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1/2003 Newsletter

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From May 2004 onwards, eight of the nine countries around the shores of the Baltic Sea will be members of the European Union. To help HELCOM adapt to this new political situation, the environment ministers from all the HELCOM countries are meeting on 25 June 2003 to fine-tune the organisation's working structures and set future priorities.

In our work protecting our unique sea, we benefit greatly from close co-operation with other regional marine environmental protection commissions. The co-ordinated measures to be set up by the Joint OSPAR and HELCOM Ministerial Meeting on 26 June 2003 will represent a vital step forward in the protection of both the Baltic Sea and the North East Atlantic.

Mieczysław S. Ostojki
Executive Secretary

Working together for our seas - HELCOM meets OSPAR

This June 23rd-27th the German city of Bremen is hosting separate Ministerial Meetings of both the Commission for the Protection of the Northeast-Atlantic (OSPAR MMC) and the Baltic Sea Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM MMC), and a special Joint Ministerial Meeting involving both Commissions (JMMC).

Observers from International governmental and non-governmental organisations and International Financing Institutions will participate in the meetings together with representatives from all the Contracting Parties to OSPAR and HELCOM, including the Commission of the European Community as well as all the coastal countries around the North East Atlantic and the Baltic Sea.

Wide-ranging issues under review

The meetings aim to:

- analyse the current status of policies for the protection of the marine environment in Europe



- discuss important issues related to present and future policies
- analyse the need for co-ordination and co-operation between the two regional marine conventions and the European Community, and determine

Chair's Corner



I believe one of the most important items on the agenda of the forthcoming ministerial meeting is defining the respective roles and contributions of the two marine commissions HELCOM and OSPAR with regard to the European Marine Strategy. The involvement of non-EU countries like the Russian Federation is particularly vital in this context, since a strategy is being shaped for the whole of Europe.

Recent shipping accidents in the North-East Atlantic and the Baltic Sea have proven once more that the impact of shipping on the marine environment is a crucial issue for both commissions. The designation of the Baltic Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area is now more urgently needed than ever.

Increasing shipping, marine installations and overfishing all add to the pressure on marine ecosystems, and the commitment of both commissions to applying ecosystem approaches is another important step forward. This will increase the involvement of other policy sectors in the vital task of ensuring that marine resources are used sustainably.

Inese Vaidere
HELCOM Chair

how the relevant work should be distributed among the key players. The following specific issues will also be discussed at the respective meetings:

OSPAR

1. Results and further development of:
 - the Strategy with Regard to Hazardous Substances
 - the Strategy with Regard to Radioactive Substances
 - the Strategy to Combat Eutrophication
 - the Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Ecosystems and Biological Diversity of the Maritime Area
 - the Strategy on Environmental Goals and Management Mechanisms for Offshore Activities
 - the Joint Monitoring and Assessment Programme
2. Disposal of Offshore Installations

3. Programme for the More Detailed Implementation of the OSPAR Strategy with regard to Radioactive Substances
4. Application of an ecosystem approach as a tool for implementing the OSPAR-Convention.

HELCOM

1. Combating Eutrophication
2. Nature conservation in marine environments, the preservation of biodiversity and the adoption of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM)
3. The future of the Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP)
4. Implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration on the safety of shipping
5. Compliance checking with regard to the implementation of the Convention.

Joint HELCOM-OSPAR Meeting

1. Co-operation with the European Community on developing and implementing a comprehensive European Marine Strategy (also applicable to the Mediterranean and Black Seas)
2. Conservation of biodiversity, with specific regard to negative impacts from fisheries
3. Establishing a network of marine protected areas
4. Harmonisation of the implementation of international rules for shipping
5. Co-operation with the African Conventions on the protection of the marine environment, with the Nairobi Convention as HELCOM's partner, and the Abidjan Convention as OSPAR's partner.

