baltic Sea. To reach our targets we need coordinated action.

This is one reason why the Swedish government has made the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region one key issue for the EU Presidency that will start in July. We hope that the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, now being developed by the EU Commission, will strengthen our work in turning our plan into action.

In the EU a lot is going on regarding the protection of inland, coastal and marine waters. Within the Water Framework Directive, programmes of action are being finalized. The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive came into force last summer and the Maritime Strategy is developing.

I believe that the joint HELCOM effort taken to make the Baltic Sea a pilot project under the Marine strategy framework directive is a good example on how our experience must feed into the EU work. Also, new areas, such as Marine Spatial Planning are emerging. HELCOM should not miss any of these opportunities and has to be part of them!

Ladies and gentlemen,

In these times when the financial crisis is dominating the news, it is more important than ever to show why investment in the environment pays back. Just a few days ago, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency presented a new report – “*What can the sea give us?*” – showing that out of 26 ecosystem services provided by the sea, only ten are working at optimal level. Seven are seriously threatened. All these ecosystem services are valuable to humankind, and we can not afford to loose them. The report also shows that the BSAP eutrophication component is good business for the region. Taking action in accordance with the BSAP is providing a net benefit of about two billion Euro per year. Environmental investments do pay back!

Real investments are necessary to be able to profit from the ecosystem services. In 2007 the Swedish government has for the first time introduced a completely new budget line for the marine environment, half a billion Swedish crowns. In last year’s budget, this amount was doubled to one billion crowns, about 100 million Euros. In a few weeks a new marine bill will be presented to the parliament outlining a new Swedish maritime policy.

Many financial sources are available for action. At the EU level we have several financing instruments providing significant resources for the Baltic Sea. Important cooperation projects on the municipal level are taking place thanks to these funds. Private foundations are doing needed investments in protecting the Baltic Sea. The Nordic Investment Bank has established a new lending instrument for the Baltic Sea. Sweden will support the Technical Assistance Fund which we hope will help develop new investment projects and boost the use of the NIB fund so we can see concrete results.

In 2010 the HELCOM countries must present its plan for the implementation of the BSAP.. Developing the implementation plan is a challenging task. Sharing experiences between our countries is therefore very useful.

One example of cooperation in the development of national implementation plans is the bilateral cooperation project being developed between the Russian Federation and Sweden, in close coordination by HELCOM.

In mid-March the 10th Anniversary of the Baltic Sea Days in St Petersburg will take place. Baltic Sea Days has also become an important arena to share experiences and move forward, and is an important complement to this stakeholder event.

Finally,

Thanks to HELCOM we have a good cooperation mechanism, a wealth of knowledge about the issues, and never before we have had so many opportunities and also means to really do something concrete to save the Baltic. The new PLC-5 numbers also show that we may have turned the trend regarding the nutrient loads to the sea, which would be good news for everyone. This is a good start on our journey.

HELCOM must show leadership and continue to respond to need for saving the marine environment. Our work is often at the forefront and by its merits it can be echoed within the EU and the world. We should be proud of being able to give a good example of what regional cooperation really can achieve.

Thank you.