

**Report on the Exercise of the Observer Status of the
Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) at the
Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission
(Helsinki Commission – HELCOM)**

2026

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I. Introduction



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The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) has held observer status at the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission – HELCOM) for more than two decades. Throughout this period, the BSPC continuously provided parliamentary backing to state commitments agreed upon within the framework of HELCOM and has sought to amplify, through its regular resolutions, the shared vision of a healthy and resilient Baltic Sea environment in a good ecological state. The present report is submitted in fulfilment of the BSPC’s observer mandate and covers the BSPC’s efforts to support HELCOM as well as the main developments within HELCOM throughout 2025 and extending into the most significant institutional changes of 2026.

The reporting period marked the halfway point of the 2021 Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) – HELCOM’s central programme of measures towards the 2030 target year – and the completion of the first round of BSAP implementation reporting, the results of which are to be reviewed at the 2026 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Warsaw. It is important to note that it is not easy to report in the current situation - HELCOM tried to continue to operate under the “strategic pause” announced in March 2022, against the backdrop of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and a tense geopolitical situation that has heightened old as well as emerging environmental risks in the Baltic Sea, including those associated with the so-called “shadow fleet.” Throughout this period, the BSPC and HELCOM tried to maintain their close cooperation, ensuring that parliamentary concerns were reflected in regional environmental governance and that HELCOM’s scientific assessments informed the resolutions adopted by Baltic Sea parliamentarians.

The report at hand documents this cooperation and the main developments within HELCOM during the period under review. The first part examines the cooperation between the BSPC and HELCOM, focussing on BSPC’s efforts to support HELCOM’s work through its annual resolutions and government responses to the HELCOM-

related recommendations of the 34th BSPC. The second part summarises the main developments in HELCOM's work, primarily drawing on the HELCOM Annual Report 2025, and shortly outlining the current institutional developments: the designation of the next Executive Secretary, the priorities of the new Polish Chairmanship 2026–2028, and the preparations for the upcoming HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in November 2026 in Warsaw. The annex provides updated lists of HELCOM's expert groups and projects for reference. My sincere thanks for the assistance go to the International Secretariat of the Landtag, especially to Mrs Evgeniya Bakalova.

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II. Cooperation between the BSPC and HELCOM

1. BSPC Efforts to Support HELCOM

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) and the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) share the common goal of a healthy and resilient Baltic Sea supporting a wide range of economic and social activities. Traditionally, the close cooperation between HELCOM and the BSPC is substantiated through repeated BSPC's recommendations to Baltic Sea region governments that reference HELCOM's proprieties and demand upholding their international commitments and implementing the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), among others. HELCOM's representatives regularly participate in the meetings of BSPC working bodies and annual conferences, while both institutions benefit from ongoing exchanges.

Looking back, the resolution of the 33rd BSPC annual conference¹ held on 25–27 August 2024 in Helsingør (Denmark) encompassed a number of demands and recommendations in connection with HELCOM's priority areas. Thus, it called upon a strict and quick implementation of the updated BSAP and its associated documents within the agreed timelines. In addition, the resolution called to consider further measures from the policy-relevant suggestions of the 2021 Climate Change in the Baltic Sea Fact Sheet. The BSPC also followed the tradition of paying special attention to the challenge of sea-dumped munitions – as highlighted in multiple resolutions of the previous BSPC annual conferences (see e.g. the resolutions of the 28th,² 29th,³ 30th,⁴ and 31st,⁵ and 32nd,⁶ BSPC). In their 33rd BSPC resolution, the parliaments of the Baltic Sea region urged national and regional governments to work together on mapping and safely removing sea-dumped munitions, using EU projects and funding, fostering cooperation between HELCOM, CBS, and the EU, and applying environmentally friendly methods as part of security and environmental priorities.⁷

The BSPC primarily supports HELCOM by providing parliamentary backing and political visibility for HELCOM's environmental work via its annual resolutions and the corresponding government statements on the implementation of relevant measures. Since gaining observer status more than two decades ago, the BSPC has maintained

¹ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 33rd Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) in Helsingør on 27 August 2024, <https://resources.bspc.net/documents/33-BSPC-resolution-27.08.2024.pdf>.

² Conference Resolution Adopted by the 28th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) in Oslo on 27 August 2019, Item 24, p. 4, <https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bspc.net%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2019%2F08%2FConference-Resolution-28-BSPC-adopted-270819-.docx&hl=en>.

³ Conference Resolution Adopted by the Digital 29th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) on 24 August 2020, Item 15, p. 3, <https://www.bspc.net/29th-bspc-resolution-final-adopted/>.

⁴ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 30th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) on 30 August 2021, Item 47, p. 6, <https://www.bspc.net/30-bspc-resolution-2021-adopted/>.

⁵ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 31st Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) in Stockholm on 14 June 2022, Item 26, p. 5, <https://www.bspc.net/conference-resolution-31-bspc/>.

⁶ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 32nd Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) in Berlin on 29 August 2023, Items 60, 62, 63, pp. 8–9, https://www.bspc.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Final-Version-32-BSPC-resolution-V-28082023_v1-.pdf.

⁷ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 33rd Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) in Helsingør on 27 August 2024, Item 19, p. 5, <https://resources.bspc.net/documents/33-BSPC-resolution-27.08.2024.pdf>.

close institutional contacts with HELCOM, received regular updates from the HELCOM Secretariat, submitted annual observer reports, and has incorporated HELCOM objectives and priorities into its annual resolutions. Its recurring demand is that governments must move from commitments to timely implementation – particularly of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Following this tradition, the 34th BSPC resolution incorporated the following demands and recommendations with direct references to HELCOM:

- The resolution calls upon the Baltic Sea region governments to strengthen the **implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan**, particularly in relation to eutrophication, marine biodiversity restoration and pollution control.⁸ It also stresses that implementation should be aligned with EU and regional environmental legislation.
- Further, the resolution acknowledges HELCOM's scientific foundations and governance capacities and calls for their reinforcements through **strengthening marine ecosystem monitoring**, including full support for HELCOM's updated indicators and assessment cycles.⁹ This should help to measure progress towards Baltic Sea environmental objectives consistently and transparently.
- Finally, it calls to ensure **alignment between HELCOM, EU and IMO regulatory frameworks**.¹⁰ The aim is to avoid fragmented or contradictory rules while retaining flexible implementation pathways adapted to the Baltic Sea states' specific conditions.

