

Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings No. 92

Activities 2002

Overview



Helsinki Commission
Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

HELCOM's activities 2002–2003

Introduction

This report summarises the activities of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) related to the protection of the Baltic marine environment over the period March 2002 to June 2003. This year's report reviews HELCOM's activities according to the main environmental issues, rather than on the basis of HELCOM's organisational structure.

The review also includes a description of the launching of the "Baltic Sea Regional Project", which is funded by the Global Environment Facility. A Grant Agreement for this project has been signed with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

More details of HELCOM's activities, projects and publications are available at www.helcom.fi, together with background information about environmental issues related to the Baltic Sea.

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Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings

Foreword



Over the past year, HELCOM has tackled priority areas at full steam - combating eutrophication with special emphasis on the agricultural sector, curbing inputs of hazardous substances, conserving nature, and working to improve navigational safety and guarantee a swift response to any accident.

Two major ministerial meetings marked the political climax of the period covered by this publication (April 2002 - June 2003). One of these meetings was held together with HELCOM's sister organisation OSPAR, which covers the marine environment of the North East Atlantic region. This meeting of the environment ministers of more than twenty countries and the EC commissioner was very timely, considering both the changing political environment in the Baltic region, and the EU's current preparations for a common European Marine Strategy. The meeting stressed the continuing role of regional marine commissions like HELCOM and OSPAR in protecting the interlinked ecosystems of the Baltic and the Atlantic from all sources of pollution.

This report compiles useful information on several recent HELCOM publications, including the major report "The Baltic Marine Environment 1992-2002", indicator reports on various important issues, statistics on accidents at sea, maps depicting the region's accident response capabilities, a report on water pricing and

cost recovery, a review of improvements at pollution "hot spots", and the outcomes of the Regional Workshops held in Germany, Sweden, Ukraine, Poland and the Czech Republic to discuss these hot spots.

Several new initiatives are also presented, including the launch of a significant project financed by the World Bank to boost the protection of the marine environment in the Baltic region, a joint EU-HELCOM project on dioxins and PCBs, the development of ecological quality objectives, and a practical exercise where capabilities to respond to an oil spill at sea were tested using a vast quantity of popcorn.

I hope that this publication will provide you with a good overview of the activities of HELCOM over the last fifteen months. Please visit our HELCOM website for further information on all these activities, and many other aspects of HELCOM's work protecting the Baltic marine environment.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne Christine Brusendorff".

Anne Christine Brusendorff

Executive Secretary of the Helsinki Commission
(as of August 2003)

1. Environmental monitoring and reporting

Major reports

In order to provide scientifically reliable information on the state of the Baltic marine environment, HELCOM co-ordinates monitoring programmes and assesses pollution loads and the status of the marine environment. Over the last year HELCOM has finalised the following reports:

- Several Indicator Reports covering topics from hydrographical background forcing to plankton blooms and pollution loads,
- "The Baltic Marine Environment 1999-2002" – an overall assessment of the state of the Baltic Sea (BSEP No. 87),
- a detailed scientific background assessment: "Radioactivity in the Baltic Sea 1992-1998" (BSEP No. 85),
- Executive Summary of the Fourth Baltic Sea Pollution Load Compilation, and
- "The Review of More Specific Targets to reach the Goals set in the 1988/1998 Ministerial Declaration regarding Nutrients" (BSEP No. 89).

The new Ecological Quality Objectives project

In order to provide accessible and reliable information to facilitate decision-making on complex environmental issues, HELCOM is currently reviewing reporting and monitoring procedures. This review takes into account the ecosystem approach to the management of human activities and the need to ensure that these activities are compatible with the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive, pan-European reporting and other such activities. A pilot study into the development of a road map for the establishment of Ecological Quality Objectives (EcoQOs) for the Baltic Sea within HELCOM is one part of this process.

2. Combating eutrophication and hazardous substances

According to the recent assessment of “The Baltic Marine Environment 1999-2002” the Baltic Sea is particularly vulnerable to pollution involving hazardous substances and excess nutrients, due to its unique natural conditions. Eutrophication induced by excessive nutrient loads has considerably reduced oxygen levels even in shallow coastal waters. Biodiversity and fish stocks have also been affected, and intense algal blooms are still common.

Heavy metals and persistent organic compounds

The good news on heavy metals include clear decreases in lead concentrations in herring in most areas. The concentrations of other metals such as cadmium in marine organisms are declining in some areas (e.g. the Gulf of Bothnia and the Gulf of Finland), but increasing in others (e.g. the western Baltic Proper).

Concentrations of HCH-isomers (lindane), dioxins and PCBs have decreased considerably since the early 1980s. But dioxin levels in fish still exceed the new EU food safety limits in some areas, particularly further north. TBT concentrations are still so high they have potential biological effects, at least in the Kattegat, the Belt Sea and the Sound.

The chemical weapons dumped in certain deep waters of the Baltic Sea in the 1940s are not currently seen as a serious threat to marine ecosystems. Research also indicates that any attempt to recover these munitions would be more likely to cause harm than good.

