

# The Baltic Sea Action Plan

A new environmental strategy  
for the Baltic Sea region



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## Time for Action

The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), the inter-governmental organisation responsible for overseeing the protection of the Baltic marine environment, is preparing a Baltic Sea Action Plan to ensure that every possible step is taken to improve the state of the Baltic Sea.

To protect our common sea, the countries around the Baltic have been working closely together for 30 years to reduce pollution and repair the damage done to the marine environment. These efforts have led to noticeable improvements, enabling people to bathe on beaches that were once polluted, and helping endangered wildlife populations to recover.

But there is still a lot to do, as many of the Baltic's environmental problems are proving difficult to solve, and it could take several decades for the marine environment to recover.

The European Marine Strategy foresees a regional approach to the protection of the marine environment across European seas through the development of separate action plans. That gives extra political momentum for co-ordinated international efforts to solve the problems affecting the Baltic. The Baltic Sea Action Plan involves all the Baltic coastal states, including Russia as the only non-EU member, as well as other countries in the Baltic's catchment area.



M/isa Hietalahti



## Getting everyone on board

The Baltic Sea Action Plan must be based on our common understanding of what we want our sea to be like in the future. This means that the action plan should be drawn up with active participation from stakeholders at many levels – from international organisations and governments; through activities which pollute the sea or depend on the sea for their livelihoods; right down to individual citizens, whose choices can help to reduce pollution.

The Baltic Sea Action Plan aims to safeguard the Baltic's natural ecosystems while also allowing valuable marine resources to be used sustainably in the future. The social and economic effects of the measures proposed for the plan will be carefully assessed, as well as their environmental benefits.





Antti Koli

## Setting targets

The sensitive nature of the Baltic Sea means that tailor-made measures must be applied to limit all the kinds of pollution that affect the sea.

The Baltic Sea Action Plan is to be based on **Ecological Objectives** defined to reflect our common vision of a healthy Baltic Sea, with balanced ecosystems able to support a wide range of sustainable economic activities.

This jointly agreed set of ambitious but realistic objectives will show how everyone around the Baltic Sea can work towards shared goals.

Progress towards these objectives will be assessed through measurable ecological indicators devised by HELCOM's scientific experts. Objectives and **indicators** will be carefully selected to reflect the needs and wishes of everyone who has an interest in the Baltic Sea.



Jukka Nurminen



## Key issues requiring action:

### Eutrophication

The natural balance of the Baltic Sea has been seriously disrupted by excessive nutrient inputs, which originate from diffuse sources like over-fertilised farmland and air pollution, as well as point sources like sewage treatment plants and industrial wastewater outlets. Symptoms of this eutrophication process include abnormal algal blooms and lifeless areas on the seabed.



### Objective

#### A Baltic Sea undisturbed by excessive inputs of nutrients

- No excessive nutrient concentrations
- Clear water
- Natural oxygen levels
- No excessive algal blooms
- Natural distribution of plants and animals

### Actions

- Reduce the amounts of nutrients entering rivers from diffuse sources, especially farmland
- Reduce nutrient pollution from the remaining "hot spots", such as wastewater treatment plants
- Reduce airborne nutrient pollution





A. W. Bilimsky

### Hazardous substances

In spite of efforts to reduce pollution, concentrations of hazardous substances remain abnormally high in the Baltic Sea and its marine life. Levels of dioxins in fish, for instance, are still above EU safety levels for foodstuffs.

#### Objective

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##### Concentrations of hazardous substances close to natural levels

- Concentrations near background levels
- No health problems among animals
- All fish safe for consumption

#### Actions

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- Prevent the environmentally harmful use of hazardous substances
- Further reduce the amounts of hazardous substances entering the sea in rivers and from the air
- Safely dispose of old stocks of chemicals or equipment containing hazardous substances



A. W. Bilimsky



Visa Hietalahti



### Maritime activities

The Baltic's crowded shipping lanes are becoming busier as the economies of the countries around the Baltic Sea grow. This can lead to increased pollution and other pressures on the marine environment. The risk of a potentially disastrous oil spill is particularly rising as traffic intensifies.

#### Objective

##### Maritime traffic and offshore activities carried out in an environmentally friendly way

- Accidents and the consequent harm to the marine environment minimised
- Maritime activities cause no harm to the marine environment

#### Actions

- Further reduce emissions and waste discharges
- Improve maritime safety
- Improve preparedness to respond to any accidents and pollution incidents



A. W. Bilinsky



## Biodiversity

The Baltic's unique conditions limit the diversity of life in the sea, and make ecosystems exceptionally sensitive to pollution, the effects of commercial fisheries and offshore activities, and the introduction of non-native species.