In addition to these items, the resolution of the 34th BSPC reinforces its support for HELCOM's environmental policy priorities in line with BSAP thematic segments (biodiversity; eutrophication; hazardous substances and litter; sea-based activities). The resolution contains the following recommendations aiming at a healthy Baltic Sea:

- Regarding **fisheries and ecosystem recovery**, the resolution calls for a recovery plan for depleted Baltic fish stocks, consideration of bottom-trawl-free zones, and application of the precautionary principle to fishmeal fisheries.¹¹
- Further, the resolution proposes **incorporating climate adaptation and biodiversity protection into maritime spatial planning**, fisheries management, and coastal development.¹²

⁸ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 34th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), Mariehamn, Åland Islands, 26 August 2025, Item 35, p. 9, <https://www.bspc.net/resources/documents/1003/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

⁹ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 34th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), Mariehamn, Åland Islands, 26 August 2025, Item 40, p. 9, <https://www.bspc.net/resources/documents/1003/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

¹⁰ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 34th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), Mariehamn, Åland Islands, 26 August 2025, Item 51, p. 10, <https://www.bspc.net/resources/documents/1003/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

¹¹ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 34th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), Mariehamn, Åland Islands, 26 August 2025, Items 36–38, p. 9, <https://www.bspc.net/resources/documents/1003/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

¹² Conference Resolution Adopted by the 34th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), Mariehamn, Åland Islands, 26 August 2025, Item 39, p. 9, <https://www.bspc.net/resources/documents/1003/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

- Regarding **nutrient reduction**, the resolution promotes coordinated nutrient-reduction policies and sustainable, climate-resilient agricultural practices to reduce nutrient runoff into the Baltic Sea.¹³
- The resolution supports the establishment and **digitalisation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**, stronger connectivity and ecosystem-based management, including through strengthening regional cooperation.¹⁴
- In regard to the promotion of **green shipping**, the resolution advocates for green shipping corridors, cleaner maritime and rail transport, smart ports, shore-side electricity, circular-economy practices, and improved hinterland connections.¹⁵
- In view of old and emerging environmental hazards, the resolution specifically calls for environmental risks from the **shadow-fleet** to be assessed as part of maritime security and hybrid threat monitoring and reiterates support for environmentally safe and timely clearance of **sea-dumped munitions**, including with the help of Horizon Europe funding and enhanced international coordination.¹⁶
- Finally, the resolution calls for more **youth engagement in marine policy**, through e.g. civic science and biodiversity education.¹⁷

The resolution of the 34th BSPP demonstrates both continuity and thematic expansion in BSPP support for HELCOM. The BSPP reiterated its demands for accelerated BSAP implementation, nutrient reduction, climate action, and the environmentally safe removal of dumped munitions. At the same time, the 34th resolution broadened the agenda to consider depleted fish stocks, marine protected areas, ecosystem monitoring, green shipping, the environmental risks of the shadow-fleet, and coordination between HELCOM, the EU and IMO.

In practical terms, the BSPP supports HELCOM by backing HELCOM's scientific assessments and regional targets and actions through parliamentary recommendations, encouraging governments to implement their commitments, maintaining political accountability, while taking into consideration issues of maritime security and wider Baltic Sea cooperation. HELCOM provides the regional environmental regulatory framework and expertise, while the BSPP helps build parliamentary support and pressure for implementation.

¹³ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 34th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPP), Mariehamn, Åland Islands, 26 August 2025, Item 41, p. 9, <https://www.bspp.net/resources/documents/1003/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

¹⁴ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 34th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPP), Mariehamn, Åland Islands, 26 August 2025, Item 43, p. 9, <https://www.bspp.net/resources/documents/1003/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

¹⁵ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 34th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPP), Mariehamn, Åland Islands, 26 August 2025, Items 45–48, p. 10, <https://www.bspp.net/resources/documents/1003/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

¹⁶ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 34th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPP), Mariehamn, Åland Islands, 26 August 2025, Items 49–50, p. 10, <https://www.bspp.net/resources/documents/1003/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

¹⁷ Conference Resolution Adopted by the 34th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPP), Mariehamn, Åland Islands, 26 August 2025, Item 52, p. 10, <https://www.bspp.net/resources/documents/1003/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

2. Government Responses to HELCOM-related Recommendations of the 34th BSPC

The established BSPC practice of forwarding the annually adopted resolutions to the respective BSPC member governments allows regular insights into the progress achieved in implementing the consensually agreed demands and recommendations across a wide range of policies and topics of common interest for Baltic Sea parliamentarians. The statements in response to the relevant demands of the 34th BSPC¹⁸ show that governments largely support and provide evidence of ongoing implementation of corresponding measures and recommendations to improve the ecological state of the Baltic Sea. Notably, BSPC recommendations largely match existing national, regional, and EU-level work on marine protection, monitoring, and regulatory coordination.

2.1. Implementation of the BSAP

Responses to the BSPC's call for strengthening the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan are broadly affirmative. Several governments report that the BSAP is already being implemented through national marine strategies, river basin management plans, restoration programmes, wastewater and agricultural measures, as well as work on marine protected areas. Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Åland all report that BSAP implementation is either underway or already embedded in their policy frameworks.

Almost all governments state that BSAP goals are being translated into national measures on eutrophication reduction, biodiversity protection and restoration, as well as pollution control. Finland highlights its Marine Strategy programme of measures, the Ahti and Helmi programmes, and nutrient-recycling funding; Sweden states that BSAP implementation is a government priority with responsibilities assigned to relevant authorities; Estonia reports that BSAP actions were integrated into its Marine Strategy measures; Latvia and Lithuania point to ongoing national plans and EU-funded projects; while Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern notify that their respective state governments are implementing BSAP actions in compliance with EU law.

35. Strengthen the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan , particularly in the fields of eutrophication mitigation, marine biodiversity restoration, and pollution control, and ensure alignment with EU and regional environmental legislation.	
European Commission	As regards environmental matters, the BSAP is well aligned with the EU priorities and HELCOM is instrumental in supporting the Member States implementing the environmental law , notably as concerns the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Nature Restoration Regulation . A HELCOM Ministerial Meeting is planned for October 2026, and it will be a good occasion to take stock of the implementation of the BSAP and set priorities for the next steps.

¹⁸ BSPC, Governmental Replies to the Resolution of the 34th BSPC. Pending Publication.