Keeping a close eye on dioxins and PCBs

To get a clear overall picture of trends concerning dioxins and PCBs in the Baltic Sea, it is important to integrate studies of human health with the close monitoring of concentrations in the environment and seafood, in order to investigate any linkages. In cooperation with the European Commission, HELCOM launched the “Integrated Dioxin and PCB Monitoring Pilot Project in the Baltic Region” in October 2002, in order to collate information from a range of existing and planned national and international dioxin/PCB monitoring activities examining environmental factors (e.g. sediments, bio-indicators), seafood and human health (blood, breast milk, fat).

Eutrophication still a major problem

The problematic symptoms of eutrophication – including serious oxygen deficiency, extensive algal blooms and floating mats of decaying seaweed in coastal waters – remain all too common, in spite of substantial efforts to reduce nutrient inputs on a wide front.

Progress in cutting nutrient loads

A major study – “The Review of More Specific Targets to reach the Goals set in the 1988/1998 Ministerial Declaration regarding Nutrients” (BSEP No. 89) – has been conducted to assess progress towards the strategic goals of the 1988 Ministerial Declaration regarding nutrient load reductions. This review shows that progress in reducing nutrient loads from point sources such as municipal and industrial wastewater treatment plants has been good, with the 50% reduction target for phosphorus achieved by almost all the Contracting Parties. But the results also show that measures to reduce nutrients from agriculture have fallen short of their aims.

Further reductions in nutrient loads from point sources are likely, since the continued implementation of nitrogen and phosphorus removal measures will further curb loads from municipal plants, especially in the EU accession countries. Further implementation of Best Available Techniques will also cut industrial nutrient pollution loads.

Comprehensive official plans to reduce inputs of nutrients to the Baltic Sea have so far been adopted by national governments in Finland, Latvia and Sweden. Plans to reduce nutrient loads in the other Contracting Parties which are or will soon be EU members mainly focus on the implementation of the related EU Directives, which also contribute to the reduction of nutrient inputs into the Baltic Sea.

The struggle to curb agricultural pollution

Agriculture is a major source of nutrients, and with the expected rise in agricultural production after EU enlargement, discharges of nutrients from farm-

land are likely to increase in many areas around the Baltic Sea. Reducing nutrient loads from agriculture is more complicated than cutting loads from point sources. The implementation of agri-environmental measures is expected to promote reductions in nutrient loads from agriculture, but there is a considerable time lag between the implementation of agricultural water protection measures and any visible effects in water bodies downstream.

The HELCOM Working Group on Agriculture finalised its work at two meetings in 2002. The group's achievements are reviewed in a final report which describes the implementation of Annex III of the Convention, the outcome of a related Danish project "Assessing the Status of Implementation of Environmental Regulations of Agriculture in the Baltic and partly the North Sea Areas", the status of the JCP Agricultural Hot Spots, and progress regarding monitoring and plans of action to combat plant nutrient losses from agriculture.

Most, but not all, of the requirements of HELCOM's existing agricultural recommendations are covered by the 1992 Helsinki Convention (Annex III). In order to cover any issues not contained in Annex III, the Working Group on Agriculture paved the way for the combination of HELCOM's earlier agricultural Recommendations in a new "umbrella" Recommendation.

HELCOM and Poland acted as co-lead parties for the Task Force on Agriculture in supporting the actions of the Baltic 21 programme, by organising meetings and preparing indicators and contributions for the Baltic 21 Triennial Report and an Agricultural Sector Fact Sheet. At the recent Senior Officials Group meeting, HELCOM stepped down as co-lead party.

A package of measures to combat eutrophication was agreed on by the region's environment ministers at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in June 2003. The aims of these measures are:

- to make agriculture more environmentally sustainable by supporting the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy,
- to ensure that EU directives such as the Nitrate and Urban Waste Water Directives are fully implemented,

- to improve agricultural practices to ensure efficient nutrient utilisation and to reduce adverse environmental impacts, and
- to achieve further reductions in inputs of nutrients from other sources.

More work needed to limit nutrient loads

- More efforts must be made to reduce nutrient loads, especially from agriculture.
- The relationships between sources and impacts must be evaluated more accurately, in order to facilitate the preparation of more cost-effective measures, some of which can be tailor-made to deal with regional problems.
- Existing HELCOM reduction goals for nutrient loads must be harmonised with the objectives of the EC Water Framework Directive.
- It must also be remembered that other diffuse sources contribute significantly to the nutrient inputs entering the Baltic Sea, and there is an urgent need to reduce airborne inputs of nitrogen from both land-based and sea-based sources. Inputs of nutrients from urban areas, smaller municipalities and scattered settlements must also be addressed.

The Hazardous Substances Project

The recently completed HELCOM Hazardous Substances Project compiled all the available data on sources, pathways, markets and the legal situation relating to selected hazardous substances, in order to assess the exposure situation and identify suitable cost-effective measures.

The project team was thus able to prepare special documents covering mercury, cadmium, short-chained chlorinated paraffins, nonylphenol and nonylphenoethoxylates, dioxins and PCBs. These guidance documents have been designed to help policy makers to choose the most efficient instruments and measures to eliminate the emissions, discharges and losses of these hazardous substances.

