

introduced into the marine environment might harm human health, living resources or marine ecosystems, or damage amenities or interfere with other legitimate uses of the sea.

Best Environmental Practices and Best Available Techniques are to be promoted by the Contracting Parties to prevent the pollution of the Baltic Sea. Additional measures shall be taken if the consequent reductions of inputs do not lead to acceptable results.

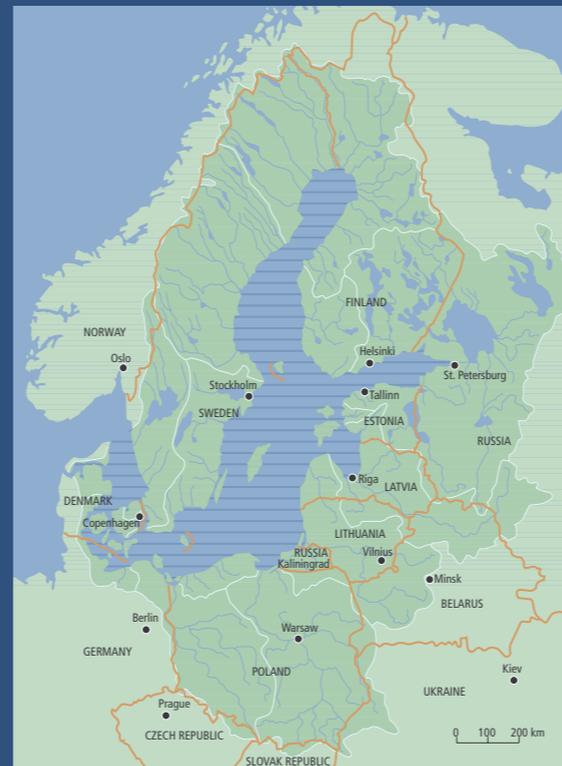
The **"polluter pays" principle** should serve as the economic basis for the control of environmentally harmful activities, emphasising the importance of responsibility by forcing polluters to pay for the true costs of their activities.

Monitoring

Emissions from both point sources and diffuse sources into water and the air should be measured and calculated in a scientifically appropriate manner by the Contracting Parties. The Contracting Parties are also committed to identifying and assessing the effects of anthropogenic discharges in the Baltic Sea, and to identifying and evaluating the changes in the environment as a result of regulatory actions.

Avoiding risks

Implementing the Helsinki Convention should neither result in transboundary pollution affecting regions outside the Baltic Sea area, nor involve increases or changes in waste disposal or other activities that could increase health risks. Any measures taken must not lead to unacceptable environmental strains on the atmosphere, soils, water bodies or groundwater.



HELCOM is taking measures in the whole catchment area of the Baltic Sea, which is populated by around 85 million people in 14 countries. Most of the pollution from this area eventually finds its way into the sea, largely through more than 200 rivers flowing into the Baltic.



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The Helsinki Commission HELCOM

Three decades of international
co-operation on protecting
the marine environment of
the Baltic Sea



Helsinki Commission
Baltic Marine Environment
Protection Commission

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The Helsinki Commission

All the coastal states around the Baltic Sea (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden) and the European Community are working together to protect the Baltic marine environment from all sources of pollution, as spelled out in the “Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area” – more usually known as the Helsinki Convention.

The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) has overall responsibility for the implementation of the Helsinki Convention.

The 1974 Convention

For the first time ever, all the sources of pollution around an entire sea were made subject to a single convention, signed in 1974 by the then seven Baltic coastal states. The 1974 Convention entered into force on 3 May 1980.

The 1992 Convention

In the light of political changes, and developments in international environmental and maritime law, a new convention was signed in 1992 by all the states bordering on the Baltic Sea, and the European Community. After ratification the Convention entered into force on 17 January 2000. The Convention covers the whole of the Baltic Sea area, including inland waters as well as the water of the sea itself and the sea-bed. Measures are also taken in the whole catchment area of the Baltic Sea to reduce land-based pollution.