Åland	Åland's Water Action Programme contributes to the implementation of several elements of HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan. The programme includes measures to reduce eutrophication, increase biodiversity through improved knowledge, strategies and action plans, and implement restoration activities in lakes and marine environments. Examples include the projects Clean Water 2030, Waterways for Marine Biodiversity and LIFE IP BIODIVERSEA. An application has also been submitted for the Resilient Sea project under Central Baltic, planned to start in May 2026. The project BalticReed harvests and repurposes nutrient-rich reed biomass, reducing eutrophication and restoring coastal ecosystems.
Estonia	During the 2023 update of Estonia's Marine Strategy Programme of Measures, BSAP actions were integrated into national measures to ensure coherence between national and regional commitments. Estonia also participates in regional projects supporting BSAP implementation. One example is the Horizon Europe-funded project PROTECT BALTIC. Estonia's national Marine Strategy sets a target to protect 30% of its marine area by 2030. As of 2024, 7,066 km² — 19.3% of the total marine area or 28.1% of national waters — is under protection. In 2022, Estonia carried out a pilot modelling project to determine maximum allowable nutrient inputs for the Soela Strait. A follow-up project covered the entire Estonian marine area until June 2025 and included evaluating internal phosphorus loading from seabed sediments to provide a comprehensive overview of nutrient pressures.
Finland	In Finland, the implementation of the BSAP is mainly done through the implementation of the MSFD programme of measures, as well as through regional river basin management plans. Two national programs, Ahti and Helmi, provide resources to support the above-mentioned aims. Ahti Programme, focused on improving the state of waters and marine areas, promotes the implementation of the national marine strategy programme of measures as well as the regional River Basin Management Plans. Helmi habitats programme aims to strengthen Finland's biodiversity and safeguard vital ecosystem services. Many measures to restore Baltic Sea habitats have also been produced through an eight-year long LIFE project called BIODIVERSEA. The environmental measures of Finland's CAP Strategic Plan contribute to strengthening the implementation of the BSAP. In addition, national funding programmes for nutrient recycling support circular economy objectives and reduction targets for nutrient loads.
Latvia	Latest research study in Latvia on effectiveness of measures under the River basin management plans in Latvia (2022 – 2027) towards HELCOM BSAP goals concludes that measures to reduce nutrient loads from agriculture have significant potential to reduce 15 Annex nutrient loads in the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Riga, and these measures are particularly effective when they are systematically implemented across a wide area and targeted at high-risk areas. The work has already been started on river basin management plans for 2028–2033, which will include an updated assessment of water quality, the objectives set for water bodies, and the actions needed to achieve them. LIFE GOODWATER IP project's overall aim is to improve the status of water bodies at risk in Latvia by means of the full implementation of the measures laid down in the four River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs). Programme of Measures to reach good marine environmental status in Latvia (2022-2027) includes measures aimed at reducing pollution, improving the state of the ecosystem, as well as research activities to address information gaps.

Lithuania	Lithuania contributes to the implementation of the HELCOM BSAP by reducing pollution from land-based sources (especially agriculture and wastewater), expanding and managing marine protected areas, carrying out environmental monitoring, and participating in regional cooperation and reporting. In practice, many national actions – like improving water treatment, monitoring benthic habitats, or planning restoration - are directly linked to BSAP goals, making it a key framework connecting national policies with regional Baltic Sea protection efforts.
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Working alongside the federal government, the state government is implementing the relevant measures of the HELCOM BSAP in full compliance with EU regulations. The implementation of Natura 2000 and the future implementation of the EU Habitats Restoration Regulation (RR) also serve to advance the implementation of the BSAP with regard to biodiversity in coastal waters.
Poland	Poland is currently preparing its first National Plan for the Restoration of Natural Resources (KPOZP) . The document will form the basis for actions aimed at restoring nature and improving biodiversity up to 2050, taking into account all types of ecosystems, including marine ecosystems. The draft National Marine Strategy provides for measures aimed, amongst other things, at reducing eutrophication, making fishing activities more sustainable, and restoring habitats and key species. A central role is played by Poland's current VASAB Chairmanship (since 1 July 2025), which focuses on enhancing territorial resilience as a cross-cutting priority, integrating spatial planning, sectoral policies, and land and sea interactions. Progress is being reviewed in joint HELCOM–VASAB projects (including Baltic Sea2Land, eMSP NBSR and NESBp).
Schleswig-Holstein	In Schleswig-Holstein, the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan is being implemented through the national program of measures under the MSFD and the BSAP 2030.
Sweden	The implementation of the HELCOM BSAP is a prioritised target for the Swedish government. The Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management letter of appropriation therefore includes missions and financial investments directly related to implementing the BSAP in cooperation with other relevant authorities. The BSAP is also fully implemented as part of national plans of measures related to for example the MSFD . In addition, the responsibility for implementing measures in the BSAP have all been assigned to relevant authorities. This is particularly important for measures that fall under sector legislation.

2.2. Ecosystem Monitoring and Indicators

Government responses to recommendations towards strengthening ecosystem monitoring, especially through HELCOM's updated indicator system, demonstrate fairly broad support for efforts aiming at regular scientifically backed assessments of the ecological state of the Baltic Sea. Thus, Finland stresses long-term monitoring and its research infrastructure, including FINMARI, and reports that its national assessment cycles are synchronised with HELCOM's holistic assessments. Sweden acknowledges that HELCOM provides important regional coordination for information and tools. Åland, Estonia, Latvia, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Schleswig-Holstein all point to existing monitoring systems (primarily under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive – MSFD), research projects, and data contributions to HELCOM

assessments. Latvia mentions its participation in HELCOM indicator systems and assessment cycles, ongoing support through EMFAF-funded projects, and scientific work on socioeconomic factors, microplastics, and hazardous chemicals. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern similarly highlights its research infrastructure and long-term observation capacity as a major source of data for HELCOM.

40. Reinforce the scientific foundations and governance capacities of marine ecosystem monitoring, including through full support to HELCOM's updated indicator systems and assessment cycles.	
Åland	Åland conducts statutory monitoring of its aquatic environments with existing resources and develops new methodologies through EU projects such as Waterways for Marine Biodiversity . Ongoing cooperation is maintained with HELCOM and Finnish authorities.
Estonia	In 2024, Estonia completed an environmental status assessment under the MSFD . Although good environmental status has not yet been reached, the results show slight improvements, indicating that implemented measures are beginning to generate positive effects.
Finland	The scientific foundation of Finland's marine research was recently assessed by a national working group chaired by the Prime Minister's Office. The key conclusion is that Finnish marine research is of an internationally high standard and in many areas is top-notch. Particular strengths of the Finnish Baltic Sea science lie in the long-term monitoring and multidisciplinary research infrastructures (e.g. FINMARI). Since the assessment took place, Finnish capacity of marine ecosystem monitoring has been improved further by EU funded LIFE projects like the BIODIVERSEA , as well as by updating the Finnish Marine Strategy's monitoring programme. Finland is an active Contracting Party to HELCOM and uses HELCOM indicators e.g. when implementing the EU MSFD . Finland also uses HELCOM's holistic assessments (State of the Baltic Sea reports) when it carries out its corresponding national assessments, and the cycles between the national and the regional assessments are well synchronized.
Latvia	Latvia participates in the development of HELCOM joint periodic assessments of the state of the marine environment (HOLAS) and assessments of pollution loads compilation to the Baltic Sea (PLC). The EMFAF supports research, including improvement of monitoring of the marine environment. Latvia is implementing the EMFAF co-financed project "Research to improve knowledge of the state of the marine environment for the implementation of an integrated maritime policy" (2024 – 2029). The project aims to improve knowledge regarding the state of the marine environment and the factors affecting it, as well as socioeconomic aspects. Other projects: "Smart Platforms in the Gulf of Riga and Moonsund" (Interreg VI-A Estonia–Latvia Programme), Horizon Europe project "MarTe: Marine Technology Excellence Centre for a Sustainable Blue Economy in the Baltic States". Latvia also continues its scientific research on microplastic pollution and emerging hazardous chemicals, such as pharmaceuticals, in the aquatic environment.
Lithuania	The Ministerial Declaration of the "Our Baltic Conference 2025" emphasises strengthening scientific research and data systems with updated monitoring by 2026, and supporting a sustainable blue economy through EU funding and innovation. Lithuania plays an active role in the PROTECT BALTIC project, coordinated by HELCOM through national institutions such as the