Guidance documents to help policy makers

- Guidance Document on Mercury and Mercury Compounds, presented by Poland (October 2002),
- Guidance Document on Short-chained Chlorinated Paraffins (SCCP), presented by Sweden (June 2002),
- Guidance Document on Nonylphenol/ Nonylphenoethoxylates (NP/NPEs), presented by Sweden (June 2002),
- Guidance Document on Dioxins, presented by Finland (June 2002), and
- Guidance Document on Cadmium and its Compounds, presented by Denmark (June 2002).

The project also kicked off numerous other activities, including stakeholder meetings with representatives of administrations and industry designed to raise awareness of the problems associated with hazardous substances. These activities need to be continued in the future to ensure targets are reached by 2020.

This would mean a change in the profile of HELCOM's work to promote more sustainable developments with regard to hazardous substances within the Contracting Parties. Political will is a crucial factor in this context, and it is vital that the Contracting Parties make every endeavour to work towards HELCOM's objectives concerning hazardous substances.

The "Project on the Implementation of the HELCOM Objective with regard to Hazardous Substances" ran from 1999 to 2002, and was funded by EU, Sweden and HELCOM.

Half-way through the JCP

The Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP) is now half-way through its 20-year implementation period. The clearest indicators of successful implementation are the increasing number of pollution Hot Spots deleted from the HELCOM List of Hot Spots, and the generally decreasing discharges and emissions from the remaining Hot Spots.

Financing the JCP has been possible thanks to the widely shared vision of the Programme. In the former countries in transition, where affordability is still a critical constraint on investments, the use of co-financing, combining loans from the International Financial Institutions and grants from the European Union and bilateral donors, has been vital.

The total sum of reported investments made at the deleted Hot Spots amounts to about 1.1 billion euros. The true figure for total investment is probably much higher than this, as investment reports from 20 Hot Spots were unavailable.

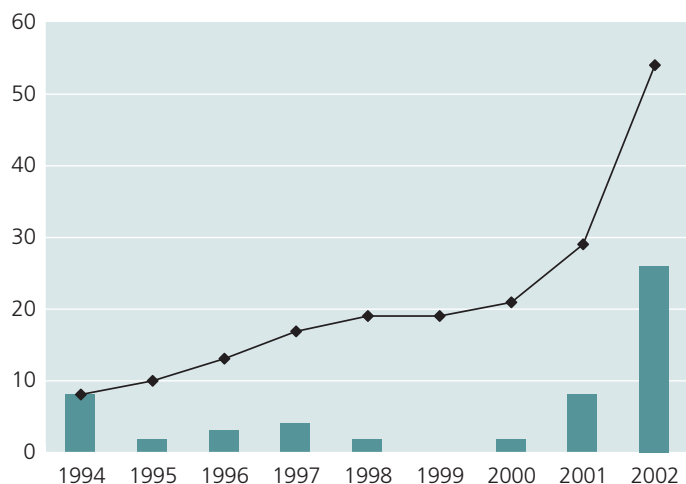
The political situation around the Baltic Sea is changing again, and there has been much discussion about how the work of the Programme Implementation Task Force (PITF) and the JCP should be continued in the future. A "HELCOM ad hoc Working Group on the Improvement of the JCP Implementation Monitoring and Facilitating" has prepared a report on this issue and proposals for how to continue with the programme.

JCP Regional Workshop round comes to an end

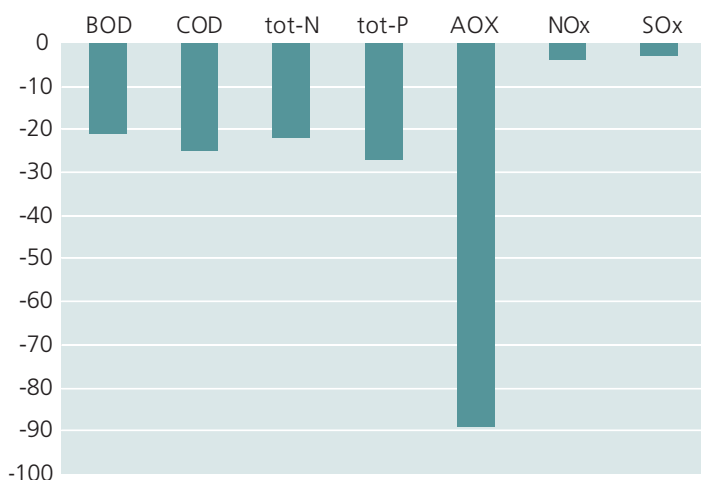
The PITF Regional Workshop round was concluded, with workshops arranged in Lübeck (Germany), Stockholm (Sweden), Lvov (Ukraine) and Wrocław (Poland) as well as a bilateral meeting in Prague (Czech Republic). A total of ten Regional Workshops and one bilateral meeting have now been held, covering all the countries participating in the JCP/PITF. The workshops enabled individual hot spots to be discussed in detail, with a view to their possible future deletion from the HELCOM List of Hot Spots.

Pollution Hot Spots deleted following pollution load reductions

Investment activities focusing on alleviating pollution at sites included in HELCOM's List of Hot Spots have attracted considerable attention. These investments have in many cases been so successful that many Hot Spots have now been formally deleted from the list. Out of the 132 original Hot Spots a total of 46 had been deleted, and three



Pollution Hot Spots and sub-Hot Spots deleted from the HELCOM list by the end of 2002. The bars indicate the numbers of deletions each year, and the line shows the cumulative number of deletions.



