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WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme

BALTIC ECOREGION NEWS

Positive win(d)s propelling sustainable shipping forward in the Baltic Sea

Special Area for Sewage Discharges

Over the past six months enormous strides have been made toward sustainable shipping. First, in April the International Maritime Organization (IMO) reached an agreement to designate the Baltic Sea as a special area for sewage discharges from passenger ships under Annex IV of the MARPOL Convention.

Preventing Invasive Species Spread in Ballast Water

Following this, Finland's accession on 8 September to the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments (BWM Convention) brought to an end one of the 'longest running sagas in shipping regulation'. After nearly 10 years of sustained advocacy efforts, the Convention has met its ratification criteria and will come into force in September 2017.

"This shows that even a small country like Finland, which represents only a fraction of global shipping tonnage, can have a big

influence on marine protection and should never shy away from its global responsibilities" says Vanessa Ryan, Marine Conservation Officer at WWF Finland.

Since then, Panama has also acceded, bringing the proportion of global shipping tonnage covered by the treaty to 53.28 per cent, with 53 contracting parties, [according to the IMO](#).

Dr. Simon Walmsley, shipping expert in WWF's Ocean Practice, says:

"This is a biological issue not a normal engineering solution so quite a departure from the norm for the IMO, its member states and the shipping industry. This marks a landmark step towards halting an onslaught which can devastate local ecosystems, and incur significant economic costs."

A new Nitrogen Emission Control Area

Following this, in October, the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee agreed to limit Nitrogen Oxide (NOx) emissions from ships'

exhaust gases in the Baltic Sea as proposed by HELCOM countries. A similar proposal from the North Sea countries was approved at the same meeting. As a result of these two decisions, in spring 2017 the creation of a larger Nitrogen Emission Control Area (NECA) for new ships built in or after 2021 is expected.

Successful Cooperation

This initiative emerges from the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action [Plan](#), agreed by the nine coastal countries and the EU in 2007 – an example of how cooperation can help achieve greater results across regions. According to recent estimates by the European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme, some 22,000 tons less Nitrogen will be deposited annually in the Baltic Sea area as a result, although fleets will need to be renewed over time before the full effect is realized; thus it will not be an effective tool to reduce Nitrogen in the short term.

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THE SPIRIT OF MARK TWAIN – ALIVE AND WELL IN THE BALTIC SEA

‘One Region, One Future’

– under the right circumstances this phrase could inspire visions of partnership, collaboration and shared progress. The title of this year’s EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Annual Forum certainly underscored the importance of working together across the Baltic Sea Region to shape a sustainable future. Yet the mood was pensive.

The geopolitical and socioeconomic trends occurring across the region, Europe and in the U.S. provided a stark background narrative. The emerging political and economic climate is daunting for those of us who envision a world where humans live in closer harmony with nature and with each other, as stewards of this green and blue planet for future generations. Yet our collective commitment to achieving greater impact through securing more effective regional collaboration remains steadfast.

An even greater need to engage

From BEP’s standpoint, recent geopolitical events point to an even greater need to engage a broader network of partners from the public, private, scientific and civil society communities to create both a shared agenda and a platform for collective action. An inclusive approach that transcends ideologies and ensures that actions to secure a healthy Baltic Sea can provide broad benefits for all has never been more important. We in BEP need to effectively champion the fact that this is within reach.

We suspect that the Baltic Sea, if it could speak, would echo the words of writer Mark Twain who, according to legend, after learning that his obituary had been printed in newspapers, said that “The reports of my death are greatly

exaggerated.” While the stories of the demise of the Baltic Sea are many, and the challenges facing the Baltic are indeed stark, the sea itself is not dead. Yes, it is a dynamic ecosystem under tremendous stress but the steps we must take are clear and we know that substantial benefits can accrue from implementing the policies that countries have in fact already committed to.

The starting point remains the same

There are, of course, disagreements as to exactly which actions are needed and how to prioritize these, but the starting point is the same. The desire to secure a healthy diverse and resilient Baltic Sea for the benefit of the people and nature of the region remains broadly accepted. As long as this is the case, we have in place a fundamental enabling condition for success.

And we must not forget that we are making real progress, visible both in and out of the water! We are seeing positive shifts across the region on key areas that WWF and partners have worked long and hard to secure. Take shipping, for example. The recent International Maritime Organization (IMO) approval of HELCOM countries’ proposal to limit ships’ NOx emissions in the Baltic Sea (NECA) is a huge step forward. This coming so closely on the heels of other shipping milestones (as described on page one) represent years of hard work across countries, sectors and with policy makers. We are also seeing impressive progress and results from land-based measures to reduce nutrient input to the Baltic Sea. Since 1995, nitrogen inputs have decreased by 17% and phosphorus inputs have decreased by 20% according to HELCOM.