	State Service for Protected Areas and Klaipeda University. Its cooperation focuses on strengthening the management and monitoring of marine protected areas (including Natura 2000 sites), improving scientific data, and defining clearer conservation objectives and measures.
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	The state government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern significantly strengthens the scientific foundation for monitoring marine ecosystems by funding and operating high-performance research facilities . The Leibniz Institute for Baltic Sea Research Warnemünde (IOW) conducts long-term observation programs, ship-based in-situ experiments, and physical and biogeochemical modelling. With the research vessel “Elisabeth Mann Borgese” , the state possesses a significant research infrastructure for marine environmental monitoring. Through close cooperation, these activities provide important data sets for HELCOM. Alongside the federal government, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern implements the corresponding monitoring activities in its coastal waters in full compliance with EU MSFD . In connection with the implementation of Natura 2000 and the future implementation of the EU Restoration Regulation , scientific data will be collected and evaluated as part of monitoring and reporting obligations.
Schleswig-Holstein	In Germany, marine ecosystem monitoring is based on the monitoring programs of the EU MSFD . These have been revised and are open for public comment until April 14, 2026, before being reported to the EU in October 2026. They are fundamentally based on the indicator systems and assessment cycles agreed upon in regional marine protection conventions (HELCOM for the Baltic Sea) or within the framework of the EU-CIS process.
Sweden	Sweden prioritises securing appropriate scientific knowledge and monitoring to improve the understanding of the marine ecosystems and provide adequate data to adapt management. HELCOM contributes important regional coordination of information and tools to achieve this. In addition, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) provides scientific expertise and advice for commercial fish stocks and indicators. However, limited resources must be used effectively and Sweden is therefore highly engaged in the development of the monitoring to make sure that the most cost-effective methods are used. In this regard it is important to point out that implementing existing efficient measures should have priority.

2.3. Regulatory Alignment between HELCOM, EU, and IMO

Governments across the Baltic Sea region broadly support alignment between HELCOM, EU, and IMO frameworks, and consistently warn against duplication or fragmentation. Finland emphasises that HELCOM must remain fully aligned with EU and IMO regulations and sees it as crucial for fulfilling the requirements of the MSFD on the regional level. Sweden stresses avoiding duplication while highlighting HELCOM's instrumental role in driving regionally identified needs in international forums. Lithuania remarks that HELCOM facilitates the development of region-specific policies ensuring that stricter environmental standards for the Baltic Sea are compatible with IMO's broader guidelines. Latvia notes that HELCOM recommendations help implement IMO requirements in a regionally coordinated and harmonised manner.

51. Ensure alignment between HELCOM, EU and IMO regulatory frameworks, avoiding regulatory fragmentation while enabling flexible, region-specific implementation pathways.	
Finland	As part of the more general ongoing attempt to render HELCOM's work even more efficient and streamlined, Finland has highlighted the need to make sure HELCOM's work is fully aligned with the work carried out by EU and IMO . HELCOM carries out crucial regional IMO related tasks, such as the regional coordination of oil and chemical spill response, as well as the formulation of regional approaches towards IMO regulation. HELCOM is also of utmost importance from the perspective of fulfilling the regional prerequisites of the EU MSFD. Finland's objective is to uphold a strong HELCOM, which provides pragmatic and practical benefits to the health of the Baltic Sea. This can be best done by focusing and prioritizing HELCOM's work, and by avoiding regulatory fragmentation as well as duplication of work with other relevant organisations.
Latvia	Latvia participates in the work of HELCOM, the EU, and the IMO. HELCOM recommendations and guidelines in the maritime field help to implement IMO requirements in a regionally coordinated and harmonised manner to ensure environmentally sustainable shipping and ports in the Baltic Sea area.
Lithuania	Lithuania actively participates in HELCOM's activities, which aim to align regional environmental regulations for the Baltic Sea with broader EU and international standards. Within the HELCOM framework, efforts are underway to align EU and IMO regulations , particularly in areas such as maritime pollution and emission control. HELCOM facilitates the development of region-specific policies, ensuring that stricter environmental standards for the Baltic Sea, like the SECA (Sulphur Emission Control Area) regulations, are compatible with IMO's broader guidelines. The commission actively engages with both the EU and IMO to harmonize regulations, preventing fragmentation while ensuring regionally tailored implementation. Additionally, HELCOM fosters dialogue between member states to streamline environmental and maritime safety policies in line with EU directives and IMO conventions. Through participation in IMO committees, EU working groups and regional fora, the Lithuanian Ministry of Transport and Communications promotes dialogue between global, European and regional governance levels. Lithuania's approach seeks to balance global uniformity with regional ambition.
Schleswig-Holstein	In the field of marine conservation, the implementation of the EU MSFD is based on work carried out at the HELCOM level; furthermore, the EU itself is a member of HELCOM and, through its participation in the relevant bodies, ensures the coordination of regulatory frameworks.
Sweden	The Swedish government always strives to avoid duplication of work and regulatory fragmentation. It is important to point out, however, that the HELCOM parties have been exceptionally successful in identifying regional issues and solutions in maritime-related topics. The HELCOM cooperation is instrumental in driving regionally identified needs in international forums.

III. Main Developments

1. HELCOM Annual Report 2025: Priorities and Developments

The HELCOM Annual Report 2025¹⁹ provides an overview of the Helsinki Commission's activities throughout 2025, structured around the implementation of the 2021 Baltic Sea Action Plan and the 1992 Helsinki Convention across 18 thematic segments. In his foreword, HELCOM's Executive Secretary, Mr Rüdiger Strempele, noted that five years before the BSAP 2030 benchmark, the Baltic Sea region finds itself amid a global "polycrisis." Yet despite the tense geopolitical situation, the updated 2021 BSAP saw its first round of implementation reporting in 2025 (the second round is planned for 2029), with results under evaluation and to be later discussed at the 2026 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Warsaw. Mr Strempele stressed that the overall ecological state of the Baltic Sea remained poor, with long-standing problems unresolved and new ones emerging. However, he emphasised that a thriving Baltic Sea would contribute to regional prosperity, resilience, and security.

The report reminded that HELCOM currently operated under a strategic pause²⁰ in regular operations involving the Russian Federation, in place since 4 March 2022 and reaffirmed at the 2024 Ministerial Meeting, which condemned Russia's war against Ukraine.

Species and Habitats

In 2025, HELCOM adopted Recommendation 42-43/9²¹ on protecting sturgeon and reducing sturgeon bycatch. In addition, the HELCOM Red List II project (2022–2025)²² concluded with the publication of threat-status assessments for Baltic species and biotopes, including species in danger of extinction and underwater biotopes at risk of collapse. The HELCOM-coordinated PROTECT BALTIC project (2023–2028)²³ advanced regional species distribution modelling (399 benthic invertebrate, 185 macrophyte, and 72 fish models) and launched the BaBiDaPi project²⁴ linking the HELCOM Biodiversity database to the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet).

¹⁹ HELCOM Annual Report 2025. Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings No. 209. HELCOM (2026), <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Annual-report-2025.pdf>. Accessed August 18, 2026.

