



HELCOM RECOMMENDATION 35/1

This Recommendation supersedes HELCOM Recommendation 15/5.

Adopted 1 April 2014, *)
having regard to Article 20, Paragraph b)
of the Helsinki Convention

SYSTEM OF COASTAL AND MARINE BALTIC SEA PROTECTED AREAS (HELCOM MPAs¹)

THE COMMISSION,

RECALLING Article 15 of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, 1992 (Helsinki Convention),

RECOGNIZING that a network of well-managed and ecologically coherent HELCOM marine protected areas (MPAs) is also an important step towards fulfilling the commitments undertaken at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD),

FURTHERMORE RECOGNIZING the need to reach the CBD Conference of Parties 10 (COP – 10, Nagoya, Aichi, Japan), biodiversity targets (Aichi targets) also in the Baltic Sea, as most of the CBD COP-10 Aichi targets link to the protection of the marine environment and management of MPAs, for example Target 5 (loss of habitats), Target 6 (overfishing), Target 8 (pollution/nutrients), Target 9 (invasive species), Target 10 (anthropogenic pressures, climate change, acidification), Target 11 (10% MPAs), Target 12 (threatened species), Target 13 (genetic diversity), Target 14 (ecosystem services), Target 15 (15% restoration target), Target 17 (biodiversity strategy), and Target 19 (knowledge sharing),

ACKNOWLEDGING that according to the Aichi Target 11, 10% of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, shall be conserved through an effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected system of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures,

APPRECIATING the measures already taken by all Baltic Sea countries to contribute to the network of HELCOM MPAs, and appreciating in particular that the Baltic Sea was the first regional sea that reached the Aichi Target 11 of 10% spatial coverage,

RECOGNIZING that the conservation and restoration of degraded ecosystems should be considered as a method to improve the quality of the marine environment, as pointed out in CBD's Aichi Target 15, for example when improving the status of HELCOM Red-listed habitats and species,

*) *Note by the Secretariat:* HELCOM 35-2014 agreed on an additional consultation procedure until 21 March 2014 (which was later extended until 31 March 2014) after which this Recommendation is considered to be adopted (Outcome of HELCOM 35-2014, Paragraph 4.36).

¹ Former HELCOM BSPAs

RECALLING that the first joint Ministerial Meeting of HELCOM and OSPAR (Bremen 2003) adopted a Joint HELCOM/OSPAR Work Programme on Marine Protected Areas (JWP) with the aim to achieve a coherent and effectively managed network of OSPAR MPAs² and HELCOM BSPAs (present HELCOM MPAs) by 2010 and that this aim, with a timeframe extended to 2020, was confirmed by the HELCOM 2013 Copenhagen Ministerial Meeting,

BEARING IN MIND that the Contracting Parties agreed in the 2007 HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) that the Baltic Sea should become a model of good management of human activities and be in a good environmental status by 2021, and adopted a strategic goal to attain “Favourable status of Baltic Sea biodiversity”, recognizing that this can only be achieved by reaching the goals of “Baltic Sea unaffected by eutrophication”, “Baltic Sea life undisturbed by hazardous substances”, and “Maritime activities carried out in an environmentally friendly way”,

RECALLING that the HELCOM 2010 Moscow Ministerial Meeting agreed on the establishment of BSPAs (present HELCOM MPAs) also in the Exclusive Economic Zone, on developing and applying by 2015 management plans for all existing BSPAs and to follow every new BSPA designation with the establishment of a management plan or measures within five years, and to designate 10% of all Baltic Sea sub-basins as BSPAs (present HELCOM MPAs), when scientifically justified,

BEING CONCERNED, however, that according to the 2010 HELCOM assessment of the network HELCOM MPAs ([BSEP 124B](#)), the network is still neither complete nor coherent, that most of the MPAs are not effectively managed, and that the targets of the Joint HELCOM/OSPAR Work Programme (JWP) and the Aichi Target 11 regarding the management, ecologically representativeness and connectivity have not yet been fully achieved,

