

IUCN Statement to the 2024 Ministerial Meeting on the Baltic Sea Marine Environment

Excellencies,

Parties to the Helsinki Convention,

Observers and guests,

It is a great pleasure and honour to be with you at the 2024 Ministerial Meeting on the Baltic Sea Marine Environment, also celebrating 50 years of the signing of the Helsinki Convention. Half a century of the Commission's remarkable and relentless work to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea area and succeeding in keeping up strong cooperation between the states sharing this invaluable environmental, cultural, and economic asset.

IUCN is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it. For the past 75 years, IUCN has been providing credible knowledge and advice to societies and communities around the world to help safeguard biodiversity and ensure that any use of natural resources is sustainable and equitable. The HELCOM Red List of Baltic Sea species and the Guidelines for designating marine and coastal Baltic Sea marine protected areas are two vivid examples of IUCN's global standards and knowledge feeding into HELCOM's work on the preservation of the Baltic Sea ecosystem.

Let us for a minute remind ourselves of the dire state of global biodiversity, coupled with climate change, consumption, and pollution pressures, and remember that nature and resilient ecosystems are crucial for our wellbeing, health, and sustainable growth. The founding principles of regional cooperation embedded in the Helsinki Convention undoubtedly have a crucial role within this context.

Global and regional policy frameworks, most notably the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Agreement on the Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, and the EU Green Deal and Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 are clear. We need to double down our efforts if we are to preserve rapidly declining biodiversity and the ability of ecosystems to provide essential services to our society. We must maintain all positive action and strengthen our efforts further. HELCOM has proven that it can provide the necessary leadership and guidance to achieve our common environmental targets.

Planned and coordinated measures on nature recovery, embedded in initiatives such as the EU Nature Restoration Law, are essential for the gradual restoration of the Baltic Sea. This approach reinforces the Baltic Sea Action Plan aiming at a healthy and resilient Baltic Sea ecosystem and the development of an action plan for habitat and biotope restoration by 2025 with a prioritized list of actions and regional targets.

IUCN is looking forward to collaborating with HELCOM on the implementation of this and other commitments and the vision created 50 years ago. Let us deliver what is needed today and provide solutions to prevent tomorrow's challenges.

Thank you!

20 April 2024