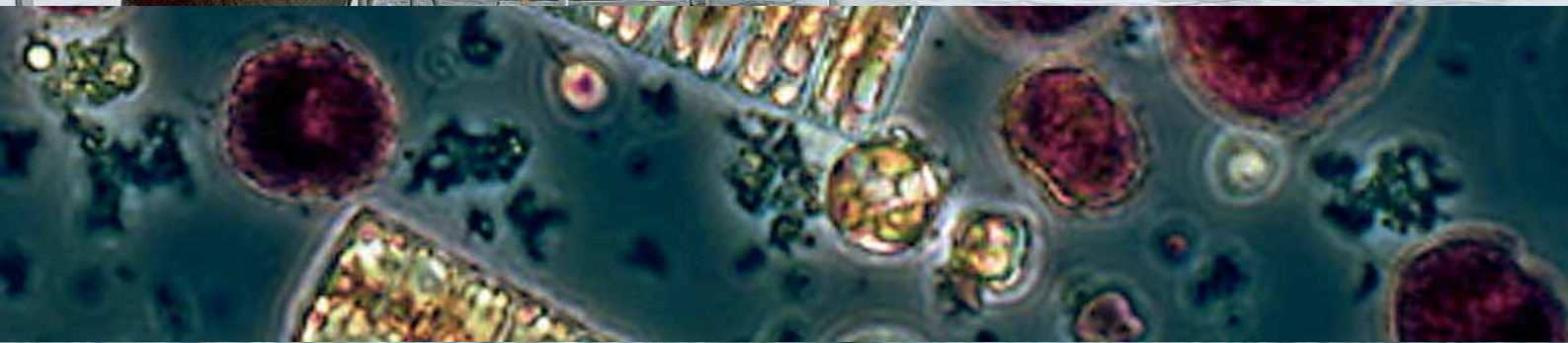


HELCOM news

2/2003 Newsletter



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Published by:
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The latest HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, held on 25th June 2003 in Bremen, Germany, represented another milestone in the work of the Helsinki Commission looking after the marine environment of the Baltic Sea.

In Bremen, the Environment Ministers and other high-level representatives of the nine countries around the Baltic Sea, and the European Community, unanimously adopted a Ministerial Declaration and ten new HELCOM Recommendations, paving the way for HELCOM to meet new challenges in the wake of the extension of the European Union in 2004.

Anne Christine Brusendorff
Executive Secretary

HELCOM Environment Ministers prepare for political and economic changes around the Baltic Sea

At the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, held on 25th June 2003 in Bremen, Germany, 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.

This will greatly improve the protection of the marine environment, partly thanks to the wider implementation of EU legislation, but also since this will enable HELCOM to represent all the nine countries around the Baltic to promote the adoption in Brussels of specific regulations protecting the Baltic. In this respect, HELCOM will increasingly serve as a bridge between Russia and the EU, ensuring that the same

environmental standards are applied throughout the Baltic Sea and its catchment area.

Visions for HELCOM's future

HELCOM will continue to play an important role in many ways:

- as the environmental focal point for the entire Baltic region; and a reliable source of information on the state of the Baltic Sea that can form the basis for decision-making in other international forums;
- as an independent regulatory body that issues regulations to supplement those imposed by other international organisations, in order to cater for the Baltic's specific needs;
- as a supervisory body dedicated to ensuring that unified environmental standards are fully implemented throughout the Baltic Sea and its catchment area.

Chair's Corner



HELCOM must urgently address several issues to improve the prospects for the Baltic Sea. The most important challenges include combating eutrophication, guaranteeing navigational safety, addressing the environmental impacts of fisheries, and curbing inputs of hazardous substances.

But HELCOM does not work alone on these issues. Various other inter-gov-

ernmental and non-governmental organisations operating in the Baltic on European or global levels also play an active role in the Baltic region. It is crucial that all these organisations pursue their objectives co-operatively to ensure that their programmes complement each other efficiently.

I am greatly looking forward to working together with all HELCOM's partners, and I am grateful for their continuing support in the protection of our common sea - the Baltic.