²⁰ HELCOM's strategic pause means that official meetings with Russian involvement are suspended until further notice, but does not constitute a cessation of HELCOM activities, since BSAP implementation continues.

²¹ HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/9, Managing Large and Medium Rivers to Ensure River Connectivity for Fish Migration to Protect Sturgeon and Reduce Sturgeon Bycatch, Adopted 28 March 2025, <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Rec-42-43-9.pdf>. Accessed August 18, 2026.

²² HELCOM, 2024 Red List II of Biotopes, Habitats and Biotope Complexes, <https://helcom.fi/baltic-sea-trends/biodiversity/2024-red-list-of-biotopes-habitats-and-biotope-complexes/>. Accessed August 18, 2026.

²³ HELCOM, PROTECT BALTIC Project, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/protect-baltic/>. Accessed August 18, 2026.

²⁴ HELCOM, Baltic Biodiversity Data Pipeline – Connecting the HELCOM Biodiversity database to EU-DTO (BaBiDaPi), <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/babidapi/>. Accessed August 18, 2026.

Spatial Conservation and MPAs

An updated MPA dataset identified more than 2,800 MPAs (constituting a 15-fold increase over previously available data), showing that 18.4% of the Baltic Sea region is currently covered by MPAs – against the 2030 target of 30% MPAs (and 10% strictly protected areas). Several EU-funded projects (PROTECT BALTIC,²⁵ BLUE4ALL,²⁶ BLUE CONNECT,²⁷ MSP4BIO²⁸) supported work done on ecological coherence and management effectiveness.

Agriculture and Nutrients

Eutrophication remains a major threat to the Baltic Sea marine environment and agriculture remains a major source of nutrient input leading to eutrophication. In 2025, HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/7²⁹ on BAT/BEP to reduce nutrient inputs was adopted, alongside guidelines on soil structure and aggregate stability on clay soils.³⁰ The agreed Maximum Allowable Inputs (MAI) ceiling currently stands at 792,209 tonnes for nitrogen and 21,716 tonnes for phosphorus annually. In 2025, the assessment of achieving Nutrient Input Ceilings (NICs) by 2030 was published.³¹ Additionally, HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/8³² on sustainable management of phosphogypsum was adopted, together with an extensive background report. HELCOM launched the Ninth Baltic Sea Pollution Load Compilation (PLC-9, 2025-2028) project,³³ focussing on the assessment on inputs of nutrients and selected hazardous substances into the sea. The CiNURGi project³⁴ continued supporting the implementation of the HELCOM Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy and the related BSAP actions.

²⁵ HELCOM, PROTECT BALTIC Project, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/protect-baltic/>. Accessed August 18, 2026.

²⁶ HELCOM, BLUE4ALL, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/blue4all/>. Accessed August 18, 2026.

²⁷ HELCOM, BLUE CONNECT, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/blue-connect/>. Accessed August 18, 2026.

²⁸ HELCOM, MSP4BIO, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/msp4bio/>. Accessed August 18, 2026.

²⁹ HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/7, Best Available Technology (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP) to Reduce Nutrient Inputs and Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Manure, Adopted 28 March 2025, <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Rec-42-43-7.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

³⁰ HELCOM Guidelines on Best practices to improve soil structure and aggregate stability on clay soils. HELCOM (2025), <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/HELCOM-Guidelines-on-Best-practices-to-improve-soil-structure-and-aggregate-stability-on-clay-soils.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

³¹ Assessment of achieving NICs in 2030 and the effectiveness of measures - based on the reporting for BSAP Action E1. Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings n°208. HELCOM (2025), <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Assessment-of-achieving-NICs-in-2030-and-the-effectiveness-of-measures.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

³² HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/8, Sustainable Management, Utilization and Safe Disposal of Phosphogypsum, Adopted 28 March 2025, <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Rec-42-43-8.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

³³ HELCOM, The Ninth Baltic Sea Pollution Load Compilation (PLC-9), <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/plc-9/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

³⁴ HELCOM, Circular Nutrients for a Sustainable Baltic Sea Region (CiNURGi), <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/cinurgi/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

Hazardous Substances

Several projects (EMPEREST,³⁵ HAPhazard,³⁶ PharmaSea³⁷) were finalised in 2025. Further, HELCOM adopted its regional strategic approach for hazardous substances as well as Recommendation 42-43/6³⁸ on priority substances, sources of releases, and uncertainties. The drafting of the Regional Action Plan on Hazardous Substances (RAP HAZ) was finalised, and a dedicated Stakeholder Conference was held on 31 March 2025.³⁹

Marine Litter

No international legally binding commitment to end plastic pollution was agreed in 2025, but HELCOM's Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter continues to guide measure to reduce pollution in the Baltic Sea region. HELCOM published five reports on abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), the first regional pilots for riverine litter and plastic pellet monitoring were completed, followed by the establishment of a seafloor litter threshold of no more than 1 item per 1,000 km² in waters up to 200 m depth. Finally, HELCOM guidelines on handling EPS/XPS on construction sites were drafted in close cooperation with the related industry. The ALDFG project (2025–2026)⁴⁰ supports actions under HELCOM's RAP on Marine Litter to reduce abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear from recreational fisheries.

Seabed Disturbance

In 2025, HELCOM finalised the Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheet on depositing dredged material (2012–2023),⁴¹ submitted the 2023 consolidated report to the London Convention/Protocol, and initiated a review of BAT/BEP for small-scale dredging.

Underwater Noise

At the UN Ocean Conference in Nice in June 2025, 37 countries led by Canada and Panama signed the “High-Ambition Coalition for a Quiet Ocean” declaration, which all HELCOM parties except Russia have joined. HELCOM parties continue contributing to these objectives through the implementation of the HELCOM Regional Action Plan on Underwater Noise. Further, work on the HOLAS 4 noise assessment continued, and

³⁵ HELCOM, EMPEREST – Eliminating Micro-Pollutants from Effluents for Reuse Strategies, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/emperest/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

³⁶ HELCOM, HAPhazard, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/haphazard/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

³⁷ HELCOM, Pharmaceutical Substances in the Baltic Sea (PharmaSea), <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/pharmasea/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

³⁸ HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/6, Lists of Priority Substances, Sources of Release, and Uncertainties to Address, Adopted 28 March 2025, <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Rec-42-43-6.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

³⁹ HELCOM Stakeholder Conference 2025: Towards a sea unaffected by hazardous substances: The ‘One Baltic’ approach, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/events/helcom-stakeholders-conferences/helcom-stakeholder-conference-2025/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁴⁰ HELCOM, ALDFG, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/aldfg/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁴¹ Depositing of dredged material in the Baltic Sea for the period 2013-2023. HELCOM (2025), <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Depositing-of-dredged-material-2013-2023.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

the BEP/BAT document on continuous noise from shipping and guidelines on acoustic deterrent devices were completed.