HELCOM today

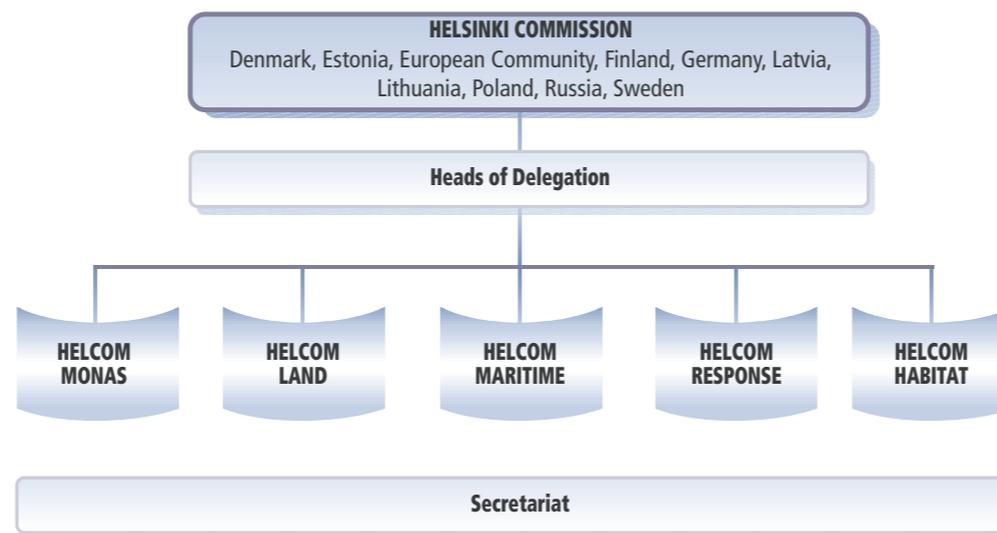
The Helsinki Commission meets annually. Ministerial level meetings are also held occasionally. The Commission unanimously adopts Recommendations for the protection of the marine environment, which the governments of the Contracting Parties must act on in their respective national programmes and legislation.

The chairmanship of the Helsinki Commission rotates between the Contracting Parties every two years, according to their alphabetical order in English.

The working structure of HELCOM, supported by the Secretariat, consists of the meetings of the Helsinki Commission, the Heads of Delegation, and five subsidiary bodies.

The Helsinki Commission is also responsible for monitoring and implementing:

- the Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP), established to facilitate and monitor the elimination of the 132 most significant pollution sources (“hot spots”) within the Baltic Sea catchment area;
- the 2001 Ministerial Declaration on Safer Shipping;
- the 2003 Bremen Ministerial Declaration;
- the Baltic Sea Regional Project – a World Bank/Global Environment Facility funded project dealing with Large Marine Ecosystem Management, Land and Coastal Management, and Institutional Strengthening and Regional Capacity Building.



The Monitoring and Assessment Group (HELCOM MONAS) constitutes the backbone in the work of HELCOM by assessing the trends in pressures and their impacts on the state of the marine environment and by evaluating the effectiveness of adopted measures. This forms the basis for discussions in other groups on the need for mitigation measures and actions. MONAS produces targeted and timely assessments and co-ordinates supporting monitoring programmes based on the specific features of the Baltic Sea.

The Land-based Pollution Group (HELCOM LAND) identifies point sources and diffuse sources of land-based pollution, and proposes suitable actions in order to reduce emissions and discharges.

The Nature Protection and Biodiversity Group (HELCOM HABITAT) co-ordinates regional activities to conserve and protect biodiversity, species, and habitats and to enhance sustainable use of living marine resources in co-operation with appropriate stakeholders. The group promotes the ecosystem approach for the sustainable use and management of coastal and marine natural resources, and fosters Coastal Zone Management Plans.

The Maritime Group (HELCOM MARITIME) develops measures to ensure that shipping in the Baltic is environmentally safe and sound. The group identifies sea-based sources of pollution and proposes actions to limit emissions, discharges, and transfer of non-indigenous organisms by ships.

The Response Group (HELCOM RESPONSE) works to ensure a swift national and transnational response to marine pollution incidents. This involves preparing and testing response equipment and emergency routines where co-operation between neighbouring states is needed. The group co-ordinates aerial surveillance flights and considers the possible use of satellites in order to prevent deliberate pollution from ships.

Co-operation
HELCOM co-operates with a range of Baltic Sea stakeholders which participate in meetings and contribute to the work. The partners which have been granted observer status to HELCOM encompass the governments of Belarus and Ukraine, and about 35 inter-governmental and non-governmental international organisations.

Principles

Responsibility
In order to restore the ecosystem of the Baltic Sea area and preserve its ecological balance the Contracting Parties shall individually or jointly take all appropriate legislative, administrative or other measures to prevent and eliminate pollution.

The precautionary principle
Preventive measures must be taken whenever there are reasonable grounds to believe that substances or energy directly or indirectly