Inese Vaidere
Chair of the Helsinki Commission



Joining forces to protect the Atlantic and the Baltic - the Joint OSPAR and HELCOM Ministerial Meeting

The OSPAR Commission also held its annual meeting in Bremen on 25-26 June 2003 in conjunction with HELCOM, and the two Commissions held a Joint HELCOM/OSPAR Ministerial Meeting.

Ministerial representatives from twenty countries and the European Community worked together in the first joint meeting of the Helsinki and OSPAR Commissions to improve the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic and the Baltic Sea, particularly stressing the need for an ecosystem approach to the comprehensive management of all human activities that affect the marine environment.

Heads of Delegation of the Joint Ministerial Meeting of the Helsinki and OSPAR Commissions 23 -26 June 2003 in Bremen - (in front row from left) Deputy Minister, Secretary of State Krzysztof Szamalek (Poland), Vice-Minister Melanie Schultz van Haegen (Netherlands), Minister Borge Brende (Norway), Inese Vaidere (Chair of the Helsinki Commission), Vice-Minister Irina Osokina (Russian Federation), General Secretary Juan Maria del Alamo Jiménez (Spain), Minister Lena Sommestad (Sweden), Ambassador Beat Nobs (Switzerland),

Only by examining how whole ecosystems might be affected by policies and decisions can we ensure that such developments are truly sustainable.

Minister of State Elliot Morley, MP (Great Britain), (in back row from left) Klaus Töpfer (Executive Director UNEP), Minister Hans-Christian Schmidt (Denmark), Minister Villu Reiljan (Estonia), Minister Jürgen Trittin (Germany), Minister Sivjar Fridleifsdottir (Iceland), Minister Raimond Vejonis (Latvia), State Secretary Arvudas Dragunas (Lithuania), Jean-Marie Ries (Luxembourg). Absent: Heads of Delegations of Finland, Portugal, France, Ireland, and EU-Commissioner Margot Wallström

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.

The role of HELCOM and its future priorities

by Jan-Erik Enestam, Minister of the Environment of Finland



Jan-Erik Enestam, Minister of the Environment of Finland

It is well known that the Baltic Sea is a unique sea, which requires special attention, and, in some matters, even more stringent measures than other seas in the world.

HELCOM co-operation has been and still is an important forum in which the riparian countries can openly discuss the Baltic Sea protection needs and measures. Through their own actions, jointly or individually, the riparian countries can influence the state of the Baltic marine environment and the direction of its future. The Helsinki Convention has been and should continue to be an effective instrument for introducing the local and regional aspects both in the framework of global marine conventions and agreements, as well as in environmental policy of the European Union.

HELCOM cannot stay unchanged when its geopolitical and economic environment will formally be changed 1 May 2004. Its duties and working methods, as well as the resources, need to be evaluated and modified accordingly, both as regards the Contracting Parties and the Secretariat. HELCOM and its Secretariat have to work pro-actively and draw attention to the Baltic Sea protection needs in a discernible manner. For the future of HELCOM, the role of the competent and innovative Secretariat is of the utmost importance.

For the protection of the Baltic marine environment, membership of the European Union and the fulfilment of the appropriate EU directives will not always be sufficient. HELCOM will certainly also be needed in the future to stress, among other things, the regional view-

points and the specific requirements of the Baltic Sea. To avoid possible overlapping activities, the role and focus of the HELCOM work should be carefully considered on the basis of the Bremen Ministerial Declarations. In the changing international framework HELCOM should concentrate on activities which bring added value to the protection of the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, the involvement and role of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine in the HELCOM co-operation is of the utmost importance.

One of the particular features of the Baltic Sea region is the number of new organisations and bodies established in 1990s. In this framework, HELCOM should more actively keep its leading role in the field of Baltic Sea protection and should act as a catalyst in promoting international and inter-sectoral collaboration. We need HELCOM as an important forum for riparian countries to discuss and formulate common opinions related to the specific problems and needs of the Baltic Sea and its protection. Good and effective co-operation and coordination between the European Union and HELCOM are needed in the implementation of the strategy to protect and conserve the marine environment currently under preparation within the European Union.

The constant increase in tanker shipping has considerably raised the risk of environmental disasters and accidents at sea especially in the Baltic Sea. Illegal deliberate discharges of oil at sea are also a topic of a continuous concern. Therefore all appropriate measures must be taken under IMO and, if possible, under HELCOM.