Shipping

HELCOM approved the revised Recommendation 42-43/11⁴² on antifouling paints containing organotin compounds and cybutryne as well as a new Recommendation 42-43/12⁴³ on minimising nutrient losses from dry bulk fertiliser storage in ports. Several Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets (BSEFS) on shipping emissions, noise, and discharges were published, and roadmaps on exhaust gas cleaning system discharges and food waste from ships were moved toward adoption.

Response to Pollution Incidents

The Expert Group on Wildlife Response (EG Wildlife) completed a report on wildlife response activities and preparedness covering the years 2023–2024,⁴⁴ thus completing BSAP action S33 on strengthening mutual assistance for oiled wildlife response. In addition, the BALEX 2025 exercise was held on 26–28 August in Świnoujście, Poland, testing open-sea and shoreline response, wildlife response, and chemical ammunition management. In addition, the BRISK II risk-analysis project (2025–2026),⁴⁵ aiming to update the regional risk analysis for oil and hazardous and noxious substances pollution in the Baltic Sea, was launched.

Submerged Hazards

Two volumes of the HELCOM thematic assessment on hazardous submerged objects were approved and published in June 2025: on warfare materials (Volume 1)⁴⁶ and potentially polluting shipwrecks (Volume 2).⁴⁷ Three ongoing projects (MUNIMAP,⁴⁸

⁴² HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/11, Antifouling Paints Containing Organotin Compounds and Cybutryne, Adopted 28 March 2025, <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Rec-42-43-11.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁴³ HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/12, BAT/BEP to Minimize Nutrient Losses from Dry Bulk Fertilizer Storage and Handling in Ports in the Baltic Sea Region, Adopted 15 January 2026, <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Rec-42-43-12.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁴⁴ Report on wildlife response activities and preparedness by the HELCOM Expert Group on Wildlife Response (EG Wildlife) 2023-2024. HELCOM (2025), <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Report-on-wildlife-response-activities-and-preparedness-in-2023-2024.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁴⁵ HELCOM, BRISK II, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/brisk-ii/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁴⁶ HELCOM Thematic assessment on hazardous submerged objects in the Baltic Sea (volume 1) Warfare materials in the Baltic Sea. HELCOM (2025), <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Thematic-Assessment-on-Hazardous-Submerged-Objects-in-the-Baltic-Sea-Warfare-Materials.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁴⁷ HELCOM Thematic assessment on hazardous submerged objects in the Baltic Sea (volume 2) potentially polluting shipwrecks in the Baltic Sea. HELCOM (2025), <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Thematic-assessment-on-hazardous-submerged-objects-in-the-Baltic-Sea-potentially-polluting-shipwrecks.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁴⁸ HELCOM, MUNIMAP, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/munimap/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

MMinE-SwEEPER,⁴⁹ MUNI-RISK⁵⁰) further advance remediation and risk assessment, while the BALEX 2025 exercise included a munitions-related scenario for the first time.

Fisheries

HEOCOM adopted Recommendation 42-43/10⁵¹ on sustainable aquaculture, superseding earlier recommendations. WG Fish finalised the “Toolbox for bycatch mitigation,”⁵² published as a living document. Furthermore, the BAT/BEP description of sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic Sea region⁵³ was published as part of the Baltic Sea Environment Proceeding series.

Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)

The joint HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group continued implementing the Regional MSP Roadmap 2021–2030.⁵⁴ The interim assessment found most tasks under the roadmap’s five objectives were implemented as planned. Several projects (MSP4BIO concluded,⁵⁵ ReMAP,⁵⁶ Baltic PlaNet,⁵⁷ BalticSea2Land,⁵⁸ NESBp,⁵⁹ PASPS,⁶⁰ SEABAS⁶¹) advanced data harmonisation, ecosystem-based planning, and land-sea integration.

Climate Change

The Baltic Sea is one of the fastest-warming marine regions. HELCOM aims to enhance the resilience of the Baltic Sea ecosystem, increasing its capacity to recover

⁴⁹ HELCOM, MMinE-SwEEPER – Marine Munitions in Europe – Solutions with Economic and Ecological Profits for Efficient Remediation, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/mmine-sweeper/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁵⁰ HELCOM, MUNI-RISK, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/muni-risk/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁵¹ HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/10, Sustainable Aquaculture in the Baltic Sea Region, <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Rec-42-43-10.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁵² HELCOM Toolbox for bycatch mitigation measures. HELCOM (2026), <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/HELCOM-Toolbox-for-bycatch-mitigation-measures-2.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁵³ BAT/BEP descriptions of sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic Sea region. Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings n°200. HELCOM (2025), https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/BAT_BEP-descriptions-of-sustainable-aquaculture-in-the-Baltic-Sea-region.pdf. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁵⁴ Regional Maritime Spatial Planning Roadmap 2021-2030. HELCOM-VASAB (2021), <https://vasab.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Regional-Maritime-Spatial-Planning-Roadmap-2021-2030.pdf>. Accessed August 20, 2026.

⁵⁵ HELCOM, MSP4BIO – Improved science-based maritime spatial planning to safeguard and restore biodiversity in a coherent European MPA network, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/msp4bio/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁵⁶ HELCOM, ReMAP – Reviewing and Evaluating the Monitoring and Assessment of Maritime Spatial Planning, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/remap-reviewing-and-evaluating-the-monitoring-and-assessment-of-maritime-spatial-planning/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁵⁷ HELCOM, Baltic PlaNet – Baltic Climate-Resilient Coastal Planning Network, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/baltic-planet/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁵⁸ HELCOM, Baltic Sea2Land – Fostering integrated governance for the joint sustainable use of human and natural capital in the near shore zone, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/baltic-sea2land/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁵⁹ HELCOM, NESBp – Northern European Sea Basins project, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/nesbp/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁶⁰ HELCOM, PASPS – Policy area ‘Spatial Planning’ Support, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/pasps-policy-area-spatial-planning-support/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁶¹ HELCOM, SEABAS – Strategic ecosystem-based planning for sustainable future of the Baltic Sea, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/seabas/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

from climate change impacts. In 2025, HELCOM's strategic approach to ocean acidification⁶² was approved. EN CLIME proposed a plan to fully update the Climate Change Fact Sheet⁶³ by 2030, and the PROTECT BALTIC project developed high-resolution environmental datasets with over 650 species models. Furthermore, Guidance on incorporating climate change considerations in the review and update process of HELCOM policies⁶⁴ was published.

Economy and Society

Work on economic and social analyses progressed through the AquaINFRA project⁶⁵ and the already mentioned HELCOM-coordinated PROTECT BALTIC project, improving methodologies for monetary and non-monetary valuation of ecosystem services and fostering a better understanding of national capacity to assess the cost-effectiveness of measures.

Monitoring and Assessment

Monitoring in the Baltic Sea region is supported by commonly agreed monitoring programmes as well as monitoring guidelines. HELCOM continued planning the next holistic assessment (HOLAS 4, to be published in 2029). The review of monitoring programmes was completed and published on a new website⁶⁶ linking programmes to guidelines. In addition, the Monitoring and Assessment Strategy review is expected to be finalised in 2026.