Pollution load reductions recorded by November 2002 expressed as percentages of the total loads recorded when the JCP was initiated in 1991.

partly deleted, by the end of 2002. Two more Hot Spots have subsequently been deleted during 2003.

Estimates of total pollution load reductions around the Baltic Sea show that the same reductions that have enabled certain Hot Spots to be deleted have substantially contributed to overall pollution load reductions in the Baltic Sea catchment area.

Further measures to eliminate problems at pollution Hot Spots were agreed on by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in June 2003. The aims of these measures are:

- to continue the successful implementation of the Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP) as presented in the new report "The Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environment Action Programme (JCP) - Ten years of implementation" (BSEP No. 88), and
- to adapt the programme implementation mechanism to the political changes arising in connection with the EU enlargement.

For more information about JCP implementation:

- The Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP) – Ten Years of Implementation (BSEP No. 88),
- Evaluation of the PITF Regional Workshops (<http://www.helcom.fi/pitf/evaluationreport.pdf>),
- Thematic Report – HELCOM PITF Regional Workshops held in Poland – Status of the Polish JCP Hot Spots (BSEP No. 91), and
- Report on Water Pricing and Cost Recovery in the Baltic Sea Countries, August 2002 (<http://www.helcom.fi/pitf/waterpricingcostrecovery.pdf>).

3. Maintaining the ecological balance

Biotopes and habitats threatened

The vast majority of the marine and coastal biotopes around the Baltic Sea are to some degree threatened. Many of these biotopes are vital for rare or endangered species.

The network of marine and coastal Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs) has still not been fully implemented. In many cases the Contracting Parties have not yet managed to demarcate BSPAs or prepare management plans, and few concrete steps have been taken to include the 24 proposed offshore BSPAs in the network.

Top predators recovering

The achievements of HELCOM's environmental programmes and nature conservation measures can be seen in the improved breeding success rates of top predators such as the white-tailed eagle and the Baltic's three seal species. Seals still face health problems, however, with sterility levels still high among young ringed seals, other pollution-related disorders evidently increasing in grey seals, and the harbour seal population again suffering from an epidemic of seal distemper in 2002.

Growing seal populations have led to conflicts with fishermen, whose catches may be reduced due to competition from seals. Some seals have damaged fishing gear and even raided fish farming facilities, rendering fishing virtually impossible in some areas. The need to resolve this conflict is recognised by HELCOM.

Environmental impact of fisheries

Present commercial fishing practices have environmental impacts throughout the whole Baltic Sea, affecting species caught accidentally as by-catches, as well as the stocks of the commercially fished species themselves. HELCOM is actively co-operating with the International Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission (IBSFC) to mitigate the environmental effects of fisheries.

One positive sign is an increase in the productivity of wild Baltic salmon to one million young fish a year over the period 1995-2001.

The integrated management of human activities

Several human activities pose threats to species, biotopes and even entire ecosystems around the Baltic Sea. Nature conservation has a vital role in HELCOM's work to maintain ecological balances and the productivity of ecosystems, while ensuring that marine and coastal environments are used sustainably, by applying the ecosystem approach in the integrated management of human activities in marine and coastal areas.

Bearing these goals in mind, HELCOM has produced the major review report "A state of the art report on Integrated Marine and Coastal Area Management activities and spatial planning systems in all Contracting Parties" (August 2002).

A workshop on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Baltic Sea area in September 2002 was jointly organised by HELCOM and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency.

This work has resulted in the adoption of the new HELCOM Recommendation "Implementation of Integrated Marine and Coastal Management of Human Activities in the Baltic Sea Area" by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in June 2003.

Further measures to improve nature conservation and the protection of biodiversity were agreed on by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in June 2003. The aims of these measures are:

- to emphasise the role of the Helsinki Commission in co-ordinating nature conservation work in the Baltic Sea area,
- to fully implement the Baltic Sea Protected Areas network,
- to intensify co-operation with international fisheries organisations to reduce the adverse environmental effects of commercial fishing,
- to apply an ecosystem approach in the co-ordinated management of all economic activities, and
- to plan all activities related to the marine environment in an integrated way.

Baltic Sea Regional Project launched

A Grant Agreement was signed on 17th of March 2003 that will allow the long-awaited Baltic Sea Regional Project to be started. The World Bank, acting on behalf of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), has provided a grant of \$5.5 million for this project, and contributions from other co-financiers and project beneficiaries, including Finland, Norway, Sweden, the United States and the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO), should bring the total funds available for the project up to more than \$12 million.

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.

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 to develop and implement ecosystem-based management for the natural resources of the Baltic.

HELCOM will manage the project in co-operation with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the Agricultural University of Stockholm (SLU), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (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.

HELCOM participated in the second GEF Biennial International Waters Conference in Dalian, China, at the invitation of the Global Environment Facility and its Implementing Agencies. The conference

provided useful information on similar international water projects, and the Baltic Sea Regional Project itself was presented and widely discussed.

For more information about the Baltic Sea Regional Project:

- HELCOM homepage: <http://www.helcom.fi/helcom/projectsmeetings.html>

Managing transboundary waters

HELCOM is represented in the Advisory Committee to the EU-funded MANTRA-East Project, which deals with integrated strategies for the management of transboundary waters. The pilot study concerns the Russian/Estonian Lake Peipsi and its drainage basin. The project stresses the importance of keeping stakeholders and the general public fully informed and involved.