Timetable

- Monday 23 June 2003
8:00 – 17:30 OSPAR Ordinary Meeting
- Tuesday 24 June 2003
9:00 – 17:30 OSPAR Ordinary Meeting
- Wednesday 25 June 2003
8:00 – 10:30 HELCOM Regular Meeting
11:00 – 14:00 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting
14:30 – 17:30 OSPAR Ministerial Meeting
17:45 – 18:30 JOINT Ministerial Meeting
- Thursday 26 June 2003,
JOINT Ministerial Meeting continued
- Friday 27 June 2003,
closing of Meetings

Organisers

Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Germany
Heinrich-von-Stephan-Str. 1, 53175 Bonn, Germany
Internet: <http://www.bmu.de>



Parties of the HELCOM and OSPAR Ministerial Meetings (indicated by green)



Picture: African sailboat



Joint Ministerial Meeting: Twinning agreements

HELCOM's active participation in UNEP's Regional Seas Programme expresses the importance of sharing experiences from the Baltic Sea region with other regions around the world. The twinning arrangement with the Nairobi Convention has already made valuable practical contributions and helped to spread vital information among the growing global network of organisations working to protect regional seas. This twinning of Regional Seas agreements is a good example of practical networking, and shows how shared experiences can strengthen regional programmes. It is hoped that the twinning agreement between OSPAR and the Abidjan Convention will build on the useful experiences obtained through the HELCOM-NAIROBI twinning.

Dixon Waruinge

HELCOM and the Nairobi Convention: Two heads are better than one

By Dixon Waruinge

A notable example of how the Nairobi Convention has gained from the experiences of HELCOM is the remodelling of the Convention's Heads of Delegation and Experts Meetings by adapting organisational structures devised at HELCOM. The new model is being used for the expert working groups of the Conference of Parties (COP) to develop Work Programmes. Representatives of civil society, NGOs, and scientific institutions are invited to experts' meetings before the COP Heads of Delegations meetings.

In recent years HELCOM has also actively transferred its experiences in:

- monitoring and assessing the coastal and marine environment and resources
- preventing pollution from land-based activities
- nature conservation and coastal zone management
- increasing the involvement of the private sector and national financial institutions.

This exchange of knowledge is to be continued and intensified.

Preparations for the twinning agreement started back in 1996, when the Contracting Parties of the Nairobi Convention chose HELCOM – out of 17 regional marine conventions worldwide – as a twinning partner to help speed up the implementation of the East African Regional Action Plan and other activities approved by the Conference of Parties.

For the previous eleven years, slow ratification and ineffective co-ordination had been hampering actions to curb the degradation of the coastal and marine environment of the East African region. These environmental problems are mainly due to the uncontrolled development of tourism and industry, the discharge of untreated sewage, and other impacts related to increasingly rapid population growth.

The Nairobi Convention

The Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region;

Adopted: June 1985

Entry into force: 1996

Contracting Parties: Comoros, France (La Reunion), Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia and the United Republic of Tanzania

N.B. South Africa has been invited to join the Nairobi Convention and associated Protocols

Associated Protocols:

- Protocol concerning Protected Areas and Wild Fauna and Flora in the Eastern African Region;
- Protocol concerning Co-operation in Combating Marine Pollution in Cases of Emergency in the Eastern African Region;
- Action Plan for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region

Contact details of the regional office:

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Progress in reducing nutrient pollution

The results of a recent study show that good progress has been made in reducing nutrient loads from point sources such as municipal and industrial waste water treatment plants. Almost all of the countries around the Baltic Sea have managed to reach the target of a 50% reduction in loads from point sources for phosphorus, although measures to cut nutrient loads originating from agricultural sources have fallen short of their 50% reduction target.

Fortunately, nutrient loads from point sources should continue to fall as nitrogen and phosphorus removal measures go on reducing emissions from municipal plants, especially in the EU accession countries. The more

widespread adoption of Best Available Techniques will also cut nutrient loads from industrial sources.

Reducing nutrient loads in runoff from farmland is much tougher than cutting point source loads. Existing load reduction measures should eventually help to curb nutrient loads from agriculture, but there is a considerable time lag before the effects of agricultural water protection measures can be seen in water bodies. Agricultural production is also expected to rise after EU enlargement, which will probably lead to increased nutrient discharges.

It must be remembered that other diffuse pollution sources contribute

significantly to the nutrient loads entering the Baltic Sea, so there is also a need to reduce airborne inputs of nitrogen both from shipping and from sources on land, as well as to cut nutrient loads originating from small municipalities and scattered settlements in rural areas.