An extremely well positioned region

We must celebrate and build on this progress. In so doing, we can galvanize an inclusive approach and an alternative narrative – one where a healthy Baltic Sea is achievable and increased cooperation is the only way forward. WWF believes that the Baltic Sea region is extremely well positioned to become the first truly sustainable Blue Economy in the world. In this future, both land- and sea-based economic activities are transformed into “circular economies” that operate within the framework of ecosystem boundaries, relying on clean technologies, renewable energy, and closed-loop material flows. The Baltic would become a model where people and business prosper amidst healthy, well-managed ecosystems.

We look forward to our continued work together towards this goal as inspired by the words of cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead: ***“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”***

*All our best,
Pauli and Ottilia*



Photo: Stefan Andersson / WWF Sweden

FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE SHIPPING



Photo: Tero Peltonen / WWF-Finland

Positive win(d)s propelling sustainable shipping forward in the Baltic Sea – continued from p. 1

Implementation of the scheme will result in curbing eutrophication problem in the Baltic. The new regulations will also have a number of indirect benefits for the Baltic Sea marine environment, such as increase the use and catalyzing technological innovation in the field of green shipping and alternative fuels such as LNG.

Sulphur Reductions as well

The Baltic Sea was designated as a Sulphur Emission Control Area (SECA) in 1998 based on a similar proposal. In 2015 a new sulphur limit for fuel oil led to 88 per cent reductions in SOx emissions from shipping in the Baltic Sea region compared with 2014, as estimated by the Finnish Meteorological Institute. The IMO meeting in

October agreed that a new stricter global limit (0.5 per cent) in fuel oil sulphur content should be applied from 2020.

Pauli Merriman, Director of WWF's Baltic Ecoregion Programme, said, "WWF has been a tireless advocate for these critical measures in the Baltic Sea. This progress on several fronts towards a sustainable shipping sector demonstrates, yet again, that long-term advocacy for the sensitive Baltic Sea does indeed pay off." This will remain a focus for WWF's long-term advocacy efforts.

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10,000 marine species travel unnoticed every day

Every day, some 10,000 marine species travel unnoticed across the world's oceans, silent stow-aways in ships' ballast water tanks.

When released in a new environment, these unwanted travellers can become invasive, out-competing and changing native flora and fauna. This translocation is one of the biggest threats to marine biodiversity. Often it is irreversible.

The 2004 BWM Convention is widely accepted as the only international instrument to prevent ships from continuing to spread invasive species via transfers of ballast water.

NOx emissions from shipping are a major source of airborne deposition of Nitrogen, aggravating nutrient pollution or eutrophication, a key concern in the Baltic.



Photo: Michel Gauthier / WWF

INTEGRATED OCEAN MANAGEMENT AND MARITIME ACTIVITIES



Baltic countries failing to lay the groundwork for sustainable sea use

Governments are failing to deliver the protection needed to sustain and restore the natural capital in the Baltic Sea. The shortcomings are exposed in a new 'MPA scorecard' report released by WWF.

'Marine Protected Areas are an essential tool for recovering, protecting and enhancing biodiversity, maintaining productivity and increasing the resilience of ecosystems in the face of a changing climate. MPAs thus form the bedrock for a truly sustainable blue economy in the Baltic Sea region,' said Mattias Rust, Acting Director Marine and Freshwater, WWF Sweden.

'Unfortunately, what is clear from the MPA Scorecard report is that despite growing interest in the 'blue growth' potential of the region, the natural capital upon which this growth is dependent is not being adequately safeguarded.'

The results show that Denmark is the top performer, followed by

Sweden then Finland and Germany. All four countries scored highly for the delivery of environmental protection commitments. However, MPA designation scores for Denmark, Finland and Sweden and the management effectiveness score for Germany were disappointing. Lithuania and Poland performed least well across all four assessments, although they have made good progress in designations within their territorial waters.

The list of priority actions presented in the report reflects WWF's belief that there is much that can be done to deliver an ecologically coherent network of well-managed MPAs in the Baltic Sea, and thus secure a range of critical ecosystem benefits for current and future generations.

