

Agenda Item 7: Cooperation with IWC, OSPAR, HELCOM and other international Organisations

**The "Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission".
The Structure of HELCOM**

Submitted by the Secretariat

NOTE FROM THE SECRETARIAT:
IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO BRING THEIR OWN COPIES OF THESE DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING

Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission Helsinki Commission

by Holger Auel, ASCOBANS Secretariat

with information from <http://www.helcom.fi>

The first Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area was signed in 1974 by the coastal states of the Baltic Sea at that time. In 1992, a new Convention was signed by all the countries bordering on the Baltic Sea and by the European Economic Community.

The governing body of the Convention is the Helsinki Commission - Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - also known as HELCOM. The present contracting parties to HELCOM are Denmark, Estonia, European Community, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden.

Executive Secretary: Tapani Kohonen +358-9-6220 2233 tapani@helcom.fi

Aim of the Convention

The Helsinki Convention of 1974, issued to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea, was the first international agreement to cover all sources of pollution, both from land and from ships as well as airborne. To accomplish its aim, the Convention calls for action to curb various sources of pollution.

Organisation and Operation

The Helsinki Commission meets annually and, from time to time, meetings are held at ministerial level. Decisions taken by the Helsinki Commission - which are reached unanimously - are regarded as recommendations to the governments concerned. These HELCOM Recommendations are to be incorporated into the national legislation of the member countries. The chairmanship of the Commission rotates between the Contracting Parties every two years in alphabetical order, using the English names of the members. The commission consists of four Committees and a Programme Implementation Task Force. Other subsidiary bodies comprise working groups and projects.

The **Environment Committee** works on joint monitoring programmes covering different sectors of the marine environment, the open sea and the coastal waters. The data are compiled into joint databases and are evaluated at regular intervals by experts from the Baltic Sea States, in order to assess the environmental conditions. It also co-ordinates issues related to nature conservation and biodiversity via its subcommittee **EC Nature**.

Environment Secretary: Kjell Grip +358-9-6220 2227 kjell@helcom.fi
Chairman of EC Nature: Henning von Nordheim +49-38-3018 6120 bfm.ina.vilm@t-online.de

The **Technological Committee** works on evaluation of waterborne and airborne pollution load to the Baltic Sea from land-based sources and on elaboration of technical measures to reduce discharges into waters and emissions to the atmosphere from urban areas, industry and diffuse sources, including agriculture and traffic. Recommendations are prepared on restriction of discharges and emissions and on banning or restricting the use of certain substances.

The **Maritime Committee** takes measures against all kinds of operational pollution from ships and offshore platforms and deals with facilities in ports to dispose of ships' wastes. It also co-ordinates the activities of the Baltic Sea from pollution by ships.

The **Combating Committee** elaborates rules and guidelines for co-operation in combating spillages of oil and other harmful substances.

The **Programme Implementation Task Force** (HELCOM PITF) initiates, co-ordinates and facilitates the implementation of the Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP). The Programme consists of investment activities to control point and non-point sources of pollution and conserve environmentally sensitive areas and resources. It also comprises actions in the fields of legislation, policy and education. HELCOM PITF shall take a proactive role in the development, implementation and monitoring of the Programme including improved co-ordination at all levels and assure an interactive role with multilateral banks, bilateral financial institutions and/or national, regional, municipal governments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector.

Involvement in the conservation of harbour porpoises

HELCOM's involvement in the protection of the Baltic harbour porpoise population is based on Resolution 17/2 adopted in 1996 (see appendix). The Resolution recommends *inter alia* that the Contracting Parties to HELCOM give highest priority to avoid by-catches of harbour porpoise and consider the establishment of protected marine areas for harbour porpoise.

According to a HELCOM report on "The Environmental State of the Baltic Sea" from October 1996, the harbour porpoise is less abundant in the Baltic than it was earlier this century. Results from a survey in the Baltic Sea in 1995 showed an approximate number of 1.200 animals. Experts suspect that the harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea are genetically specific and reproduce exclusively within this area. Gill nets represent a serious threat for harbour porpoises. In the past organochlorines have caused severe problems in Baltic seals resulting in skeletal and uterine deformations leading to sterility. It can be expected that Baltic harbour porpoise populations are also susceptible to marine pollution.

Appendix

HELCOM RECOMMENDATION 17/2

Adopted 12 March 1996, having regard to Article 13, Paragraph b) of the Helsinki Convention

PROTECTION OF HARBOUR PORPOISE IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA

THE COMMISSION,

DEEPLY CONCERNED about the population status of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea and AWARE that individual numbers have drastically decreased,

RECOGNIZING the relevance of the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS), the action list and relevant recommendations by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) and the resolutions of International Whaling Commission (IWC) and European Cetacean Society (ECS),

RECOGNIZING that harbour porpoise is and should remain an integral part of the marine ecosystems,

RECOGNIZING FURTHER that by-catches, habitat deterioration and disturbance adversely affects this species,

CONVINCED that the vulnerable status of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea calls for immediate actions in order to safeguard their survival,

RECOMMENDS that the Governments of the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention:

- a) give highest priority to avoid by-catches of harbour porpoise;
- b) take action, in close co-operation with ICES, for the collection and analysis of additional data on population distribution and abundance, stock identities and threats such as pollutant levels, by-catch mortality, disturbance by shipping (e.g. under water noise);
- c) consider the establishment of protected marine areas for harbour porpoise within the framework of the Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs), when documented information is available that an area hosts harbour porpoise;
- d) report to the Commission every three years, beginning from 1998 on their progress in implementing the above recommendations.