According to the results of the mid-term review in August 2002, which was chaired by HELCOM, the project is developing well. Many issues have been examined in the project area, ranging from scientific studies to assessments of social, legal and institutional matters. Now the project has entered its final year, the results are being summarised and transformed into user-targeted information to enhance environmental decision-making. Detailed information about the project is available at <http://www.mantraeast.org>.

4. Improving navigational safety

In October 2002 HELCOM compiled a detailed inventory on the current state of maritime transportation, and the outlook for the future.

This inventory confirms that the Baltic is among one of the busiest seas in the world, accounting for 15 per cent of the world's maritime cargo. It is expected that the amount of goods being transported each year will eventually double from 500 million tonnes to 1,000 million tonnes, including a tripling in general cargo and container traffic and a 40% increase in oil transportation.

There is a clear tendency for ever larger vessels to be used, particularly for oil transportation, and this is reflected in the construction and expansion of oil terminals.

Being prepared

Based on data on ship accidents in the Baltic Sea, three high-risk areas have been identified: the Gulf of Finland, the South-western part of the Baltic including the Danish Straits, and the entrances to harbours. These areas are all characterised by limited space for manoeuvring, high ship densities, and a high risk of grounding due to varying water depths.

An overall assessment of the statistical risks of ship accidents in the Baltic Sea is to be elaborated on the basis of accident inventories, in combination with detailed accident scenarios covering the main oil transportation routes and entrances to major oil terminals.

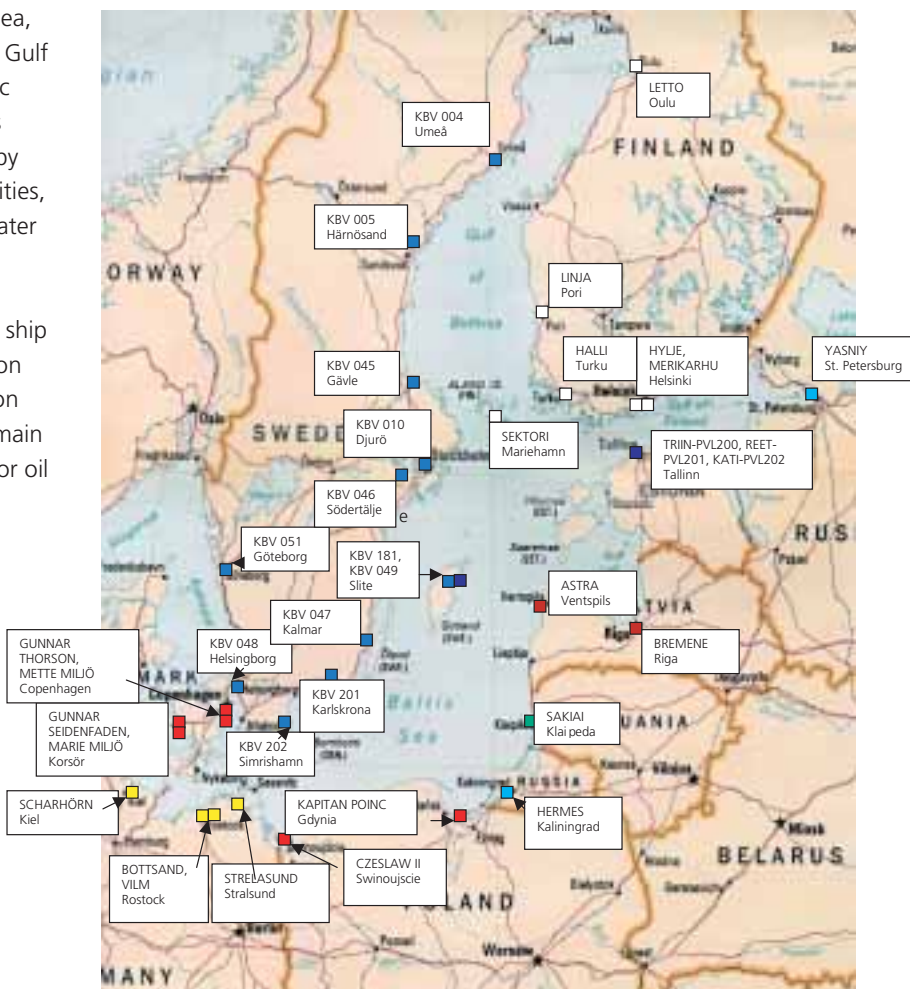
This will add another cornerstone to the existing co-operation on pollution response around the Baltic Sea, and should pave the way towards the more efficient joint utilisation of response capacity by neighbouring countries. The conclusion of bilateral and trilateral agreements under the Helsinki Convention to set up detailed and improved response procedures for specific sub-regions represents another step in this direction.

The popcorn test

Co-operation on preparing to respond to serious pollution incidents is one of HELCOM's trademarks, as could be seen in a recent joint HELCOM exercise arranged in Latvia in August 2002, which involved 17 ships, one aircraft and more than 30 observers from HELCOM – and was observed by 60 delegates from 15 nations within the NATO Partnership for Peace Programme. The exercise involved vast quantities of popcorn dumped into the sea to simulate a spill of 800 tonnes of crude oil.