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BCG, Commission and WWF Exchange on Governance and Blue Economy

Brussels, 15 June – The much anticipated EU Commission Communication on International Ocean Governance was the subject of a lively exchange between WWF and representatives from across six Directorate Generals, including DG MARE, ENVIRO, MOVE, REGIO, RTD and External Services. WWF presented its recommendations for the Commission's Oceans Governance Consultation, showcasing WWF's global Ocean focus, work towards securing a sustainable blue economy and regional solutions in the Mediterranean, Celtic and Baltic Seas. Marty Smits, Partner and Managing Director at the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) joined by phone to present key findings from the [Reviving the Ocean Economy 2015 report](#), and to highlight the regional versions of the report in Melanesia and the Western Indian Ocean.

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INTEGRATED OCEAN MANAGEMENT AND MARITIME ACTIVITIES



The EU takes the HELCOM Chair

Brussels, 1 July – The European Union took over the Chairmanship of HELCOM from this summer through to June 2018. Reaching a healthy Baltic Sea ecosystem by 2021, promoting innovation for a sustainable blue economy and tackling the challenge of regional governance are their stated priorities. Marianne Wenning, Director for Quality of Life, Water and Air in the European Commission, and Matjaž Malgaj, Head of the Unit in DG Environment that deals with Marine Environment and Water Industry, also in the European Commission, will serve as Chair and Vice-Chair of HELCOM, on behalf of the EU.

The [priorities](#) of the EU Chairmanship also include implement-

ing the regional action plan for marine litter and promoting sustainable agricultural practices, among others. Regional governance is a further priority, specifically securing cooperation with Regional Fisheries Bodies and contributing to international ocean governance. WWF has expressed support for these priorities, and stressed that progress towards their delivery will require strong, proactive leadership by the EU to demonstrate the added value of regional coherence and coordination. This includes a focus on cross-compliance between relevant directives.

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Special Area and Cooperation Platforms

Tallinn, 5 September – WWF participated in a meeting of the HELCOM Cooperation Platform on Port Reception Facilities where the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) shared that the results of their 'simulation exercise on MARPOL Annex IV Special Area' won't be available until later in the year. WWF and CLIA agreed to keep in touch regarding the outcomes and potential implications of this. The HELCOM secretariat will also update the HELCOM Port Reception Facility Overview and CLIA agreed to contribute to this including the outcomes of their report – something WWF supported.

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Integration, Transparency and Eels

Brussels, 2 September

– WWF met with Commissioner Vella in a constructive follow-up to the integrated ocean management roundtable meeting held with the Commission in June (see previous article). Commissioner Vella was joined by members of his cabinet, as well as Haitze Siemers from DG Mare and Matjaž Malgaj from DG Environment. WWF's European Policy Office Director – Genevieve Pons – led the meeting, joined on WWF's behalf by Sam Burgess and Rita Santos (EPO), Giuseppe Di Carlo (Mediterranean Marine Initiative) and Pauli Merriman (BEP).

WWF sought to ensure that integrated governance, sustainability and ocean conservation are embedded in EU action and policy. The team urged the Commission to embrace transformational change, guided by the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, and highlighting some of WWF's work in these areas. The Chairmanship of HELCOM was presented as an opportunity for the EU to demonstrate leadership on oceans governance by providing greater policy coherence, cross-compliance and cooperation across land and sea in the context of securing a sustainable blue economy. WWF further noted the need for increased transparency and the importance of supporting HELCOM's engagement on biodiversity issues such as the eel management plan.

The meeting laid an important foundation for future work between WWF and the Commission.

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INTEGRATED OCEAN MANAGEMENT AND MARITIME ACTIVITIES

Oiled Wildlife Response Exercise

Helsinki, 13 September

– WWF Finland participated in an oiled wildlife response exercise held at the premises of the Helsinki Zoo. The exercise was part of the larger national 4-day Predict 2016 exercise, which included both oil and chemical response elements.

The oiled wildlife response exercise included staff from the Finnish Environment Institute, the Helsinki City Rescue Department, Metsähallitus Luontopalvelut (Parks & Wildlife Finland) and Helsinki Zoo, as well as WWF staff and oil spill response volunteers.

The purpose was to test the setting up of a small-scale oiled wildlife response rehabilitation centre, and for the first time ever in an exercise, the search and collection of oiled birds was also carried out in practice. Real-time bird sightings were used to draw up a scenario for oiled birds, with species potentially affected ranging

from Common eider (*Somateria mollissima*) to Mute swan (*Cygnus olor*) and Great crested grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*).