RECALLING that the HELCOM 2013 Copenhagen Ministerial Declaration agreed to improve the HELCOM MPA network in order to strengthen biodiversity, and implement at a regional level the CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for the 2011-2020 period, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, taking into account the special characteristics of the Baltic Sea,

ACKNOWLEDGING that those HELCOM Contracting Parties which are also EU Member States are obliged to implement the EU Birds and Habitats Directives (BD 2009/147/EC and HD 92/43/EEC) in the Baltic Sea, as well as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD 2008/56/EC) with the aim to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) by 2020,

NOTING, that the goals, objectives and targets of the BSAP concerning HELCOM MPAs also contribute to implementation of these directives concerning spatial protection measures and in particular marine Natura 2000 sites,

FURTHER NOTING the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP, regulation EU 1380/2013) and in particular Article 8 on the establishment of fish stock recovery areas, which states that in such areas fishing activities may be restricted or prohibited in order to contribute to the conservation of living aquatic resources and marine ecosystems,

RECALLING that HELCOM seeks to combine efforts with the EU, and that to gain further synergies from activities taken by HELCOM Contracting Parties to meet the obligations of the above mentioned EU directives, the designation of Natura 2000 sites as HELCOM MPAs is accepted and the respective EU protection requirements are regarded as adequate for managing HELCOM MPAs (if covering also the underwater biota),

NOTING that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), has set new criteria for categorizing MPAs and that acknowledging these categories and following the same standards and terminology when

² Note that in 2010 OSPAR amended these objectives with new targets set for the OSPAR MPA network to be ecologically coherent by 2012 and to be effectively managed by 2016 (OSPAR Recommendation 2010/2).

setting up new criteria for HELCOM MPAs makes it possible to link up HELCOM's MPA network with global networks of MPAs,

CONSIDERING the HELCOM "Guidelines for Designating coastal and marine Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs) and proposed protection categories" as well as the "Guidelines for Management of Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs)", as well as relevant HELCOM report on , "Planning and management of Baltic Sea Protected Areas: guidelines and tools" ([BSEP No. 105](#)),

BEING AWARE of the fact that the Baltic Sea area has a large number of unique coastal and marine ecosystems, as well as biotopes, habitats, biotope complexes and species of great natural value and ecological significance, and that the network of HELCOM MPAs is a subset of a larger network of MPAs in the Baltic Sea, consisting also of national protected areas and for those Contracting Parties which are EU Member States also Natura 2000 sites.

BEING DEEPLY CONCERNED about the severe degradation of the Baltic Sea marine ecosystems and the decline of marine biodiversity, caused for example by pressures and threats brought from land and by intensive human use of coastal and marine areas and natural resources as well as the unsustainable use of ecosystem services,

RECOGNIZING that well-managed coastal and marine protected areas, supporting healthy and diverse ecosystems, can better withstand the above mentioned pressures and threats, contribute to a more sustainable use of ecosystem goods and services, and have an improved resilience and buffering capacity of the ecosystem in the face of external stressors,

FURTHER RECOGNIZING that a more intact and less disturbed biodiversity with a high degree of naturalness can optimally contribute to mitigation of global climate change by storing and absorbing carbon,

ACKNOWLEDGING that proper legal protection of all MPAs in the HELCOM MPA network must be ensured, along with effective management plans or measures, in order to contribute to sufficient protection of biodiversity,

FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGING that the protection effectiveness of MPAs benefits from a good support from local and regional stakeholders as well as a wider public, and vice versa,

RECOMMENDS that the Governments of the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention individually and jointly take all appropriate measures, assisted by the relevant HELCOM subsidiary bodies, to step up efforts to establish an ecologically coherent and effectively managed network of coastal and marine Baltic Sea protected areas (HELCOM MPAs), that also contributes to fulfilling other legal commitments, such as obligations of the CBD and EU legislation and policies as described in the preamble (for those HELCOM countries being also EU Member States) and to improve the protection effectiveness of existing HELCOM MPAs, and in particular to:

- a) reach the target set by the HELCOM 2010 Moscow Ministerial Declaration that at least 10% of the marine area in all sub-basins of the Baltic Sea including the EEZ areas beyond territorial waters is covered by MPAs where scientifically justified. In addition, where ecologically meaningful, coastal terrestrial areas can be included;
- b) review whether new coastal and marine areas justify being selected as HELCOM MPAs, and to designate new sites as HELCOM MPAs where ecologically meaningful, especially in offshore area beyond territorial waters;
- c) ensure that HELCOM MPAs *inter alia* provide specific protection to those species, habitats, biotopes and biotope complexes included in the HELCOM Red Lists, as agreed in the HELCOM 2013 Copenhagen Ministerial Declaration, by considering these in the site selection procedure as well as in site management

(for example by specific conservation and restoration measures including restoration of degraded ecosystems);

- d) ensure, when selecting new areas, that the network of HELCOM MPAs is ecologically coherent and takes into account connectivity between sites including for example migration routes, species mobility and areas of special ecological significance such as spawning areas;
- e) make use of computer-based site selection tools such as MARXAN for a HELCOM-wide approach which maximizes the chance of creating a coherent network of HELCOM MPAs and at the same time minimizing the impact of pressures and conflicts with other interests;
- f) encourage Contracting Parties which are also EU Member States to designate when feasible all appropriate Natura 2000 sites as HELCOM MPAs, and to consider all Natura 2000 sites as well as other marine protected areas when evaluating the network of marine protected areas;
- g) encourage Contracting Parties which are also OSPAR Contracting Parties to designate, when appropriate, OSPAR MPAs as HELCOM MPAs in order to harmonize the networks where the conventions geographical scope overlap;
- h) manage HELCOM MPAs effectively and to develop and apply by 2015 management plans or measures for all existing HELCOM MPAs, and to establish management plan or measures for every new MPA within five years after its designation, as agreed in the HELCOM 2013 Copenhagen Ministerial Declaration;
- i) update the management plans when necessary and in accordance with other legal requirements with a maximum of 12 years intervals;
- j) harmonise the designation of neighbouring HELCOM MPAs in transboundary marine areas, and where appropriate to join forces between neighbouring states when setting up management plans or measures for such HELCOM MPAs;
- k) assess the effectiveness of the management plans or measures of HELCOM MPAs by conducting monitoring, and where feasible scientific research programmes, which are directly connected to the conservation interests of HELCOM MPAs, including the placement of monitoring stations inside the MPAs (for those Contracting Parties which are also EU Member States this monitoring may be linked to the monitoring related to the implementation of relevant EU legislation);
- l) include HELCOM MPAs as areas of particular ecological significance in coastal and maritime spatial planning processes and incorporate their management provisions in spatial plans and Integrated Marine and Coastal Management Strategies, respectively;
- m) update, when necessary, HELCOM MPA related guidelines and guiding documents in order to keep them in line with new knowledge and compatible with other international criteria, such as MSFD requirements, in particular those concerning spatial protection measures;
- n) apply the newest IUCN categorisation system when describing the HELCOM MPAs in order to allow for global comparisons of regional networks;
- o) perform identification, designation and legal protection of HELCOM MPAs according to HELCOMs criteria and guidelines and base all management plans or measures on relevant HELCOM publications such as "Planning and management of Baltic Sea Protected Areas: guidelines and tools" (BSEP 105). For EU Member States the respective EU requirements and guidelines are regarded as adequate for designating and managing HELCOM MPAs;

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- p) modernize the HELCOM MPAs database as agreed in the HELCOM 2013 Copenhagen Ministerial Declaration, taking into account and harmonizing with other similar databases;
 - q) continuously report the most recent numerical and descriptive data on HELCOM MPAs to HELCOMs data systems ([HELCOM MPA database](#), [GIS based map and data service](#));
 - r) regularly assess the status and development of HELCOMs MPAs according to the time tables set by HELCOM and to ensure that the assessments are applicable for corresponding EU and global reporting;

ALSO RECOMMENDS to harmonize activities and to work jointly with respective OSPAR and EU groups, as applicable, in order to achieve a Joint Network of marine protected areas.