Nutrient pollution has been an important political issue around the Baltic Sea ever since the late 1980s when the region's environment ministers set the 50% reduction targets. Related problems such as intense algal blooms and oxygen depletion still occur regularly in the Baltic Sea.

Algal blooms expected in the Baltic again this summer

Extensive blue-green algal blooms are likely to form in many parts of the Baltic Sea this year, particularly in the Northern Baltic Proper, in the southern waters of the Archipelago Sea, in the Åland Archipelago and throughout the Gulf of Finland, according to the sixth forecast issued by the Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) and the Finnish Institute of Marine Research (FIMR)

The predictions are based on nutrient concentrations observed this spring at 180 locations throughout the Baltic Sea by the Finnish Institute of Marine Research, Finland's environmental authorities, the City of Helsinki Environment Centre, and research institutes in Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

Intense blooms are quite likely, since nutrient concentrations in the sea increased considerably during the late winter and spring. If the summer turns out to be warm, the first floating algal

mats in the open sea will probably be observed around the end of June, with blooming probably peaking in late July. If the summer is cool, the peak will not be reached until August, and blooms will be less extensive. Concentrations of blue-green algae will remain low until midsummer even if the weather is warm, due to the belated warming of the sea this year.

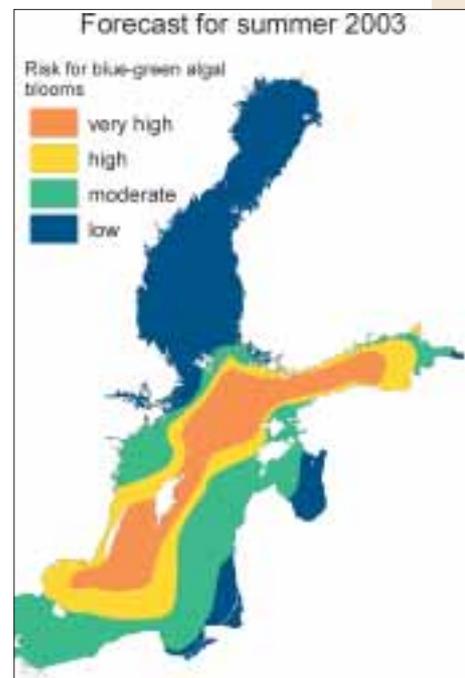
Blue-green algae mats typically form in the open sea. Depending on the wind conditions, some mats drift towards the coast and the archipelago. Due to the uncertainty of long-term weather forecasts, these movements cannot be predicted for more than a couple of days ahead. The Finnish Environment Institute and the Finnish Institute of Marine Research provide two-day forecasts on the movements of any extensive algal blooms in the open sea, but information on localised blooms in bays and in the archipelagos is more difficult to obtain.

Blue-green algae forecasts include predictions of the type of algae involved,

since certain species are poisonous to humans and domestic animals.

Further information:

www.itameriportaali.fi
Finnish Environment Institute, algal information, phone +358 10 808 898
Finnish Institute of Marine Research, Alg@line, phone +358 400 609 269



The Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme – Getting rid of pollution Hot Spots

There has already been considerable praise for the successful achievements of the Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP), even though the programme

is only half-way through its 20-year implementation period. The JCP aims to support both preventive and curative measures in the Baltic Sea drainage basin, and to restore the ecological balance of the Baltic Sea by reducing pollution loads. The most prominent of the JCP's six main elements has been the targeting and cleaning up of pollution Hot Spots around the Baltic Sea.