The results of the exercise showed the strengths of the Finnish oiled wildlife response system. They further highlighted the need to develop a detailed communication plan for the organization, and to improve the reporting system for oiled wildlife sightings in the field. All parties are committed to further developing capacity. The results were presented at the HELCOM RESPONSE meeting in Riga on 8–10 November. HELCOM Contracting Parties are requested to draw up oiled wildlife response plans by the end of 2016, but as the deadline will not be met by most countries, the work of the working group will continue in 2017.

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Celtic Seas Partnership – exchanging lessons

Dublin, 18–19 October – The final multinational workshop of the [Celtic Seas Partnership](#) demonstrated an impressive array of good practice guidelines developed for transboundary marine governance, co-existence of marine renewables and marine sectoral interaction, and conflict resolution methods. The aim of this 4 year LIFE+ funded project was to support the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive across the Celtic Seas (France, Ireland, United Kingdom) by facilitating stakeholder engagement and transboundary governance mechanisms. This is a common theme all EU sub-regions grapple with when addressing marine governance and achieving ‘good environmental status’.

Ottilia Thoreson represented WWF’s Baltic Programme, including on an expert panel consisting of high level government and non-governmental organization representatives. This provided a platform to share perspectives and experiences from the Baltic Ecoregion, as well as to return lessons learned from the project for application here.

Through its lifetime, the project convened 950 stakeholders across 22 sectors from the three partner countries, vividly demonstrating the benefits of multi-stakeholder collaboration on marine governance issues. There is a stark need in all European sub-regions at present, given the substantive gap in forums, to work with complex matters that touch many sectors simultaneously.

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Photo: Saara Tunturi / WWF

INTEGRATED OCEAN MANAGEMENT AND MARITIME ACTIVITIES



Photo: Oha Reulaja / Shutterstock

From Grass and Gas to Breakfast and Busses

Stockholm, 8–9 November
– **The 7th annual Strategy Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)** was hosted by Sweden together with the Nordic Council of Ministers and in close cooperation with the European Commission, with over a thousand participants in attendance. The EUSBSR agenda included relevant themes related to eutrophication, fisheries and Blue Economy/Blue Growth.

BEP co-organized a seminar at the Forum – How to Engage Farmers and Communities in Water Management with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. It brought together a number of stakeholders from national governments, municipalities and the agriculture sector to discuss how best to collaborate on water management at the landscape level. The seminar underlined the continued need to share experiences within and between neighboring countries in the region to improve water management methods on a landscape level and showcase successful examples.



Photo: Joona Fritze / WWF

One highlight of the seminar was a presentation by Markus Eerola, the winner of WWF's 2015 WWF Baltic Sea Farmer of the Year award, to share insights on the importance of closing the loop on agriculture's impact to waterways and how to support, incentivize and accelerate community based solutions. Mr. Eerola is currently testing a collaborative project involving his local community. Waste products of grass biomass from his fields and manure from neighboring hen houses are converted to bioenergy at a biogas plant. The energy produced is used directly to heat a nearby bakery, as fuel for the public transport busses, and the farms' grain dryer. The residual nutrients

from the biogas plant are reused on the crop fields hence closing the nutrient cycle.

WWF contributed to another seminar during the Forum – “Saving the Baltic Sea in 20 years – innovative methods to extract the nutrient surplus from the sea water” – which focused on the benefits and risks of technologies and approaches to address the internal load. Otilia Thoreson shared WWF's position on the internal load and stressed the continued need to address the land-based sources of nutrient pollution to the Baltic Sea. The seminar included key stakeholders who presented various innovative approaches such as mussel and algal farming, chemical solutions such as extracting sediment or binding phosphorous with chemical agents and how these approaches were proposed to help speed up the process of improving the Baltic Sea. The seminar also highlighted the need to further test these proposed solutions before they are applied to larger scale areas of the Baltic. Otilia stressed the importance of prioritizing investments for land-based measures, while exploring these new approaches as a complement for localized coastal areas as well as potential support to rural and coastal communities.

The BEP also attended the 18th Baltic Development Forum Summit held back-to-back with the Forum and which included a focus on current economic affairs, the political climate, and the potential for business.

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INTEGRATED OCEAN MANAGEMENT AND MARITIME ACTIVITIES



Photo: VASAB (Speaker is Alec Taylor, WWF UK)

Baltic Maritime Spatial Planning Forum

Riga, 23–24 November – The BEP participated in the [2nd Baltic MSP Forum](#), the biggest regional event of the institutions responsible for maritime spatial planning. The Forum serves as a platform for discussions among those involved and affected by MSP on how to develop and enhance MSP in the Baltic Sea basin.

