

CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION OF THE MARINE
ENVIRONMENT OF THE BALTIC SEA AREA

HELSINKI COMMISSION - Baltic Marine
Environment Protection Commission

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The international co-operation for the protection of the marine environment of the Baltic Sea Area has been recognized since the '70s as a valuable example of co-operation between countries to protect the environment in the region.

This co-operation between the Baltic Sea States (i.e. Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden - plus the European Community) has produced many environmental gains in the course of the last 25 years. Thus confirming the belief that the deterioration of the Baltic Sea can be arrested and the state of the marine environment improved.

At the Ministerial Meeting of the Helsinki Commission in 1988, the Ministers agreed that a reduction of 50% in pollution load going into the Baltic Sea should be aimed at. This demanding target concerning heavy metals, toxic or persistent organic compounds and nutrients has served as the starting point for planning and policy development within HELCOM. Now, ten years later, the Environment Ministers of the Baltic Sea States and the European Commissioner for the Environment met to consider to which extent this target has been reached.

The Ministers and the Commissioner noted that a number of important actions have been taken. They welcomed the successful implementation of the Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP), e.g., the removal of 15 point sources of serious pollution, "hot spots", as a result of decisive action and investments and the fact that there are ongoing activities at 70% of the remaining priority "hot spots". Work is continuing to remove more of these "hot spots" from the remaining 117 on the JCP list.

Furthermore, the Ministers and the Commissioner welcomed the significant progress made in:

- the reduction of discharges of organochlorine compounds;
- the significant reduction in emissions of lead from motor vehicles;
- recovery in the populations of certain hitherto severely endangered species.

Nevertheless, the Ministers and the Commissioner recognized that many problems which so far have not been successfully addressed still exist thus mitigating the realization of the 50% target. In particular the Ministers and the Commissioner expressed concern at

- eutrophication resulting from high inputs of nutrients from agriculture, transport and municipalities;
- comparatively high concentrations of some heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants;
- illegal discharges from ships.

Moreover, the Ministers and the Commissioner are worried by some further problems, inter alia:

- lack of adequate national data on human inputs of nitrogen and phosphorus, heavy metals and persistent organic compounds;
- recent detection of new potentially dangerous contaminants;
- shortcomings in the procedures for monitoring and risk assessment of hazardous substances;
- the potentially adverse impact of the introduction of non-native species into the Baltic Sea.

Having discussed these matters and concluded that progress towards arresting pollution inputs and restoring the ecological balance of the Baltic Sea should be accelerated, the Ministers and the Commissioner decided:

- to reaffirm their commitment to achieve the strategic goals set up in the 1988 Ministerial Declaration and to define a series of more specific targets to be realized before the year 2005 and reviewed in 2003;
- to intensify the implementation of the Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP) and to this end, place increased emphasis on the reduction of non-point pollution sources in agriculture and transport sectors as well as the actions to remedy remaining industrial "hot spots";
- to speed up the development and implementation of integrated coastal zone management plans, and to actively promote programmes for the integrated management of the major water systems in the Baltic Sea catchment area;
- to further investigate the scope of problems related to shipping such as the introduction of non-native species and the use of antifouling agents and to support ongoing activities in relevant international organizations, in particular within the IMO as well as propose action as needed;
- by adopting a new annex on pollution from agriculture ensure a number of actions which will lead to less discharges of, i.a., nutrients from agriculture;
- by adopting amendments to the annex on shipping introduce effective methods to encourage ships to deposit their wastes and cargo residues directly to port reception facilities, including the "no special fee" system by the year 2000;
- to streamline and make more effective the systems for monitoring environmental performance and compliance within the Helsinki Convention - and to improve the production and dissemination of accurate pollution load data which is necessary for the detailed evaluation of the environmental health of the Baltic Sea;
- to implement the strategy on the cessation of discharges, emissions and losses of hazardous substances by the year 2020;

The Ministers and the Commissioner emphasized the importance of co-operation to decrease transboundary pollution not only within the context of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, but also in the context of a number of other important international conventions and treaties (including UN ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Water Courses and International Lakes, the UN ECE Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution and the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context). They advocated the development of sub-regional co-operation as exemplified, inter alia, by the International Commission for the Protection of the Oder/Odra River Against Pollution.

In the same vein they committed themselves to intensify joint co-operative research projects including, i.a., the application of models for decision support, evaluation of effect-related critical

loads and methods to follow up action taken. This will contribute to a more effective environmental management framework for the restoration of the Baltic Sea.

Finally, the Ministers and the Commissioner underlined the need to develop greater priority setting and targeting for tackling the more acute environmental issues around the Baltic Sea. They, therefore, decided that HELCOM structures, procedures and programmes will be reviewed during 1998 and the results and conclusions will be presented to the next meeting of the Commission. It is expected that this review will result in such changes in the role, organization and procedures of HELCOM which will better reflect the changing political and economic context and enable the Commission to react more rapidly and effectively to the environmental challenges.

The Ministers and the Commissioner are confident that the above decisions will result in a significant improvement in the state of the marine environment of the Baltic Sea Area.