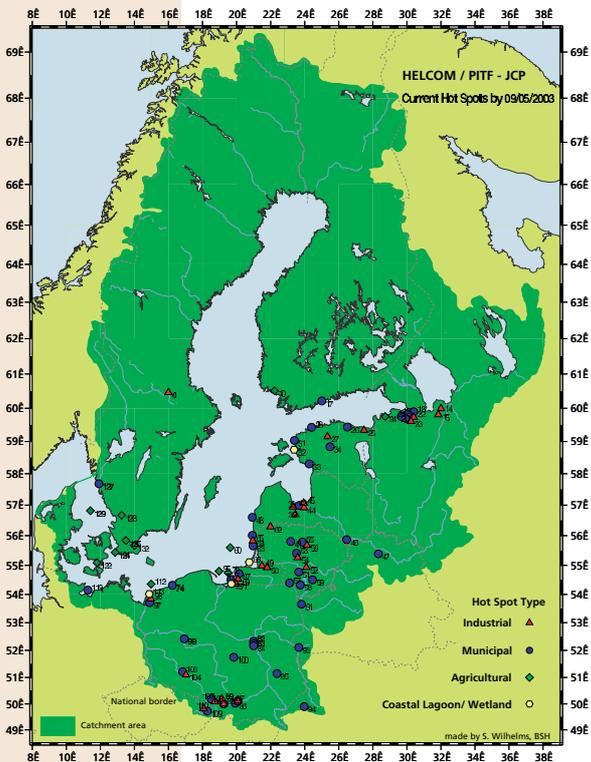
as less dramatic cuts in NO_x and SO_x loads of 4% and 3%, respectively.

The key to these successes has been the wide-ranging support for the JCP implementation from all the Members and Observers of the Programme Implementation Task Force (PITF), which comprises representatives from International Financial Institutions and international governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as from the European Union and all the countries in the Baltic Sea drainage basin.

Investment projects designed to combat point-source and non-point source pollution are already well under way, largely focusing on the pollution Hot Spots identified at the beginning of the JCP.

The impressive financial support obtained for the Programme – of at least €1.1 billion, not accounting for investments at 20 Hot Spots which have not submitted investment reports - demonstrates the efficient linkage of environmental priorities with a wide range of financial resources. The use of co-financing, combining loans from International Financial Institutions and grants from the European Union and bilateral donors, has proven to be particularly effective.

These activities have resulted in the formal deletion of 47 of the 132 Hot Spots originally listed, the partial deletion of another three, and considerable reductions in the overall pollution loads originating from all the Hot Spots. The deleted Hot Spots alone account for reductions of 21% in BOD loads, 25% in COD loads, 22% in the total nitrogen loads, 27% in the total phosphorus load, and 89% in AOX loads, as well



Map of Hot Spots

US \$ 12 million for the Baltic – the Baltic Sea Regional Project finally starts

Part of international efforts to combat the environmental degradation of the Baltic Sea, the World Bank, acting on behalf of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), has provided a grant of \$5.5 million for the Baltic Sea Regional Project. Contributions from other co-financiers and project beneficiaries including Finland, Norway, Sweden, the United States and the Nordic Environ-

ment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) should bring the total funds available for the Project up to more than \$12 million.

The long-term objective of the Baltic Sea Regional Project (BSRP) is to introduce ecosystem-based assessments to improve the management of coastal and marine environments around the Baltic Sea. The project will involve

urgently needed action to address transboundary environmental concerns such as sustainable fisheries, the conservation of living marine resources, and the curbing of pollution from diffuse sources on farmland. Measures will also be taken to improve decision-making at the regional, national and local levels by strengthening assessment and monitoring systems, and

by supporting regional efforts for the development and implementation of ecosystem-based management for the natural resources of the Baltic. The project has been designed to help improve the general environmental situation in and around the Baltic Sea through better integrated management, based on the Large Marine Ecosystem approach.

HELCOM will manage the project in cooperation with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the Agricultural University of Stockholm, WWF, NEFCO and the International Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission (IBSFC). The actions within the project will take place in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia. The BSRP is expected to be completed by June 30, 2006.



Mr Roger W. Grawe from the World Bank and HELCOM Executive Secretary Mr Mieczysław S. Ostojki signing the GEF Grant Agreement



Official start of the Baltic Sea Regional Project

Curbing land-based pollution – implementing HELCOM Recommendations

More than forty HELCOM Recommendations concern measures to limit pollution originating from the land – from either point sources such as industrial plants and municipal waste water treatment plants, or diffuse sources including traffic and farmland. Several more recommendations specify product controls.

Although the HELCOM countries have improved their implementation of HELCOM Recommendations since the previous reporting round in 1998, environmental regulations could still be strengthened and better enforced.