Kerstin Hinze



## Objective

### Favourable conservation status of biodiversity

- Natural landscapes and seascapes
- Thriving and balanced communities of plants and animals
- Natural species diversity
- Viable populations of species

## Actions

- Set up a representative network of marine and coastal protected areas
- Prevent the introduction of non-native species
- Curb inputs of nutrients and hazardous substances

Mervi Kumasranta



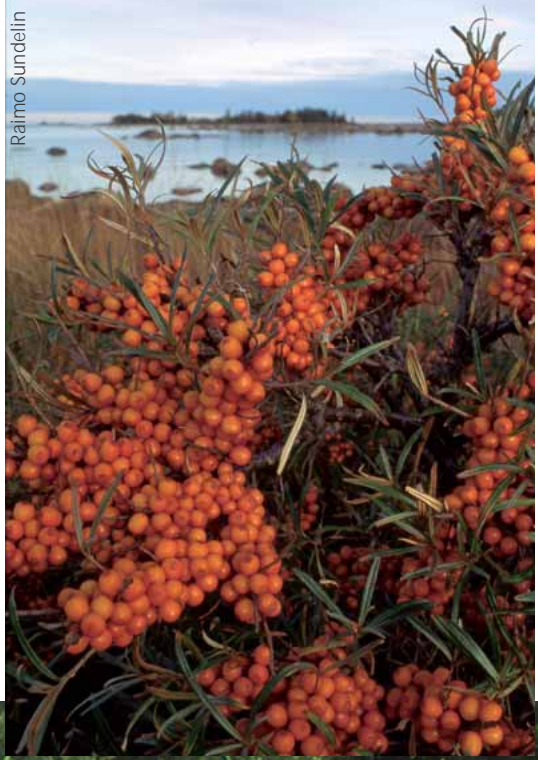




Raimo Sundelin



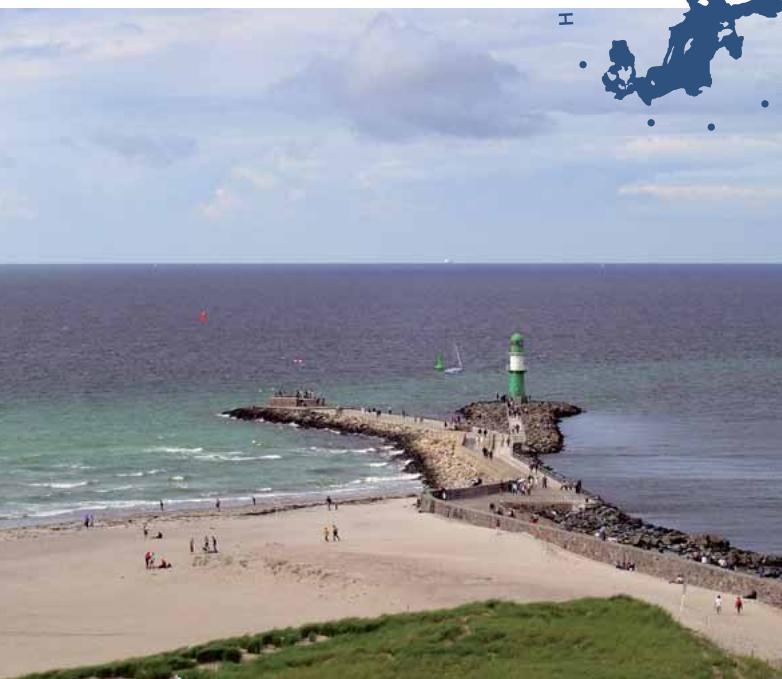
Jukka Nurminen



Raimo Sundelin



Ylisa Hietalahti



## Building on 30 years of experience

HELCOM naturally plays a leading role in the realisation of our vision of a healthy Baltic Sea, by deciding on internationally agreed protective measures. But the future ultimately lies in the hands of everyone whose activities affect the Baltic marine environment. For this reason it is very important that the responsibility for creating and implementing the Baltic Sea Action Plan is shared by all stakeholders in both the private and the public sectors.

**HELCOM invites everyone interested in rescuing the troubled Baltic Sea to get actively involved in drawing up and carrying out the Baltic Sea Action Plan.**