In spite of all the efforts made over the last few decades, eutrophication is still a problem. It is evident that the 50 % reduction goal, set in 1988, has been achieved by almost all Contracting Parties as regards point sources, but for diffuse sources the situation is much more unsatisfactory. Even the elaboration of the more specific targets, as requested by the ministerial meeting in 1998 has not been realised by all countries. The main land-based source of nutrients is agriculture. The EU enlargement will bring new large catchment areas of the Baltic Sea under the EU Common Agricultural Policy. This will hopefully lead us to a new political cooperation in this field for the benefit of the Baltic Sea.

From politicians point of view, reporting should be further improved in general terms, as well as on the implementation of recommendations. We need in decision-making timely information on the status of the marine environment, on pollution loads, and on other emerging issues where human activities and pressures threaten marine environment.

To fulfil the above-mentioned challenges, and to keep HELCOM as a strong intergovernmental organisation for the protection of the Baltic marine environment, the Contracting Parties must give continuously strong political support to the work of HELCOM.

Jan-Erik Enestam
Finnish Minister of the Environment

Blue-green algal blooms in the Baltic in 2003

This year, the extremely hot and sunny period from mid July to early August produced severe blue-green algal blooms in the Baltic, and 2003 can well be regarded as one of the worst years so far. This was, however, true only for the central waters of the Baltic Proper, from the Gulf of Gdansk to the Åland islands, while surface accumulations in the southern parts of the Baltic and in the Gulf of Finland were only moderate.

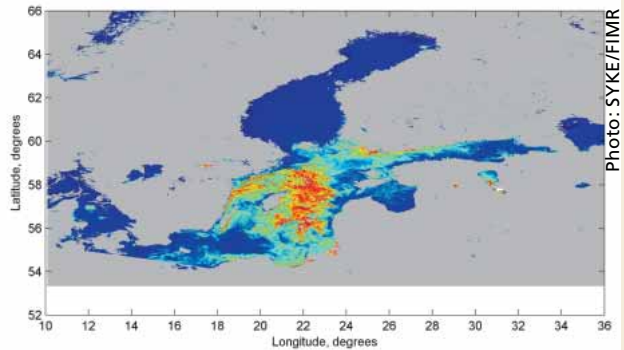
The relatively benign situation in the Gulf of Finland was unexpected, as considerable inorganic phosphorus levels after the spring bloom had led to warnings of possible severe blooms of blue-green algae in late summer. This time, happily, the reality did not match up to the forecasts.

One important contributor to the observed increase in the late summer blue-green algal blooms is the increase

in inorganic phosphorus levels during the 1990s, due to a rapid rise in internal loading. This has helped the most ecologically significant types of blue-green algae in the Baltic - *Nodularia spumigena* and *Aphanizomenon flos-aquae* - to thrive, since they are dependent on the amounts of phosphorus available in the water.

Internal sources of phosphorus are currently beyond our control, and internal loads have risen despite decreases in external phosphorus inputs into the Baltic.

This contradictory situation is partly due to the continued presence of nutrients in the sea following the release of heavy anthropogenic nutrient loads into the Baltic over almost 50 years, but the Baltic's unique hydrography is also a contributory factor. Frequent suboxic and anoxic conditions in deep



waters and at sediment interfaces commonly lead to the liberation of inorganic phosphorus from sediments, fertilising the Baltic ecosystem also during late summer - a season when the lack of phosphorus usually limits algal growth.

The spatial extent of blue-green algal blooms in the Baltic in the latter part of July 2003

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Whales and porpoises in the Baltic

This summer several fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*) were seen around the Belt Sea Islands, and even as far from the North Sea as the island of Rügen near the border of Germany and Poland. Fin whales have been recorded in the Baltic Sea before, but only very rarely. Their appearance was probably an indirect consequence of a large saltwater influx from the North Sea in January and February. This flow of oxygen-rich, salty water was so strong and persistent that it led to dramatic changes in the diversity of marine fauna. It is likely that the fin whales simply followed their typical prey into the Baltic within this large mass of salty water.

