

HELCOM Recommendation 34E/1

"Safeguarding important bird habitats and migration routes in the Baltic Sea from negative effects of wind and wave energy production at sea"

This document is a part of the
2013 HELCOM Ministerial Declaration
and was adopted by the 2013 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting



HELCOM RECOMMENDATION 34E/1

Adopted 3 October 2013,
having regard to Article 20, Paragraph 1 b)
of the Helsinki Convention

SAFEGUARDING IMPORTANT BIRD HABITATS AND MIGRATION ROUTES IN THE BALTIC SEA FROM NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF WIND AND WAVE ENERGY PRODUCTION AT SEA

THE COMMISSION,

RECALLING Article 15 of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, 1992 (Helsinki Convention), in which the Contracting Parties undertake to individually and jointly take all appropriate measures with respect to the Baltic Sea Area and its coastal ecosystems influenced by the Baltic Sea to conserve natural habitats and biological diversity and to protect ecological processes and that to this end, the Contracting Parties shall aim at adopting subsequent instruments containing appropriate guidelines and criteria,

NOTING the ongoing and planned extensive development of facilities for wind energy production in the Baltic Sea, **RECOGNIZING** that renewable energy, including wind and wave energy brings environmental benefits over traditional fossil fuels and have an important role in achieving global and EU CO₂ reduction targets, however **BEING CONCERNED** of increasing demand to locate wind energy facilities in shallow coastal or off-shore areas of high value for wintering and staging birds as well as inside migration routes of birds,

BEING FURTHER CONCERNED of the additional pressure that these facilities put on the marine environment, which is already burdened by numerous pressures from other human activities,

EMPHASIZING the importance of the early planning of the use of the marine space in the Baltic-wide context for development of installations, such as wind and wave energy facilities, in order to minimize the harmful effects on birds,

RECALLING that with the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan the Contracting Parties have adopted four strategic goals, reflecting the jointly identified major environmental problems in the Baltic Sea and describing the desired state of the marine environment, namely a “Baltic sea unaffected by eutrophication”, “Baltic Sea life undisturbed by hazardous substances”, “Maritime activities carried out in an environmentally friendly way”, all of which will enable reaching “Favourable status of Baltic Sea biodiversity”,

RECALLING FURTHER that the ministers and high-level representatives of the Contracting Parties agreed in the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan that the Baltic Sea should become a model of good management of human activities and be in a good environmental status by 2021,

RECALLING ALSO that the HELCOM Moscow 2010 Ministerial Meeting agreed that Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) should be developed for the different Baltic Sea areas in close transboundary cooperation aiming at long-term sustainable use and planning for the whole Baltic Sea,

EMPHASIZING the ecosystem approach principle of the Baltic Sea broad-scale Maritime Spatial Planning Principles jointly adopted by HELCOM and VASAB in 2010,

RECALLING ALSO the obligations under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive relevant to those Contracting Parties being also EU member states, especially related to the aim to reach or maintain a good environmental status of the marine environment in which the introduction of energy, including underwater noise, is at levels that do not adversely affect the marine environment,

RECALLING FURTHER the obligations under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives relevant to those Contracting Parties being also EU member states and **APPRECIATING** that in 2011 the European Commission has developed a guidance document “Wind energy developments and Natura 2000” referring also to marine environment,

RECOGNISING that birds are an integral part of the Baltic Sea ecosystem and food web, and that many bird populations in the Baltic Sea are in serious decline and that the cause of the decline is unclear,

RECOGNISING FURTHER that off-shore banks and shallow coastal areas are important habitats for many wintering and staging bird species, such as long-tailed duck, common eider and velvet scoter, and that these habitats are limited in range and extension,

BEING CONCERNED that the long-tailed duck, velvet scoter, common eider and other birds are examples of declining species that winter on off-shore banks,

NOTING indications that certain bird species like long-tailed duck may not return to the original wintering habitat after the habitat has been used for wind energy facilities, and thus **BEING CONCERNED** that the loss of wintering and staging habitats will have a negative impact on the population status of birds that are dependent on these habitats,

RECOGNIZING that birds use different areas during different seasons, **CONCERNED** that the increasing number of wind energy installations at sea and their accumulation in certain areas can result in a cumulative impact on staging areas and migration routes of birds,

NOTING that new technical solutions are available to monitor bird migration movements and **HIGHLIGHTING** the importance of making the relevant data on sea birds and their wintering and staging habitats and migratory routes available for maritime spatial planning processes,

RECOMMENDS the Contracting Parties of the Helsinki Convention to map migration routes and staging areas (i.e. wintering, feeding, moulting and resting) of birds in the Baltic Sea Area and to enhance research and monitoring in order to improve the understanding of the impacts of wind energy facilities, both during and after construction, on birds in the Baltic Sea,

ALSO RECOMMENDS the Governments to apply the precautionary principle by undertaking measures to avoid or minimize negative effects of wind energy facilities on birds in the Baltic Sea, such as disturbance during and after construction, including barrier effects and hampering of migration, habitat modification or loss, and collisions with turbines, through the application of ecosystem-based approach in strategic planning for wind energy facility developments in the Baltic Sea,

RECOMMENDS FURTHER to:

- a) continuously compile and exchange information on existing, on-going as well as planned developments for wind energy facilities and wave energy installations in the Baltic Sea Area and well as on migration routes and staging areas of birds in the Baltic Sea Area
- b) jointly assess cumulative impacts of wind energy facilities and wave energy installations in the Baltic Sea Area on birds, including risks of collisions and adverse effects to migration routes,
- c) enable appropriate planning of the use of marine space that incorporates conservation need of seabirds in the Baltic-wide context thus contributing to reaching their favourable conservation status;

- d) support development and use of nature friendly wind energy technology to minimize collision risk and other negative impacts on birds and intensify the research;
- e) avoid that wind energy facilities and wave energy installations are sited in areas important for birds, and that the loss of off-shore staging habitats will be halted;
- f) avoid that wind energy facilities are situated within major migrating routes of birds,
- g) ensure that plans for offshore wind energy development and individual wind energy facilities will be established only following strategic environmental assessment and environmental impact assessment, respectively, where cumulative regional Baltic Sea scale and sub- basin scale impacts and benefits of the different development options to birds have been thoroughly assessed;
- h) include into construction and operating permissions the obligation for the operator to carry out adequate monitoring of impacts on birds during the operation phase.

RECOMMENDS FURTHER that the action taken by the Contracting Parties in accordance with this Recommendation should be reported to the Commission on request.