Alec Taylor from WWF UK presented in the plenary session of the forum in a TEDx talk fashion on the theme “WWF’s experiences of MSP across Europe – lessons and common themes” where he highlighted examples from the various regions of the WWF MSP work including the Baltic, including some of our messages on Blue economy/growth. Jochen Lamp also gave presentations on inclusion of fisheries into MSP as well as on the implementation of MPA management within MSP – a topic that will also be a part of the coming HELCOM Vasab work.

There were a number of valuable side sessions, many of which shared updates as well as lessons learned from the SCOPE project, the goal of which is to come up with common solutions for cross-border maritime planning. It was clear that many of the tools and resources being developed as a part of the SCOPE project will be useful and relevant for our collective work on MSP. The project was described as a unique exercise to challenge countries involved (Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Poland and Sweden). More details can be found here: <http://www.balticscope.eu/>

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Estonia’s progress in MSP

Tallinn, 24 October – A conference focusing on the upcoming start of the nation-wide maritime spatial planning (MSP) took place. The Estonian Fund for Nature was active with Aleksei Lotman as moderator for the event who shared WWF’s [Ecosystem Based Management cartoon](#) and [All Hands on Deck](#) report. Two counties in Estonia already have maritime spatial plans but these have not yet been officially adopted. One such plan has been challenged by a local activist group, with a court decision applied. Under the lead of the Finance Ministry, Estonia is poised to start a national MSP process early in 2017. There is some concern that the level of detail might not be the same for national planning as for the existing county plans.

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BIODIVERSITY AND FISHERIES



Photo: Anna Szostowska

International ghost net workshop in Poland

Warsaw, September – An international workshop of MARELITT project partners was organized by WWF Poland. A group of experts representing marine science, fishermen and divers associations discussed methodologies for ghost net search and retrieval in the Baltic Sea. A joint plan of data collection was developed to help to designate marine areas for new searches by fishing vessels and divers in 2017-2019. The meeting further explored the possibilities of introducing an electronic net marking system into the European and national laws and policies.

The workshop was also attended by representatives of the Finnish Environmental Institute, a new unofficial partner in the MARELITT project (i.e. outside EU INTERREG financing). This will expand our work and actions regarding ghost nets retrieval to the Finnish waters. At this rate, perhaps ghost nets will one day be nothing more than a scary story!

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German ghost nets - going, going, gone...

Two years after the successful 2014 clean-up of two shipwrecks, this past summer WWF Germany launched its ghost net dragging operations. Using the 'net fork' (originally designed by WWF Poland for lost net retrieval), WWF collaborated with local fishers, the fisheries and cultural heritage authorities and government agencies to identify target areas. The combination of the fishing vessel "Einheit" led by Captain Karl-Heinz Neumann and a local diving team who marked lost net positions known by the fisheries authorities proved highly successful. In total, 5 tonnes of derelict fishing gear (wet weight) were retrieved.

Retrieval operations are sponsored by the German recycling

company Tönsmeier, and results feed into the blueprint for derelict fishing gear removal generated by WWF Germany in the framework of the EU MARELITT project launched in March 2016. In addition to trawl and gill nets, material brought up included old anchor chains, a fire hose, aluminum and copper cables, as well as a rusted ammunition shell. Hence, the ghost nets had not only continued to catch fish, but had also attracted seabed waste in substantial quantities. As a next step, recycling tests will show whether the mixed material can be reused as part of the marine plastics recycling chain.

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Photo: Florian Hoffman Geisernetze & Barbara Meier

MARELITT in Malmö

Derelict fishing gear, often referred to as "ghost nets", is a global issue but few are aware of the problem and its consequences. MARELITT Baltic is the first transnational initiative focused on developing far-reaching proposals for minimizing the threat and enhanced international readiness to act.

On December 1, the MARELITT Baltic project hosted an inspiring day in Malmö, Sweden. The event convened project partners, fisheries organizations, NGOs, authorities and policy makers to share views and on challenges and solutions around derelict fishing gear in the Baltic Sea.

BIODIVERSITY AND FISHERIES



Photo: WWF Project 'Havsålgarn i Östersjön'

Is Politics 'for the Birds'?

Gotland, July – The famous Almedalsveckan – Sweden's biggest political meeting place with a week-long open dialogue amongst industry, business life, education, media and citizen movements – provided WWF Sweden the opportunity to continue its tradition of inviting politicians from the parliamentary parties to the nearby island of **Stora Karlsö**. The second oldest nature reserve in the world, Stora Karlsö is first and foremost known for its abundant bird life, in particular the many colonies of breeding guillemots.