The current EU member states have done better in their implementation of HELCOM Recommendations in

general, but in spite of the measures taken to address pollution from agriculture, they are still lagging behind in terms of significant reductions in nutrient loads, especially regarding phosphorus. The main reason for the stubbornly high phosphorus concentrations in runoff is the persistent surplus of phosphorus in the soil, due to the high usage of fertilisers in the past.

Conversely in the EU accession countries and Russia, in spite of slower progress on the formal implementation of HELCOM Recommendations, there have been significant reductions in pollution, at least from point sources, largely thanks to the construction and modernisation of munic-

ipal waste water treatment plants and the decline in industrial production. The EU accession countries have also improved their implementation of product control legislation, on pesticides, for instance.

Despite the slower implementation in the EU accession countries and Russia of recommendations on limiting pollution from agriculture, nutrient loads have generally fallen more than in the EU member countries, since a widespread decline in agricultural production in the early 1990s involved drastic reductions in the use of fertilisers.

Forthcoming meetings

18-19 September 2003

Second Meeting of the Pilot Expert Working Group (PILOT EWG)

23 September 2003

Third Meeting of the Ice Expert Working Group (ICE EWG), Gothenburg, Sweden

6-7 October 2003

Sixth Meeting of the Expert Working Group for Mutual Exchange and Deliveries of AIS data (AIS EWG), Helsinki, Finland

20-24 October 2003

Sixth Meeting of the Monitoring and Assessment Group (HELCOM MONAS)

27-28 October 2003

HELCOM HOD 13/2003, Helsinki, Finland

10-12 November 2003

Eighth Meeting of the Land-based Pollution Group (HELCOM LAND), Stockholm, Sweden

3 December 2003

Fourth Meeting of the Ice Expert Working Group (ICE EWG), St. Petersburg, Russia

10-12 December 2003

Third Meeting of the Response Group (HELCOM RESPONSE), St. Petersburg, Russia

2004

20-22 January 2004

Second Meeting of the Maritime Group (HELCOM MARITIME), Stockholm, Sweden



Risky waters

The Baltic Sea is one of the world's busiest seas, with around 2,000 ships at sea at any time, accounting for 15% of the world's cargo transportation. All these ships and their often hazardous cargoes are crowded into a relatively small area of water with many rocky shallows, narrow straits and labyrinthine archipelagos, as well as harsh winter ice conditions.

Forecasts indicate that due to economic growth, especially in the eastern part of the region, the amount of cargo shipped on the Baltic will double by 2015 – from 500 million tonnes to 1,000 million tonnes annually.

Oil transportation is particularly expected to increase, especially in the Gulf of Finland, where a four-fold rise in the annual transportation of oil from 20 million to 90 million tonnes is

predicted, due to the construction and expansion of Russian oil terminals.

The increasing numbers of ships plying their routes between more than 200 Baltic ports all add to the risk of a serious accident – or a potentially devastating oil-spill. Oil is transported from 20 ports around the Baltic, with 150 to 200 oil-tankers serviced every day. On the basis of the increasing traffic and the increasing size of the tankers, it has been estimated that the risk of a major oil spill of more than 1,000 tonnes will rise by 25%.

The environmental impacts of shipping are on the agenda of the HELCOM Ministerial meeting in Bremen (25 June 2003) – where decisions are expected on measures to increase the safety of navigation and improve regional capacity to deal with emergencies.

Campaigning for PSSA status for the Baltic

Dramatic increases in shipping traffic in the Baltic Sea are compounding the risks of harmful environmental impacts on sensitive marine ecosystems.

Officially designating the Baltic Sea as a "Particularly Sensitive Sea Area" (PSSA) could raise environmental awareness in the shipping industry, leading to changes in maritime practices that would help to protect the fragile Baltic marine environment from ship-borne pollution.

PSSA status for the Baltic could also facilitate the introduction of additional

regulatory measures to complement and toughen up the existing pollution prevention and safety measures imposed through HELCOM and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

PSSAs are administered by the IMO, and they are designated in marine areas which are highly sensitive to the impacts of heavy sea traffic. Five marine areas have so far been designated as PSSAs, and the Baltic Sea is among several other areas currently under consideration. This issue will be discussed by the HELCOM Ministers in Bremen in June 2003.