Beyond the Baltic Sea

HELCOM traditionally engaged with UN processes (CBD, CMS, IMO, UNECE), other Regional Sea Conventions, as well as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which was newly granted observer status. In 2025, HELCOM's Executive Secretary participated in the BSPC Standing Committee meeting in Brussels, the Baltic Assembly in Vilnius, the OSPAR Ministerial Meeting in Vigo, the OSCE, the Baltic Sea Science Congress in Sopot, and the ICES Annual Science Conference in Klaipėda.

Overall, the 2025 report demonstrated intensive work towards the implementation of BSAP actions: multiple adopted HELCOM Recommendations, concluded assessments (Red List II, submerged hazards), as well as a wide range of HELCOM-

⁶² HELCOM strategic approach to ocean acidification. HELCOM (2026), <https://helcom.fi/publications/helcom-strategic-approach-to-ocean-acidification/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁶³ Climate Change in the Baltic Sea. 2024 Fact Sheet. Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings n°198. HELCOM/Baltic Earth 2024, https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Baltic-Sea-Climate-Change-Fact-Sheet_2024.pdf. Accessed August 20, 2026.

⁶⁴ Guidance on incorporating climate change considerations in the review and update process of HELCOM policies. HELCOM (2025), <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Guidance-on-incorporating-climate-change-considerations-in-the-review-and-update-process-of-HELCOM-policies.pdf>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁶⁵ HELCOM, Horizon Europe project AquaINFRA – Infrastructure for Marine and Inland Water Research, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/aquainfra/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

⁶⁶ HELCOM, Monitoring programmes and guidelines, <https://helcom.fi/baltic-sea-trends/monitoring-and-assessment/monitoring-programmes-and-guidelines/>. Accessed August 19, 2026.

coordinated projects. It showed HELCOM's focus on the implementation of existing commitments, science-based monitoring and assessment, and managing environmental pressures – all against the backdrop of the continued strategic pause. The results of the first BSAP reporting round, and the Ministerial Meeting in November 2026 in Warsaw, will represent important further milestones.

2. Designation of the Next Executive Secretary of HELCOM

At its ninth Informal Consultation Session of the Heads of Delegation (IC HOD 9-2026), held online on 10–11 June 2026, the Helsinki Commission appointed the Finnish national Mr Markus Helavuori as the next Executive Secretary of the HELCOM Secretariat.⁶⁷ The appointment is for an initial term of three years, commencing on 1 February 2027. Mr Helavuori currently serves as Deputy Director General at the Permanent International Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). He previously held the positions of Deputy Executive Secretary and Professional Secretary at the HELCOM Secretariat between 2018 and 2025. The incumbent Executive Secretary, Mr Rüdiger Stempel, who has held the office since 1 August 2019, will conclude his term on 31 January 2027.

3. Polish HELCOM Chairmanship Priorities 2026–2028

On 1 July 2026, Poland assumed the HELCOM Chairmanship from Lithuania for a two-year term running through 30 June 2028.⁶⁸ Mr Marek Romsicki serves as Chair, assisted by Mr Tomasz Wenecki as Vice-Chair. The Polish Chairmanship announced three key priorities: advancing the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, strengthening HELCOM's capacity to address environmental and geopolitical challenges and promoting the use of science-based knowledge in decision-making.

Priorities of the Polish Chairmanship of HELCOM 2026–2028⁶⁹ (as published on the HELCOM website)

1. Strengthening the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), initially adopted during the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Kraków in 2007 and then updated during the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Lübeck in 2021, is HELCOM's strategic programme of measures and actions for achieving good environmental status of the sea, ultimately leading to a Baltic Sea in a healthy state.

⁶⁷ HELCOM, Markus Helavuori designated as the next Executive Secretary of HELCOM, <https://helcom.fi/markus-helavuori-appointed-as-the-next-executive-secretary-of-helcom/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

⁶⁸ HELCOM, Poland takes over HELCOM Chairship from Lithuania, <https://helcom.fi/poland-takes-over-helcom-chairship-from-lithuania/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

⁶⁹ HELCOM, Poland 2026-2028, <https://helcom.fi/about-us/chairmanship/poland-2026-2028/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

The updated BSAP is the most important document of HELCOM programming and organizing its work until 2030, therefore its implementation is essential for HELCOM.

The implementation of BSAP actions is currently being the subject of the first reporting, which results will be presented and considered at the 2026 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Warsaw.

The Ministerial Meeting presents an opportunity to redouble efforts and make commitments to ensure the goals as set out in the HELCOM BSAP can be achieved by 2030. The ministers may also decide on starting to work on the next version of the BSAP applicable after 2030.

Poland will prioritize continued and increased involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and possible future work on a new BSAP.

2. HELCOM as an effective regional organization capable of coping with environmental and geopolitical challenges, including the so-called “shadow fleet”

HELCOM, as a regional intergovernmental organization, is currently facing a number of challenges related to the tense geopolitical situation in the region. This situation affects not only the functioning of the organization itself (in the absence of Russian participation under the so-called “strategic pause”), but above all poses a significant risk to the marine environment of the Baltic Sea.

In order to enhance HELCOM's resilience in addressing current geopolitical and environmental challenges, Poland sees the need to continue the ongoing discussion on improving the effectiveness of HELCOM in delivering its core tasks and commitments.

Furthermore, Poland wishes to address the issue of the so-called “shadow fleet”, taking into account the environmental risks posed by these vessels, as well as HELCOM's work related to pollution response and risk assessment, in coordination with other international organizations and cooperation frameworks.

3. Science-based knowledge within HELCOM

Science-based knowledge is of utmost importance not only for assessing the current state of the Baltic Sea, but also for providing a solid base for HELCOM decision-making, as well as for evaluating the outcomes of both joint and national actions and efforts.

Poland considers the development and the use of the science-based knowledge within HELCOM to be closely interconnected processes. On one hand, the HELCOM holistic assessments (HOLAS) offer a comprehensive overview of the ecological status of the Baltic Sea as a whole. On the other hand, the HELCOM Science Agenda serves to communicate HELCOM's scientific priorities to funding bodies, while also encouraging the scientific community to address the knowledge gaps relevant to HELCOM's work and strengthening the interface between science and policy.

Both processes will be also ongoing during the Polish Chairship – the HELCOM Science Agenda, originally adopted by the 2021 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, is foreseen to be updated at the 2026 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, while the fourth holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS 4) will be advanced to the next levels.

4. Preparations for the Upcoming 2026 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Warsaw

The next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting is scheduled to be held on 4 November 2026 in Warsaw, Poland.⁷⁰ The meeting will bring together ministers responsible for environmental and maritime affairs from the Baltic Sea countries and the EU Commissioner for the Environment. Hosted by Poland, which assumed the HELCOM Chairmanship in July 2026, the meeting constitutes the highest level of decision-making within HELCOM. According to HELCOM, the meeting will review progress in implementing the 2021 Baltic Sea Action Plan and discuss the future direction of regional cooperation beyond 2030, with the possibility of initiating work on a new version of the BSAP, as suggested by the current Polish HELCOM Chairmanship. The Ministerial Meeting is expected to culminate in the adoption of the HELCOM Warsaw Ministerial Declaration, reaffirming the shared commitment of the contracting parties to protecting the Baltic Sea, together with a statement addressing the current geopolitical situation.