WWF Sweden has sponsored the '**Baltic Sea Bird Project**' for 20 years – a success story with more guillemots breeding at the island every year. After intense discussions about the sustainable blue economy and management of the Baltic Sea, the politicians trek along the island's steep cliffs at sunset. At the beach, researchers await them with instructions on how to catch the young birds who jump from the high cliffs and need be ringed before they reach the sea, as part of the research project. The inferno of adult birds calling out for their young ones plays a counterpoint to the daily soundtrack of negotiations and city life.

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Reviving Low Impact Fisheries

WWF Denmark launched a 3-year project (*Naturskånsom fisk – fra hav til tallerken*) to promote low impact coastal fisheries and improve the market opportunities and fishing rights for small scale fishers. The project – for which WWF has received DKK 7.7 million (€1.04 million) from the Villum Foundation – is a unique cross-sector



Photo: Foreningen for Skaansomt Kystfiskeri

partnership involving a broad selection of stakeholders to promote marine conservation as essential for the sustainable use of ocean resources. It aims to improve the supply chain and logistics for small scale fisheries in remote coastal regions and support the establishment of a powerful coastal fishers association, which can in turn collaborate on sustainable fisheries policy and market development.

"We wish to show alternative ways forward for the commercial fisheries in the Baltic and Denmark. We envision a fisheries sector engaged in sustainable exploitation of the resources and working directly towards rebuilding marine biodiversity and a living sea which we can all benefit from through our consumption of fresh local seafood", says Susanne Amsinck, the project leader.

"Our goal is to set the path for a healthy, cost-efficient, low impact fishery that ensures the survival of fishing communities and puts the small local boats in the center of local development. Over the past 10 years we have witnessed a serious downturn of small scale fishing and coastal communities. We wish to turn this around".

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New Finnish law protects endangered fish species

A new decree that protects endangered fish species was recently passed in Finland. Sea trout, sea-spawning grayling, landlocked salmon and Arctic char are among the species that are now better protected by legislation.

WWF Finland has worked relentlessly to achieve this and has been successful in influencing the contents of the law.

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BIODIVERSITY AND FISHERIES

Catching the Collaborative Wave

Stockholm, 23 September

– WWF hosted a dynamic exchange with non-government organizations working towards sustainable fisheries in the Baltic Sea. Baltic Eye, Coalition Clean Baltic, Finnish and Swedish Nature Conservation Societies, FishSec, Oceana, Sportfiskarna and WWF, among others, discussed closer collaboration among organizations and how best to pool limited capacity to advance progress towards securing sustainable ecosystem based management of the region's fisheries. This was a first step in a longer-term effort to better leverage limited resources and identify how and where to join forces to improve our impact when it comes to fisheries policy.

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Photo: Quentin Bates / WWF



Photo: Erling Svensen / WWF

Baltic Management Plan in Tatters

Luxembourg, 11 October – Thanks to a [decision by the Ministers of the European Council](#), Baltic cod overfishing will continue in 2017. The management plan is in tatters despite quota reductions of 56 per cent for the western and 25 per cent for the eastern cod stock.

The Commission and scientists had recommended deeper cuts, which would have enabled a speedier recovery. Ministers further committed to reducing recreational fishing on the cod stocks, and vessels up to 15 metres will be exempted from the closure in February and March.

WWF has serious concerns that these decisions unnecessarily increase the risk of the commercial collapse of these cod stocks and represent a threat to the long-term viability of local fishing communities. Counter to the precautionary approach, the western cod quota has been set well beyond sustainable yield. Margins for environmental fluctuations are completely insufficient and the available subsidies which could have helped tide over struggling fishers will only partially be utilized.

Next year will bring serious challenges to management. Control and enforcement will be key issues, but with the landing obligation already widely ignored by both fishers and control agencies, as well as new demands with regard to recreational fishing, the cost of this decisions will likely be far higher than any perceived short-term benefit. On a brighter note, WWF welcomes the decisions for sprat, the herring stocks, plaice and salmon, all of which are likely to continue their upward trajectory and had their quotas set broadly in line with scientific advice.

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EUTROPHICATION AND AGRICULTURE

How Sustainable is your Steak?

Södertälje, 10 November

– CONSUME is laying the foundations for a larger initiative to develop consumer meat guides in all Baltic Sea countries as a tool to transform the current market towards sustainable meat production and consumption. A start-up meeting which included participants from Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden focused on learning about existing initiatives at both the local and regional levels to inform project planning.



