

**Statement by Rüdiger Strempel, Executive Secretary of HELCOM
HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2021 – Lübeck, 20 October 2021**

Dear Ministers, Commissioner, High-level representatives, Madam Chair, distinguished delegates,

Today marks the culmination of a long and eventful journey that we set out on about four years ago. With today's adoption of the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan, or BSAP, we have reached the destination envisioned by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting of 2018 where the mandate was given to update the plan.

But our journey doesn't stop here, on the contrary. With its implementation date of 2030, the BSAP will chart the way for HELCOM for the decade to come, and it promises to be the ambitious roadmap we have all been anticipating.

And this plan is indeed ambitious. Comprising about 200 actions – 199 to be precise – the updated BSAP addresses an unprecedented array of issues related to biodiversity, eutrophication, hazardous substances and litter, and sea-based activities. When the HELCOM Contracting Parties agreed to update the plan, they also agreed to maintain, at the very least, the same level of ambition. They clearly succeeded.

One point I would also like to highlight is that the updated BSAP is based on a thorough analysis of the sufficiency of the existing actions and measures, to understand what worked and what did not, and what would be the state of the Baltic Sea under a “business as usual” scenario without any modifications. HELCOM did pioneering work in conducting this analysis, and it was instrumental in adjusting some of the existing actions and measures and in developing new ones.

An evolution rather than a revolution, the update builds on the solid foundations of the original BSAP of 2007. Indeed, and although we fell short of achieving our envisioned objective of good ecological status of the Baltic Sea by 2021, the original BSAP has nonetheless delivered. It has, notably, contributed to reducing inputs of nutrients and hazardous substances, and Baltic Sea biodiversity is now partially in a healthier state. Maritime activities such as shipping are also cleaner and safer than ever before.

The 2007 plan has been one of the most effective tools at our disposal for achieving the HELCOM environmental objectives, and the 2021 update, building on this, will go even further towards doing so. By addressing some of the shortcomings of the original plan and including emerging and previously insufficiently addressed challenges such as climate change, pharmaceuticals or underwater noise, the update has allowed us to ensure that the BSAP is fit for the purpose of tackling the issues that are delaying the achievement of good environmental status.

The initial hazardous substances segment has for instance now been enlarged to also include litter, and the maritime activities segment has been widened to also encompass other sea-based activities that take place in the Baltic Sea.

Another novelty is that the updated BSAP now includes the so-called “horizontal topics” that will support the implementation of all elements of the BSAP. Climate change and maritime spatial planning are some of the better-known topics, but economic and social analyses, monitoring, HELCOM Hot Spots, knowledge exchange and awareness raising, and financing are also addressed.

Furthermore, because all measures within all segments are designed to strengthen the overall resilience of the Baltic Sea, they also improve its ability to respond to the effects of climate change.

The updated BSAP is also closely aligned with international and regional ecological objectives such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), or, for those of our Contracting Parties who are also EU member states, the European Union’s Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The BSAP therefore also contributes to driving the implementation of those targets and objectives, helping our Contracting Parties to fulfil their other regional and global obligations and commitments.

In addition to the BSAP, we have also developed several other key instruments such as the Baltic Sea Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy, the Regional Maritime Spatial Planning Roadmap 2021-2030, the HELCOM Science Agenda, and the HELCOM Guidelines for sea-based measures to manage internal nutrient reserves. These tools will support the sound implementation of the plan, and, together with the BSAP, address the issue of marine environmental protection in the most holistic manner.

The Baltic Sea Action Plan and its connected processes are a prime example of the application of the ecosystem approach, ensuring that all variables of the equation are equally considered, by balancing management and ecological objectives. The plan not only deals with the pressures on the Baltic Sea but also indicates the desired state we want it to ultimately be in. Pressures from human activities and ecosystem health are equally prioritized.

But the BSAP is not just an environmental success. It is also a political one, a token of the successful regional and cross-sectoral cooperation without which the update wouldn’t have been possible. The marine environment is complex, and even more so where waters are shared by several parties. We can therefore all be proud of the successful cooperation that led to the update, especially during these challenging times.

However, this justified pride should not mislead us. There is no time to rest on our laurels. We still need to do more to reaching our goals. We have reached one destination, but a long journey still lies ahead. But we now have a clear path mapped out for us. Let us therefore continue our joint travels by implementing the Baltic Sea Action Plan and following through on our commitments for a healthy Baltic Sea. Thank you.