

Protecting and Restoring the Baltic Sea is a joint challenge

- Stakeholder participation in HELCOM,

a German view-

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HELCOM and its Baltic Sea Action Plan – basic information

Human activities both on the sea and throughout its catchment area are placing rapidly increasing pressure on the marine ecosystem of the Baltic Sea. The notable sensitivity of the Baltic Sea marine ecosystem requests for particular and tailor made measures.

HELCOM, the regional co-operation for marine protection of the Baltic Sea assembles riparian countries and the European Community. According to Article 3 of the underlying legally binding Helsinki Convention, *(Fundamental principles and obligations) Contracting Parties shall individually or jointly take all appropriate legislative, administrative or other relevant measures to prevent and eliminate pollution in order to promote the ecological restoration of the Baltic Sea Area and the preservation of its ecological balance.*

On 15 November 2007 HELCOM has adopted its HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP). This cross-sectoral plan is designed to solve all major environmental problems affecting the Baltic Sea marine environment: Eutrophication, loss of Biodiversity, impacts from Hazardous Substances and impacts from Maritime Activities including shipping. Being convinced that purely administrative implementation of the described measures in terms of setting up legal regulations will certainly not be sufficient to achieve the BSAP's goals, two particular chapters of the BSAP deal with 'Awareness raising and capacity building' as well as with "financing".

The HELCOM BSAP as a component of marine policy development in Europe

The BSAP needs to be recognised as one component of a 'network' of the present and future marine and maritime policy in Europe, the elements of which need to be complementary.

The concept of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan has already been widely supported by politicians at various forums, and heralded as a pilot project for European seas in the context of the proposed EU Marine Strategy Directive.

The Directive which will probably be finally adopted during the 2nd quarter of 2008 directly refers to the work of existing Regional Co-operations such as HELCOM. It foresees such an action plan for each eco-region, including the Baltic.

Since the Marine Strategy Directive will become the environmental pillar of the Future Integrated Maritime Policy of the European Union – a respective Blue Paper has recently been issued by the CEC- , the approach and the requests of the BSAP will probably be spread wider than its title *Baltic Sea Action Plan* might indicate.

Stakeholder participation

HELCOM puts much emphasis on comprehensive Stakeholder involvement. The formally adopted HELCOM Rules of Procedures clearly state that any intergovernmental organization and non-governmental international organization with specialized technical, scientific or equivalent expertise pertinent to objectives of the Convention may be represented at the meetings of the Commission as an observer, given that some basic criteria are met. The following exemplary and incomplete enumeration of NGO-Stakeholders may give an impression about the dimension and variety of their involvement:

Alliance of Maritime Regional Interests in Europe (AMRIE); Baltic Farmers' Forum on Environment (BFFE); Baltic Ports Organisation (BPO); Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO); Birdlife International; European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC); Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB); Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe - Baltic Sea Commission (CPMR); European Boating Association (EBA); European Chlor-Alkali Industry (EURO CHLOR); European Fertilizer Manufacturers Association (EFMA); European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO); European Union for Coastal Conservation (EUCC); EUREAU (European Union of National Associations of Water Suppliers and Waste Water Services); International Association of Oil and Gas Producers (OGP); Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC); World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF);

Although they did not all participate and contribute, the proactive participation of all major stakeholder groups in the region can be regarded as one of the highlights of the elaboration of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan. The Plan itself stresses that in one of its recitals: *'Appreciating the positive contribution made by Intergovernmental organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations within their work and the work of HELCOM towards preserving and protecting the Baltic Sea Area [...].'*

Such participation ensures that the plan is truly relevant and can be effectively implemented in practice. The choices that we make reflect the choices of society as a whole. The acceptance of our work by society strongly depends on its acceptance by stakeholders, i.e. those representing 'use' and those representing 'protection' of the marine environment. Do both sides find their views adequately reflected?

For this reason, the common vision of the healthy Baltic Sea has been defined together with all participating stakeholders – from governments, through industry and NGOs, right down to individual citizens, including older and younger generations, and organisations in both the private and the public sectors.

Two Stakeholder conferences in 2006 and 2007 already offered the opportunity to keep all interested parties à jour as regarded the state of the art of the negotiation

process. In this way the plan promotes employment and other aspects of sustainable socio-economic development, as well as ecological sustainability and a healthy environment. It implements the principle of policy integration by including all relevant policy components that impact on the quality of the Baltic Sea ecosystem, be it directly or indirectly.

As a next concrete step the Third Stakeholder Conference on the Baltic Sea Action Plan will be held on March 4th 2008. The financial aspects of the plan's implementation and the cost-efficiency of measures will be one of the top themes of the Conference. Discussions will particularly focus on the sources of funding, involvement of the international financial institutions (IFIs) and the private sector in the implementation of the action plan and understanding their requirements for providing financing support, as well as how to prepare successful projects to ensure/increase the investments for marine environmental protection.

According to the recently decided Terms of Reference for the newly established Baltic Sea Action Plan Implementation Group, interested stakeholders are explicitly invited to participate in the future discussion and implementation process.

In fact HELCOM has –apart from its ‘business as usual work’- particular experience as regards the involvement of the ‘private sector’ in the implementation process of a politically driven programme.

When the HELCOM Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP) was launched in 1992, aiming at supporting a rapid improvement in the marine environment, in particular by raising funds and facilitating urgently needed restoration activities, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the Worldbank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) as well as the Northern Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) got involved. The JCP can be called a success story and provides some good experience for the next steps to be taken with respect to the BSAP implementation.

Having stated this, the following recommendations can be formulated:

1. A regional approach really facilitates designing tailor made solutions for individual regional problems. As a consequence regional co-operation can be recommended without any reservation. Nevertheless it needs to be safeguarded that all components of activity on all relevant levels are complementary.

2. With regard to a broadest possible acceptance of measures it is recommended to involve as early as possible as many potential ‘addressées’, i.e. stakeholders, as possible in discussions and negotiation processes. The quality of the political product will improve, its acceptance as well. When Stakeholders feel their ideas and interests adequately reflected they will be prepared and willing to promote the political message and to facilitate and support the implementation process.

3. If the integrative policy approach will be taken seriously the need for an even closer co-operation between policy decision makers, ‘green’ stakeholders and industry / economy can be foreseen. It is recommended to strengthen this cooperation since sustainable development can only be achieved if all three components are taken into account in a balanced way.