Photo: Ola Jönervall / WWF Sweden

At the local level, there is excellent work ongoing by the Södertälje municipality in Sweden on how to motivate end-users (e.g. restaurants, caterers and consumers) to choose more sustainable food and diets in the public and private sector, which provided helpful example and constructive input as “food for thought” towards the development of the CONSUME project objectives and plan for the coming 18 months.

CONSUME is an official flagship project under the EUSBSR PA Nutri. WWF Sweden received funding from the Swedish Institute to support initial project planning. This effort will build upon work also under way by WWF Finland, with



Photo: Sebastian Szustak

SIGWET - wetlands construction to reduce Baltic Sea pollution

In order to reduce Baltic Sea eutrophication the idea for a pan-Baltic project on construction and reconstruction of midfield wetlands on agricultural areas was discussed during the meeting in Falenty in October.

Workshop was organized by WWF in cooperation with the Institute of Technology and Life Sciences. Meeting gathered crucial partners of potential project, who discussed different approaches taken by Baltic Sea region countries in wetlands construction. This will permit to improve project idea and

elaborate application for funding in the future.

Set of surveys will be conducted among stakeholders from different Baltic Sea region countries about existing gaps in national and EU legislation regarding water protection. This information will help to formulate strong argumentation for funding application for the project proposal on midfield wetlands construction (to reduce Baltic eutrophication).

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national researchers to develop a eutrophication criterion for the guide methodology.

As highlighted in the latest edition of WWF's [Living Planet Report](#), we are running out of time to sustain the natural capital that provides us all with essential ecosystem goods and services on which we survive. We must act now

to reform our food and energy systems and meet global commitments on addressing climate change, protecting biodiversity and supporting sustainable development. Smarter consumption decisions are a key step in this direction.

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PEARLS FROM THE BALTIC SEA REGION



Photo: Arne Ader

Mission 'Black Stork'

The mysterious and shy black stork has inhabited Estonian forests for centuries. While it is doing well globally, here it has become so rare that every successful nesting is worth celebrating.

The decline in numbers in the last few years is due to loss and fragmentation of old forests as a nesting

habitat, as well as degradation of feeding areas in forest streams and rivers. The Estonian Fund for Nature organized volunteer projects in autumn 2016 to improve feeding habitats of this bird.

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Photo: Tom Amborn / WWF Sweden

Bats at Sea

Last summer the Estonian Fund for Nature initiated the collection of data on the bats flying over the Baltic Sea near Saaremaa to learn more about the species and times of travelling. The goal of this pilot study was to gather more information for better marine spatial planning.

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Three more years of Seal Patrols

October – WWF Poland signed on to a new 3-year EU project to continue protection for Baltic mammals. In partnership with the Hel Marine Station of Gdansk University, WWF will concentrate on implementing the Harbour Porpoise Conservation Programme and improved monitoring of coastal and marine habitats. WWF's Blue Patrol volunteers will continue to play a central role.

To begin field work, the next 2–3 months will be focused on organizing tenders (for example, for the Blue Patrol local leaders) and purchasing special equipment to be used for monitoring and interventions on the beach. The Hel Marine Station will simultaneously launch preparations for their research and monitoring work within the joint project.

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Photo: Lukasz Banaszkiewicz / WWF Poland

PEARLS FROM THE BALTIC SEA REGION



Photo: Edyta Jaszczyk / WWF Poland

The Blue Patrol volunteers' training

Dźwirzyno, 30 September

– 2 October – Some 60 Blue Patrol volunteers took part in a 3 day training in the Western Pomerania region of Poland. Speakers came from the Hel Marine Station of the University of Gdańsk, the Institute of Oceanology of Polish Academy of Sciences, the Inland Fisheries Institute from Olsztyn and WWF's Conservation Department.

It was a marvelous chance to review and expand the knowledge

and capacity of the members of the Blue Patrol to undertake interventions, in particular around the protection of seals and their habitats. The training was organized primarily by the volunteers themselves.

It was accompanied by a side event called "The Clean Beach", organized for the third time by the Blue Patrol in close cooperation with local authorities.

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Photo: Marko Kohn

Capercaillie Days

Dozens of different nature conservation holidays occurred all over Estonia in 2016. This year one spotlight was on capercaillies, with 11 international conservation holidays in the forests focused on these rare birds. The goal was to learn more about the current situation of capercaillies in Estonia.