## Baltic Sea facts

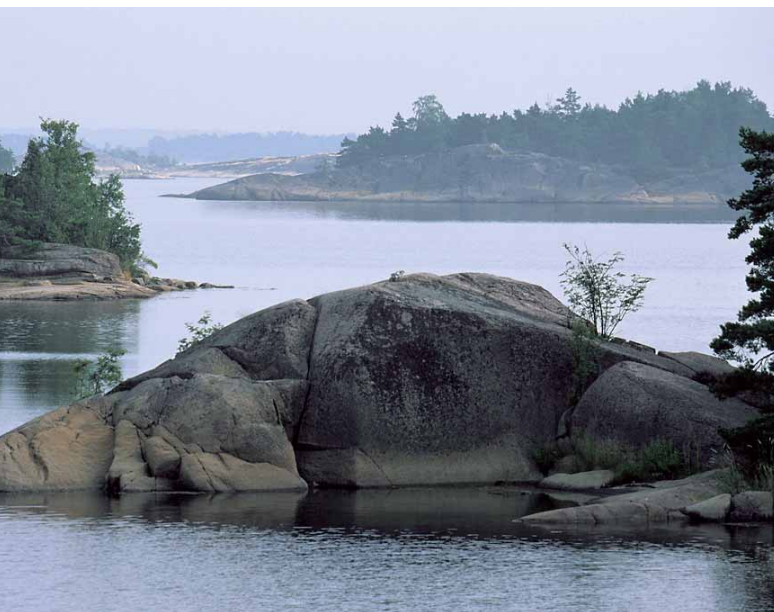
- A shallow and almost landlocked sea
- One of the largest bodies of brackish water in the world
- Unique and fragile ecosystems with naturally low numbers of species
- Highly sensitive to all kinds of pollution
- Surrounded by many large cities and regions with intensive agriculture and industry
- Some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world



Lukasz Lukaszik

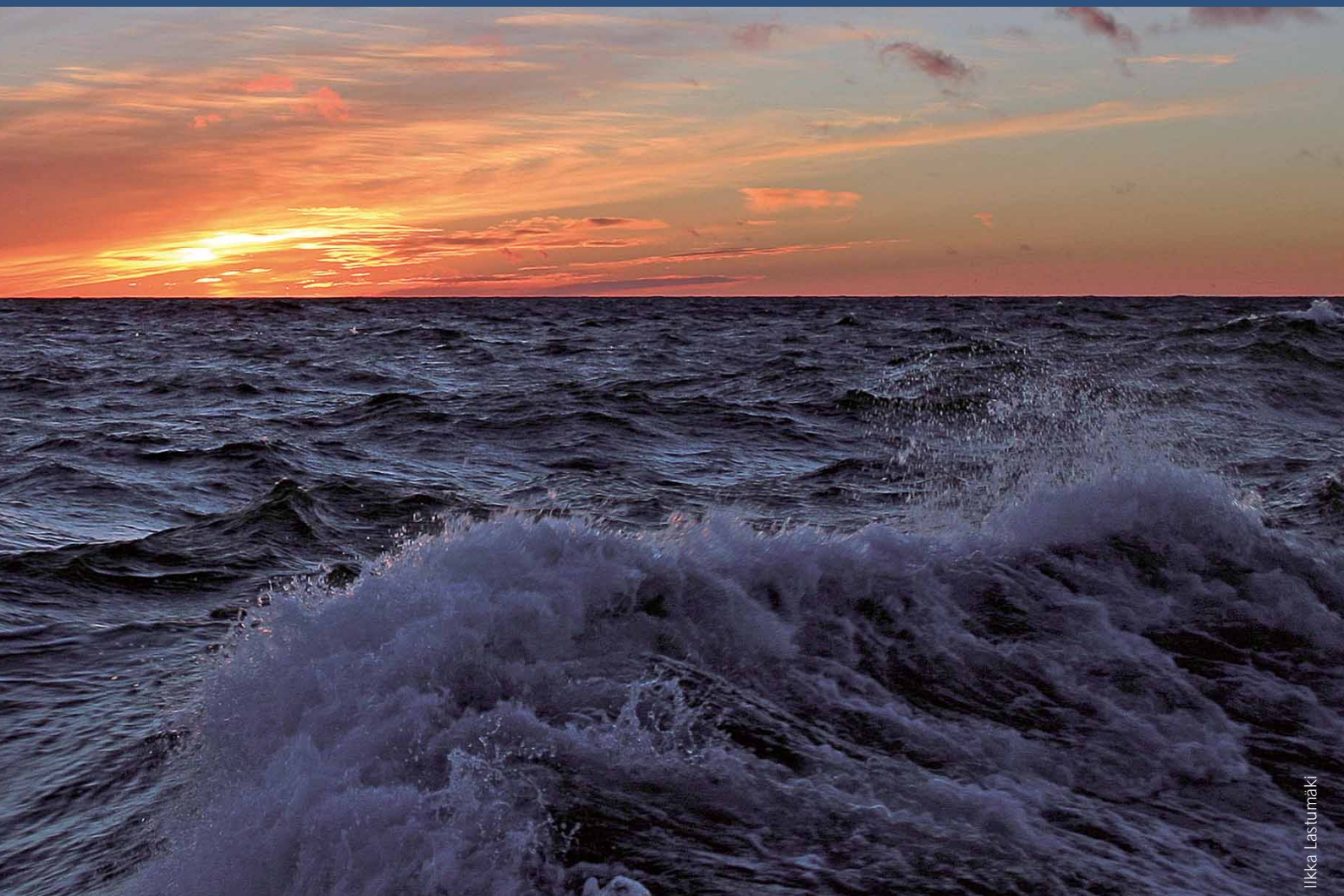


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