Working to implement existing measures

A lot of effort has been put into the implementation of previously agreed navigational safety measures – with special attention devoted to the meas-



Thirty-six response vessels are currently on stand-by around the Baltic Sea, ready to cope with accidents anywhere. Well-established and regularly tested international co-operation procedures guarantee a swift response to any incident.

ures agreed during the Extraordinary HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in 2001 and subsequently set out in the HELCOM Copenhagen Declaration.

The joint stances of the Baltic Sea States in the International Maritime Organisation and the 1982 Paris Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control have ensured that the measures concerned have been carried out within the agreed deadlines. The establishment of a joint monitoring system for maritime traffic in the Baltic Sea will both promote the implementation of established EU regulations, and set an example for other regions to follow.

Investigating PSSA status for the Baltic

Following the request of the Extraordinary HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in 2001, an investigation was conducted in February 2003 to look into the possible designation of the Baltic Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA).

The investigation concluded that the main benefits of PSSA designation would include a higher level of environmental awareness concerning the sensitivity of the Baltic marine environment within the maritime industry. This in turn could increase the compliance rate with existing measures – particularly since PSSA status would mean that such measures would have to be clearly indicated on sea charts. This would especially benefit the Baltic Sea Protected Areas, which have been designated to preserve valuable and sensitive ecosystems, biotopes and species.

The investigation also concluded that no additional powers can be conferred to countries applying for sea areas to be designated as PSSAs, and that the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982 have to be taken into account. Where PSSAs outside territorial waters are concerned, the approval of the International Maritime Organisation must also be obtained.

The issue of whether to apply for PSSA designation of the Baltic Sea by the IMO was thoroughly

discussed by the Meeting, which could not reach full agreement. As a compromise, it was decided to include the following text in the HELCOM Ministerial Declaration:

“The EU Member States and the Accession Countries will, based on the experience from existing PSSAs, carefully consider the possible designation of areas in the Baltic Sea as PSSAs, taking into account the sensitivity of the Baltic marine environment, and will invite Russia to join our efforts in enhancing our co-operation within the framework of the IMO. Finland and Sweden invited interested HELCOM Contracting Parties to join their respective efforts.”

Joining forces

In March 2003, a Joint IMO/HELCOM/EU Workshop was arranged by Germany to assess progress on the work initiated by the 2001 Extraordinary HELCOM Ministerial Meeting. The workshop was set up to see how far the measures proposed in the HELCOM Copenhagen Declaration have been implemented, and to assess the need for additional maritime safety and pollution prevention measures accordingly.

While noting that the main elements of the HELCOM Copenhagen Declaration have already been successfully implemented, the Joint Workshop also stressed that there is still a need for continued commitment on a broad regional level towards achieving full implementation for all measures.

According to proposals made by the Joint Workshop, three Expert Groups were established to examine the usefulness and feasibility of three potential measures to improve navigational safety:

- Mandatory pilotage in specified high risk areas,
- A special transit route running right through the Baltic for ships carrying oil and other potentially harmful substances, and
- New regulations specifically for winter shipping traffic.

Illegal oil discharges persist

Although the number of illegal oil discharges observed has slightly decreased overall since 1999, it cannot be claimed that this problem has eased over the whole of the Baltic Sea. In some areas aerial surveillance is only irregular, so figures are not reliable or comparable. In other areas aerial surveillance has become more comprehensive – partly thanks to the use of remote sensing equipment – enabling illegal oil discharges to be more effectively detected. Several countries around the Baltic have enhanced their detection of oil discharges by using satellite images. These images of large sea areas can reveal potential illegal oil discharges which must then be verified by aircraft.

It is vital to ensure mariners are informed about the sensitivity of the Baltic marine environment, and about the special rules that need to be followed in the Baltic. It has been suggested that a Danish procedure could be applied in the whole Baltic Sea area, where ships constituting a special risk to the marine environment are given specific information on the rules they must follow. Due to Denmark's strategic position as the gatekeeper to the Baltic Sea, this practice has already significantly benefited the environment throughout the Baltic.

A wide-ranging package of further measures to prevent discharges of oil and other hazardous substances from ships was agreed on by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in June 2003. The aims of these measures are:

- to prioritise safe navigation and emergency capacity at national level, while fully implementing the measures contained in the HELCOM Copenhagen Declaration (2001), and
- to curb deliberate illegal oil discharges by providing the necessary port reception facilities, and through effective aerial surveillance and efficient law enforcement.