HELCOM Ministerial Meetings are convened every few years and serve as an important forum for high-level dialogue, common commitments, and strategic guidance for the protection of the Baltic Sea marine environment. The 2026 Meeting in Warsaw will therefore represent another important milestone in the work on the implementation of the current BSAP on one hand and its future development beyond 2030 on the other hand.

⁷⁰ HELCOM, Preparations underway for the 2026 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Warsaw, <https://helcom.fi/preparations-underway-for-the-2026-helcom-ministerial-meeting-in-warsaw/>. Accessed August 11, 2026.

ANNEX I: Updated Lists of HELCOM's Expert Groups and Projects

Annex I.1. List of Current HELCOM Working Groups and Expert Groups

1. **WG GEAR – HELCOM Working Group on the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach**

- 1.1. EG ESA – Expert Group on Economic and Social Analyses
- 1.2. EG MSFD – Expert Group on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive
- 1.3. EN CLIME – Joint HELCOM/Baltic Earth Expert Network on Climate Change

2. **WG Maritime – HELCOM Maritime Working Group**

- 2.1. EG AIS – Expert Group for Mutual Exchange and Deliveries of AIS Data
- 2.2. GREEN TEAM – Sub-group on Green Technology and Alternative Fuels for Shipping
- 2.3. EG SAFE NAV – Expert Group on Safety of Navigation
- 2.4. JTG Ballast & Biofouling – Joint HELCOM/OSPAR Task Group on Ballast Water Management Convention (BWMC) and Biofouling
- 2.5. CP PRF – HELCOM Cooperation Platform on Port Reception Facilities
- 2.6. PRF Cooperation Platform – Cooperation Platform on Port Reception Facilities in the Baltic Sea

3. **WG Sea-based Pressures – HELCOM Working Group on Reduction of Pressures from Sea-based Sources**

- 3.1. EG Marine Litter – Expert Group on Marine Litter
- 3.2. EG Noise – Expert Group on Underwater Noise
- 3.3. EG DREDS – Expert Group on Dredging/Depositing Operations at Sea
- 3.4. EG Submerged – Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Submerged Objects
- 3.5. JEG NIS – OSPAR/HELCOM Joint Expert Group on Non-Indigenous Species

4. **WG Response – HELCOM Response Working Group**

- 4.1. EG Wildlife – Expert Group on Wildlife Response
- 4.2. EG Shore – Expert Coordination Network on Response on the Shore
- 4.3. EG Surveillance – Expert Group on Aerial Surveillance

5. WG BioDiv – HELCOM Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration State of the Environment and Nature Conservation

- 5.1. EG MaMa – Expert Group on Marine Mammals
- 5.2. EG STUR – Expert Group on Sturgeon Remediation
- 5.3. EG Benthic – Expert Group on Benthic Habitats and Biotopes
- 5.4. EG Birdmove – Expert Group on Bird Migration
- 5.5. EG Foodweb – HELCOM Expert Group on Foodwebs
- 5.6. EG MPA – Expert Group on Marine Protected Areas
- 5.7. EG Phyto – HELCOM Expert Group on Phytoplankton
- 5.6. EG Zoo – HELCOM Expert Group on Zooplankton
- 5.7. JWG Bird – HELCOM-OSPAR-ICES Joint Working Group on Seabirds
- 5.8. MPA MaNet – HELCOM Network for Marine Protected Area Management
- 5.9. EG Coastal Fish – Expert Group on Coastal Fish
- 5.10. EG Pelagic – Expert Group on Pelagic Habitats

6. WG Fish – HELCOM Working Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries

- 6.1. EG FISH-M – Task Force on Migratory Fish Species
- 6.2. EG Aquaculture – Expert Group on Sustainable aquaculture
- 6.3. EG FishData

7. WG Source to Sea – HELCOM Working Group on the Source to Sea Management of Nutrients and Hazardous Substances and Sustainable Agricultural Practices

- 7.1. EG MORS – Expert Group on Monitoring of Radioactive Substances in the Baltic Sea
- 7.2. EG Hazardous Substances – Expert Group on Hazardous Substances
- 7.3. EG Eutro – Expert Group on Eutrophication
- 7.4. EG RedCore – Expert Group on Reduction Scheme Core Follow-Up

8. HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG – Joint HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group

- 8.1. BSR MSP Data Expert Sub-Group – Baltic Sea Maritime Spatial Planning Data Expert Sub-Group

Annex I.2. Updated List of Ongoing HELCOM Projects

1. **ALDFG** – Abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) actions in the HELCOM Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP Marine Litter): Engaging fishers and stakeholders in reducing the input of ALDFG from recreational fisheries (2025–2026)
2. Horizon Europe project **AqualNFRA** – Infrastructure for Marine and Inland Water Research (2023–2026)
3. **Baltic PlaNet** – Baltic Climate-Resilient Coastal Planning Network (2025–2028)
4. **BLUE CONNECT** – Strict protection, restoration and co-management of Marine Protected Areas to ensure effective ecosystem conservation and improved connectivity of Blue Corridors (2024–2028)
5. **BLUE4ALL** – Blueprint Demonstration for Co-created Effective, Efficient and Resilient Networks of MPAs (2023–2027)
6. **BRISK II** – Long-term risk analysis for oil and hazardous and noxious substances (HNS) pollution from shipping accidents to the marine environment in the Baltic Sea
7. **CiNURGi** – Circular Nutrients for a Sustainable Baltic Sea Region (2023–2026)
8. **HAZGONE** – Connecting upstream and downstream measures for better hazardous substances governance and policy in the Baltic Sea region (2026–2028)
9. **HELCOM EG Phyto QA** – Quality assurance of phytoplankton monitoring in the Baltic Sea (2025–2027)
10. **MMinE-SWEEPER** – Marine Munitions in Europe – Solutions with Economic and Ecological Profits for Efficient Remediation (2024–2028)
11. **MUNI-RISK** – Environmental and Safety Concerns Related to Submerged Munitions in the Baltic Sea (2024–2027)
12. **MUNIMAP** – Baltic Sea Munitions Remediation Roadmap (2024–2027)
13. **NESBp** – Northern European Sea Basins project (2025–2027)
14. **PASPS** – Policy Area ‘Spatial Planning’ Support (2022–2026)
15. **PERMAGOV** – Improving the PERformance of MARine GOVERNance (2023–2026)
16. **PLC-9** – The Ninth Baltic Sea Pollution Load Compilation (2025–2028)
17. **PRISM** – Preventing Risk by Integrating Surveillance into Management of hazardous substances (2025–2028)
18. **PROTECT BALTIC** – An EU Mission Restore our Oceans and Waters project to Preserve, Revive and Help the Baltic Sea Thrive (2023–2028)
19. **SAFE-BS2BKS** – Safe Actions for Environment – Baltic Solutions to the Black Sea (2025–2025)
20. **SEABAS** – Strategic ecosystem-based planning for sustainable future of the Baltic Sea (2025–2027)