

The goal and vision of HELCOM

HELCOM's main goal is to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution, and to restore and safeguard its ecological balance. HELCOM's vision for the future is a healthy Baltic Sea environment with diverse biological components functioning in balance, resulting in a good ecological status and supporting a wide range of sustainable economic and social activities.

HELCOM works as:

- an **environmental policy maker** for the Baltic Sea area by developing common environmental objectives and actions;
- an **environmental focal point** providing information about (i) the state of/trends in the marine environment, (ii) the efficiency of measures to protect it, and (iii) common initiatives and positions which can form the basis for decision-making in other international fora;
- a **body** for developing, according to the specific needs of the Baltic Sea, Recommendations of its own and Recommendations supplementary to measures imposed by other international organisations;
- a **supervisory body** dedicated to ensuring that HELCOM environmental standards are fully implemented by all parties throughout the Baltic Sea and its catchment area; and
- a **co-ordinating body**, ascertaining multilateral response in case of major maritime incidents.

Priorities

- Environmental monitoring and assessment
- Combating eutrophication caused by excessive nutrient loads from municipal wastewater and agricultural run-off
- Preventing pollution by hazardous substances
- Improving navigational safety and accident response capacity
- Protecting and conserving marine and coastal biodiversity



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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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HELCOM

35 years of international
co-operation on protecting
the marine environment of
the Baltic Sea

Helsinki Commission

Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission



The Helsinki Commission

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, commonly known as the Helsinki Commission, or HELCOM, works to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution through intergovernmental co-operation between Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden.

HELCOM is the governing body of the 'Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area' – usually called the Helsinki Convention.

The 1974 Convention

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

The 1992 Convention

In 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 and includes the inland waters, the waters of the sea itself and the seabed. Measures are also taken in the whole catchment area of the Baltic Sea to reduce land-based pollution.

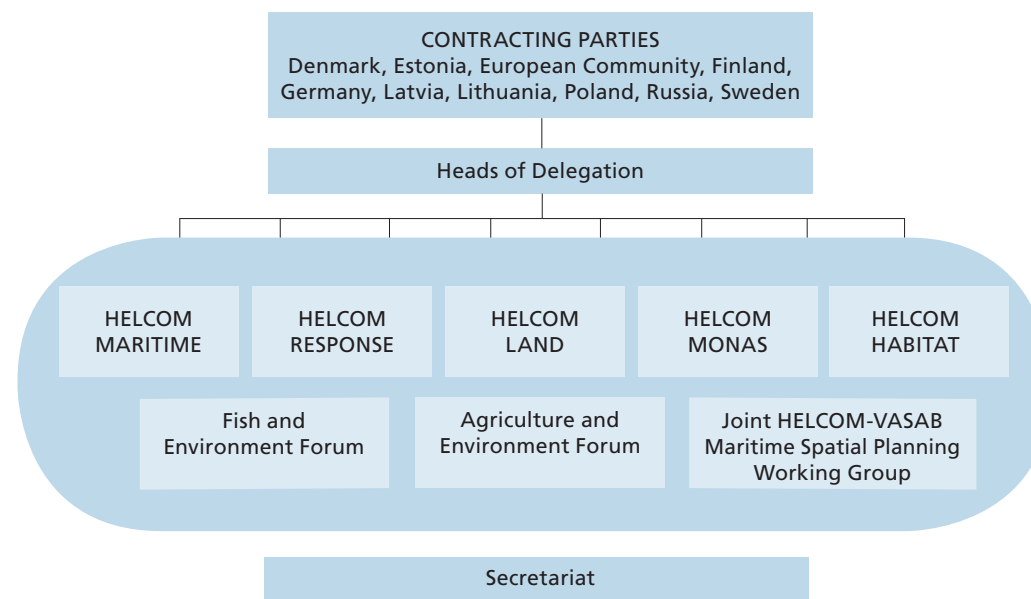


HELCOM today

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 Member States must act on in their respective national programmes and legislation.

The chairmanship of the Helsinki Commission rotates between the Member States every two years in 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, five main expert groups and three cross-sectoral platforms.



The Baltic Sea Action Plan

One of the major programmes that HELCOM is currently implementing is the overarching Baltic Sea Action Plan to radically reduce pollution to the marine environment and restore its good ecological status by 2021. This plan provides a framework for managing the Baltic Sea environment using an

integrated and holistic approach to address all major environmental problems affecting the Baltic Sea. It contains concrete and meaningful actions to curb eutrophication, prevent pollution involving hazardous substances, improve maritime safety and accident response capacity, and halt habitat destruction and the decline in biodiversity.

HELCOM Groups

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 increase safety of navigation and to ensure that shipping in the Baltic is environmentally 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 trans-

national response to marine pollution incidents both at sea and on shore. 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 the use of satellite images from the European Space Agency in order to prevent deliberate pollution from ships.

The HELCOM **Fisheries and Environment Forum** serves as a platform for dialogue between fisheries and environmental authorities on marine biodiversity and sustainable fisheries.

The HELCOM **Agriculture and Environment Forum** enhances the dialogue between agricultural and environmental authorities on the development and application of sustainable agricultural practices with the least environmental impact on the Baltic Sea.

The **Joint HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group** is developing coherent Maritime Spatial Planning in the Baltic Sea area based on the ten Maritime Spatial Planning Principles that have been agreed by the two intergovernmental organizations.

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 intergovernmental and non-governmental international organisations.