Fin whales are only occasional exotic visitors in these waters, however, and the harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) is the only cetacean species regularly encountered in the Baltic. Although porpoises were once common as far north-east as the Bothnian Bay, few sightings or by-catches have been reported from most parts of the Baltic since the 1960s. This suggests that the species' distribution range has been reduced dramatically over the last 50 years. The eastern limit of the Baltic harbour porpoise's regular occurrence currently runs roughly between Gdansk Bay in the south and the Swedish island of Gotland.

Aerial surveys conducted in 1995 estimated that there were then around 600



Harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea

harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea. The magnitude of harbour porpoise by-catches in commercial fisheries in recent years has led to increased concern over

Continues on the following page

excessively high mortality rates and the current status of this species. New aerial surveys conducted in the summer of 2002 by Sweden indicated no apparent improvement in porpoise numbers. The disappointing results of the survey suggest that more conservation measures are urgently needed to improve the situation for this already endangered population.

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New Radio and TV series

Radio & TV Series "The Baltic - A Sea of Change"

Photos: MANDART



Perhaps more than any other sea in the world, the Baltic is highly vulnerable. But people around the Baltic are now more aware than ever of the fragile nature of the sea - and how maintaining its natural balance is as important for people as it is for marine life.

The Radio and TV Series "The Baltic - A Sea of Change" portrays the close inter-relationship of the people of the Baltic and the marine environment, and examines how we can ensure a future for this unique sea.

"The Baltic - a Sea of Change" - consists of a series of four radio programmes, each of 30-45 minutes in length, and a TV series of four 10-minute films. Both series will be available free of charge in January 2004.

The audiovisual production is funded by the EU, the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, HELCOM and Deutsche Welle.

Radio Series

The radio programmes are co-produced by Deutsche Welle and national broadcasters from countries around the Baltic.

The Baltic - A Sea of Change - Lithuania

(International Co-production with Lietuvos Radijas - Lithuanian Radio and Television)

Oil released during tanker accidents and from oil platforms off the Lithuanian coast threatens the beautiful coastlines of the Curonian Spit - a UNESCO World Heritage Site - as well as the livelihoods of local people dependent on fisheries and tourism during the summer months. Illegal releases of oil from ships plying the busy waters of the Baltic add to the pollution menace.

The Baltic - A Sea of Change - Kaliningrad

(International Co-production with ZAO Baltic Plus)

Kaliningrad has gone through fundamental changes during the 12 years since the break-up of the Soviet Union, but it is still deemed one of the worst polluters of the Baltic Sea.

By looking at concrete examples such as a major cellulose factory, this co-production attempts to understand what motivates companies to undertake ecological reforms, which obstacles they encounter, and why it is still worthwhile to press ahead with such reforms.

The Baltic - A Sea of Change - St Petersburg

(International Co-production with OAO GTRK Peterburg)

The city of St Petersburg has been one of the worst polluters of the Baltic.

Until shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, many weapons and ammunition factories were located in the area, and sewage from the city was fed untreated into the sea. Agriculture was dominated by collective farming, and little concern was shown about the environment. In recent years industrial and agricultural production has been changing radically and many local NGOs are using this opportunity to campaign for a cleaner and safer environment.

The Baltic - A Sea of Change - Poland

(International Co-production with Radio Gdansk)

The alarming state of fish stocks in the Baltic and ever-increasing maritime traffic are both major worries for Polish marine scientists and local people who live from fisheries and tourism.

For far too long, the Baltic has been burdened with the wastes and emissions of people living around its shores. The largest share of this pollution comes from farmland, urban areas and industrial plants in Poland and the former Soviet Union - and is carried into the Baltic via the rivers Odra, Vistula and Neva.

TV Series

The TV Series "The Baltic - A Sea of Change" is produced by MANDART Production, an independent wildlife documentary production company based in Finland. The series is produced by Nick Upton, winner of more than 30 wildlife TV awards.

A Sea of Ice

In winter the Baltic is a sea of ice and snow. Since it contains so much less salt than the open seas, the Baltic can freeze right over during the coldest winters.

Fish, seals, porpoises and other wildlife have come to terms with the harsh natural conditions, but they remain more sensitive to pollution than creatures in other, more open seas.