For more information on maritime pollution:

- Statistical analyses of Baltic maritime traffic (VTT study), October 2002 (<http://www.vtt.fi/val/val3/val34/seastat/balticstatfinal20021.pdf>),
- Compilation of existing maritime safety and pollution prevention measures applicable in the Baltic, July 2002 (<http://www.helcom.fi/sea/pssainventory.pdf>),
- Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas – a background document, February 2003 ([http://www.helcom.fi/documents/Heads%20of%20Delegation%20\(HODS\)/HODS%2011%202003/5.2-1.pdf](http://www.helcom.fi/documents/Heads%20of%20Delegation%20(HODS)/HODS%2011%202003/5.2-1.pdf)),
- Map "Illegal oil discharges observed during aerial surveillance operations in 2001-2002" (<http://www.helcom.fi/sea/maps2001.pdf> and <http://www.helcom.fi/sea/maps2002.pdf>),
- Map "Compilation of ship accidents in the Baltic Sea area in 2000-2001", December 2002 (<http://www.helcom.fi/sea/compilationshipaccidents20002001.pdf>),
- Indicator report – "Illegal discharges of oil in the Baltic Sea", December 2002 (http://www.helcom.fi/documents/Maritime%20Group/HELCOM%20MARITIME%201,%202003/9_2.pdf),
- HELCOM RESPONSE Manual, Volume 2 – Response to accidents at sea involving spills of hazardous substances and loss of packaged dangerous goods, December 2002 (<http://www.coastguard.se/ra/volume2/start.htm>), and
- Joint IMO/HELCOM/EU Workshop "Environmental impacts due to the increased density of shipping in the Baltic Sea area – Copenhagen plus 1" (BSEP No. 86), 2002 (<http://www.helcom.fi/proceedings/bsep86.pdf>).

5. Preparing and harmonising new HELCOM Recommendations

Ten Recommendations have been adopted by HELCOM 24, bringing the number of valid HELCOM Recommendations to a total of 115.

* Sewage discharge regulations

The countries around the Baltic will work to promote the rapid adoption of globally established sewage discharge regulations, while continuing to apply the strictest possible regulations in the Baltic Sea Area. This will mean that as of 1 July 2004, comminuted or macerated and disinfected sewage may be discharged at a distance of at least 3 nautical miles from the nearest land, while other sewage may only be discharged at a distance of more than 12 nautical miles from the nearest land. Port reception facilities must therefore continue to be available around the Baltic for ships to deliver their sewage ashore.

* Modelling the dispersion of oil and chemical spills

New guidelines have been set to help improve models describing how spilt oil or chemicals will spread in the marine environment. Such models are vital to ensure that emergency responses are prompt and efficient, particularly in the context of rising risks. The new guidelines also contribute towards a joint modelling and forecast system that will cover the whole of the Baltic Sea.

* Transfer of oil at sea

New guidelines have been adopted to improve the procedures for bunkering and ship-to-ship cargo transfer of oils in order to prevent oil-spills during these operations.

* Emergency capacity

Procedures have been adopted for ensuring adequate emergency capacity is available to deal with accidents at sea. This will help to prevent or reduce spills of oil and chemicals into the sea.

* Monitoring and assessment

The new Recommendation on monitoring and assessment contains guidelines that have been updated to meet new conditions and monitoring challenges, such as the need to quantify inputs of air-borne nitrogen and several additional hazardous substances.

* Nature Conservation

Another new recommendation concerns the Implementation of Integrated Marine and Coastal Management of Human Activities in the Baltic Sea Area.

Four HELCOM Recommendations have recently been scrutinised in the light of related EU regulations and OSPAR Recommendations and Decisions, in order to streamline the work of HELCOM. As an outcome of this harmonisation process, four revised Recommendations have been adopted by HELCOM 24, covering the following issues:

* Reduction of pollution from the iron and steel industry

This new Recommendation combines three former Recommendations, and contains restrictions on emissions to both water and the atmosphere, as well as controls on waste disposal.

* Proper handling of waste

Landfills are required to implement proper landfilling practices, or be closed down. The amounts of waste ending up as landfill are to be minimised, and the environmental risks associated with decommissioned landfill sites are to be assessed.

* Diffuse discharges of heavy metals from batteries

This Recommendation restricts the sale of batteries containing mercury, and requires the recovery or safe disposal of batteries containing the hazardous heavy metals cadmium, lead or mercury. It also recommends that these batteries should be replaced with less hazardous batteries.

* Reduction of pollution from agriculture

This new "umbrella" Recommendation replaces six former Recommendations on agriculture. It contains requirements on ammonia from livestock facilities, on the use of manure, and on the treatment of agricultural waste water, as well as measures to reduce soil erosion.

6. Compliance with the requirements of the Convention and Recommendations

One important duty of the Helsinki Commission is to ensure that the Helsinki Convention and HELCOM Recommendations are fully implemented throughout the Baltic Sea region. Regular reports assess how well the necessary measures are being implemented by the Contracting Parties, and also provide information on the effectiveness of these measures, highlighting any gaps where new measures may be required.

In general, implementation of HELCOM Recommendations in 2001 had improved considerably since the reporting round of 1998, although few Recommendations have been fully implemented by all the Contracting Parties. There are still clear differences between the current EU member states and the EU accession countries and Russia concerning the implementation of HELCOM Recommendations, with measures generally better implemented by the present EU member states.

Since the HELCOM Recommendations have not been fully implemented by the Contracting Parties, there is a need for new proposals in how implementation can be accelerated and better enforced. Reporting should in future both explain the reasons for gaps or delays in implementation, and present proposals concerning how measures should be implemented more effectively. It is also important to ensure that such measures are implemented consistently throughout the Baltic Sea catchment area.

Further measures to improve compliance with existing legislation were agreed on by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in June 2003. The aims of these measures are:

- to prioritise the full implementation of the Helsinki Convention and HELCOM Recommendations, and
- to ensure that the same environmental measures are adopted throughout the catchment area of the Baltic Sea.