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Sweden's Ocean Campaign

An Ocean campaign launched in June by WWF Sweden will run through year-end to raise awareness of the vital importance of integrated management to secure healthy oceans, and demonstrate how a healthy ocean fosters economic development, food security, and human wellbeing. The campaign is further intended to highlight WWF's key asks and generate a new wave of support for sustainable seas.

The geographical focal areas are the Arctic, the Indian Ocean (in particular the Northern Mozambique Channel), and the Baltic Sea. The campaign has also highlighted and supported progress towards the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and SDG14 in particular on Oceans. A final area of focus has been to promote the importance of securing a well-managed, ecologically coherent and representative network of marine protected areas (MPAs) covering at least 10 per cent of Swedish seas by 2020, with the ambition that this target be increased to 30 per cent in 2030.

The [WWF website](#) has a host of campaign material, including print, video, social media.

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PEARLS FROM THE BALTIC SEA REGION

“Let’s do it!”

Every year in May, the Estonian Fund for Nature organizes an annual community activities day “Let’s do it!”. Each community, organization and active citizen decides what needs to be done and asks others to join accordingly. This year, 1,986 different actions took place all over Estonia, including around 45,000 participants. As 2016 is also the year of Marine Culture in Estonia, many activities were connected to the seaside and water safety. The next “Let’s do it!” day will take place on the 6 May 2017.

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Photos: Tuuli Tammala



EU to take bigger role in global effort to save oceans

Brussels, 10 November – The European Commission announced its renewed commitment to strengthen international ocean governance and to set out a joint agenda of 50 actions to secure the effective conservation and sustainable use of the global seas and oceans. WWF has been actively engaging with the Commission to provide input to this communication on Ocean Governance. While WWF welcomes the EU’s vision, it also urges more concrete actions to address the crisis of the oceans affected by climate change and increasing industrial exploitation.

“The EU must ‘lead by example’ and develop new, robust and transparent legislation in addition to international partnerships with other governments and the private sector to secure rapid recovery of both European and global oceans,” says Samantha Burgess, Head of European Marine Policy at WWF.

The 2015 ‘State of European Seas’ report by the European Environment Agency concludes that the EU is not achieving sustainable use of its seas although it does have the policy framework, knowledge and expertise to do so. Despite significant progress in the governance of Europe’s seas, our global oceans remain in crisis. Competing and escalating demands for marine resources are compounded by data deficiency and a single sector approach to ocean management. Tackling over-exploitation of ecosystem goods and services, unintended impacts of human activities, ocean acidification and weak legislative structures are essential to support long-term, responsible economic, social and environmental use of marine resources.

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ON THE HORIZON

WWF BALTIC ECOREGION PROGRAMME

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

• 14-15 December 2016

HELCOM
Head of Delegations
Helsinki, Finland

• 15-16 December 2016

WWF MSP
Training Baltic/Barents
in Focus
Moscow, Russia

• 6-7 March 2017

Let's Do It Day
Estonia

• 6 May 2017

Baltic Sea
Future Conference
Stockholm, Sweden

• 18-19 May 2017

European Maritime Day
Poole, UK

Why the Ocean Matters - From an Economic Perspective

WWF continues its innovative partnership with the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to analyze the economic value of the ocean and its assets. Last year, WWF, BCG, and the Global Change Institute joined forces to produce a report on the ocean economy, "[Reviving the Ocean Economy: The Case for Action—2015](#)". This work is now being built upon with a closer look at the ocean's economic value for specific regions, with a [report on Melanesia](#) launched in October.

Marty Smits, Partner and Managing Director for BCG, recently highlighted in a [compelling article](#) why this work is so critical where he referenced BCG's work with the Baltic Sea, "BCG's [report on the Baltic Sea](#), for example, showed that this region's future is challenged by multiple environmental threats, ranging from damaging agricultural runoff and toxic pollution to overfishing of important commercial fish stocks to contamination of the waters. But we also found that the region is uniquely well positioned to take on a global leadership role in responding to these types of challenges – and this gives me hope."

Smits continued, "The ocean's assets offer a classic example of the "tragedy of the commons," whereby it makes economic sense for individuals to act in their own



self-interest, exploiting precious and limited resources, while this is net negative for the system as a whole. To make meaningful progress, countries, businesses, and civil society will need to coordinate efforts. **We hope that these economic analyses will help leaders frame the debate and provide additional motivation to preserve and protect the livelihoods of future generations.**"

These reports make important contributions to the global dialogue around plans for implementation of the targets for Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG14) on Oceans, for which the governments of Sweden and Fiji are jointly taking a lead.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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Pauli and Otilia