A Fragile Sea

In the 70s the Baltic Sea had become one of the most polluted seas in the world, and creatures at the very top of the marine food chain were most obviously paying the price.

The pollution in the sea originates from our industries, cars and homes on the land; from ships sailing on the sea itself, and from the air. Many of our activities add nutrients into the sea, which can trigger algal blooms that are toxic to both animals and people.

Voyagers

Of all the invaders that have come to live around the Baltic Sea since it first formed, we humans have had the most impact on marine life. Many alien species have hitched a ride here from distant waters, and managed to establish themselves in the Baltic.

Marine mammals such as harbour porpoises can easily get tangled up in fishing nets, while fish like salmon, which migrate annually between the sea and rivers, nowadays depend on our help.

Sensitive Shores

Since the early days, people have settled along the Baltic's coastlines, and made their living from the sea. Meanwhile, millions of birds still rely on the safe havens provided by wetlands around the Baltic during their long migrations. Nowadays, more and more holiday-makers seem to head for the sea every year. Disturbance can be as much of a problem to wildlife as pollution.

Commercial shipping is also intensifying at a phenomenal rate, and related problems such as accidental or deliberate oil pollution can add to the pressure on the Baltic's sensitive shores.

Contacts

Please contact HELCOM Information Secretary Ulrike Hassink at ulrike.hassink@helcom.fi for details of how to obtain these special series of programmes.



Photos: MANDART

Forthcoming meetings

8-9 December 2003

Third Meeting of the Pilot Expert Working Group (PILOT EWG) in Helsinki, Finland

9-11 December 2003

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

16-17 December 2003

14th Meeting of the Heads of Delegation (HOD) in Helsinki, Finland

2004

20-22 January 2004

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

2-4 March 2004

25th Meeting of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM 25/2004) in Helsinki, Finland

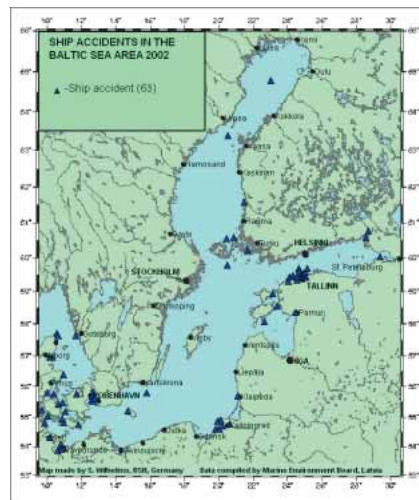


New statistics on shipping accidents in the Baltic available now

A total of 63 ship accidents were recorded around the Baltic in 2002, although thankfully none of them resulted in oil spills or any other kind of pollution, according to statistics reported by the HELCOM countries, and compiled by Latvia.

"Recording no accident involving pollution is a good result, considering that around 2,000 ships are out on the Baltic Sea on an average day; some 200 of which are tankers carrying oil or other liquid products," says Tadas Navickas, Professional Secretary of the Helsinki Commission. "But we must continue working to reduce the number of accidents in the Baltic in general."

The total number of reported accidents is similar to the figures for 2001 (57) and 2000 (62). As in previous years, groundings (43) are the most frequent type of shipping accident, followed by collisions (8) and various other types of accidents (12). Different types of ships have been involved in accidents, includ-



Shipping accidents in the Baltic in 2002

ing single-hulled (7) and double-hulled (7) tankers.

The statistical risk of accidents is growing due to the increasing density of shipping. It has duly been estimated that the total amount of goods being transported on the Baltic Sea will double by 2017.

New staff

Ms Anne Christine Brusendorff took up her new post as Executive Secretary on 1 August 2003. Her former post as Professional Secretary coordinating the work of HELCOM RESPONSE and HELCOM MARITIME has been taken over by Mr Tadas Navickas, former Head of the Lithuanian Delegation to HELCOM.

Other new members of the HELCOM Secretariat are Mr Sebastian Valanko, EcoQO Project Secretary, as well as Ms Merja Hodgson and Ms Maria Kausto-Turner, both of whom are responsible for the coordination of the Global Environment Facility Project.