7. HELCOM at Ministerial Level

The first HELCOM annual meeting to be held outside Finland was convened in June 2003 in Bremen, Germany. The OSPAR Commission also held its annual meeting in Bremen in conjunction with HELCOM, and the two Commissions held a Joint HELCOM/OSPAR Ministerial Meeting on 25-26 June.

This is the first occasion when these two international commissions – encompassing 20 countries and the European Community – have met jointly. The holding of such discussions at the highest level indicates the importance of co-operation on environmental protection for the adjoining marine waters of the North-East Atlantic and the Baltic Sea.

Preparing for the future

The HELCOM Environment Ministers and other high-level representatives of the nine countries around the Baltic Sea, and the European Community agreed that the Helsinki Commission should continue to serve as the voice of the Baltic Sea region on issues related to environmental protection – both in the EU, and in other international forums. The Ministers indicated that areas of special priority for the Helsinki Commission should include:

- Joint monitoring and assessment,
- Combating eutrophication and hazardous substances,
- Maritime safety, including emergency response, and
- Nature conservation and biodiversity.

These issues should be tackled according to an ecosystem approach to the management of all economic activities.

Special emphasis was given to the changes in environmental regulations that are likely to occur in connection with the forthcoming accession of the three Baltic Republics and Poland to the EU. From May 2004 onwards, eight of the nine countries around the shores of the Baltic Sea will be EU members.

The Ministers additionally resolved that a working plan for the new role of the Helsinki Commission should be adopted at HELCOM's annual meeting in March 2004.

The Ministers emphasised the importance of HELCOM's work in co-ordinating regional issues related to the environmentally sustainable use of the Baltic Sea, and in ensuring co-operation on the integrated management of human activities in coastal areas and at sea.

The Ministerial Meeting unanimously adopted ten HELCOM Recommendations and a Ministerial Declaration, including measures in the following key policy areas:

- Preventing discharges of oil and other hazardous substances from ships,
- Combating eutrophication,
- Improving nature conservation and the protection of biodiversity,
- Eliminating pollution Hot Spots, and
- Improving compliance with existing legislation.

Delegates from Mozambique, the Seychelles and Kenya representing the Nairobi Convention and its Secretariat attended the meeting thereby reflecting HELCOM's wish to promote global responsibility by transferring experience and knowledge to less established regional environmental programmes.

Joining forces to protect the Atlantic and the Baltic

In the first joint meeting of the Helsinki and OSPAR Commissions ministerial representatives from twenty countries and the European Community particularly stressed the following topics:

- the need for an ecosystem approach to the comprehensive management of all human activities that affect the marine environment,
- the opportunity to contribute to the European Union initiative for a European Marine Strategy to enable all authorities involved in protecting the marine environment – on national and international level – to collaborate effectively, and
- the need for joint action to protect threatened and declining species and habitats.

The two Commissions pledged to create by 2010 an ecologically coherent network of well managed marine protected areas covering the North-East Atlantic and the Baltic Sea. A Joint Ministerial Declaration was adopted.

Appendices

HELCOM SEA splits into HELCOM MARITIME and HELCOM RESPONSE

In August 2002 HELCOM SEA (the Helsinki Commission's former Sea-based Pollution Group) split into two groups – HELCOM MARITIME and HELCOM RESPONSE. This will enhance HELCOM's work in ensuring safer shipping in the Baltic – as decided by the ministers responsible for the environment and transport in September 2001.

The Maritime Group (HELCOM MARITIME) will develop measures to ensure that shipping in the Baltic is environmentally safe and sound, by identifying sea-based sources of pollution and proposing actions to limit emissions and discharges.

The Response Group (HELCOM RESPONSE) will work to ensure a swift national and trans-national response to marine pollution incidents. This involves preparing and testing response equipment and emergency routines where co-operation between neighbouring states is needed.

Recommendations adopted by HELCOM 24

- 24/1 "Monitoring of airborne pollution load"; to supersede HELCOM Recommendation 14/1
- 24/2 "Batteries containing mercury, cadmium or lead"; to supersede HELCOM Recommendation 14/5
- 24/3 "Measures aimed at the reduction of emissions and discharges from agriculture"; together with the requirements in Annex III of the Convention, this Recommendation supersedes HELCOM Recommendations 7/2, 13/7 (except Annex), 13/9, 13/10, 13/11 and 14/4
- 24/4 "Reduction of emissions and discharges from the iron and steel industry"; to supersede HELCOM Recommendations 11/7, 13/4 and 17/5
- 24/5 "Proper handling of waste/landfilling"; to supersede HELCOM Recommendation 22/4
- 24/6 "Guidelines on bunkering operations and ship to ship cargo transfer of oils, subject to Annex I of MARPOL 73/78, in the Baltic Sea Area"
- 24/7 "Further development and use of drift forecasting for oils and other harmful substances in the Baltic"; to supersede HELCOM Recommendation 12/6
- 24/8 "Amendments to Annex IV "Prevention of pollution from ships" to the Helsinki Convention, concerning discharge of sewage"
- 24/9 "Ensuring adequate emergency capacity"
- 24/10 "Implementation of integrated marine and coastal management of human activities in the Baltic Sea Area"

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