

Kotka 2010-07-29,
Magnus Nyström

Ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Finnish Ministry of the Environment I would like to thank the organizers.

The theme of this conference is the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan. The Action Plan underlines the importance of involving all stakeholders in its implementation.

This happening is called a Stakeholder Conference. Who is a stakeholder in this context? According to a dictionary a stakeholder is someone who is involved, and therefore has responsibilities towards an organization or a society, or in this case towards the Baltic Sea, and therefore has a positive interest in its future. We may have different reasons to be interested in the future of our common sea. The sea is providing fish, connections, recreation and it has a value in itself.

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan is a result of careful deliberations and negotiations and it is a compromise. It contains also follow-up mechanisms to enable us to take additional measures.

The environmental threats are all interconnected.

The main theme of this conference is the Maritime segment. Transport by the sea could be relatively environmentally sound compared to alternative means of transport. The International Maritime Organization IMO is the central actor, but HELCOM is a useful forum for coordination of interests and actions. Two joint initiatives are under preparation in IMO: New IMO rules concerning sewage from passenger ships in the Baltic Sea and concerning emissions of nitrogen oxides in the exhaust gasses. These rules can be seen as results of HELCOM cooperation.

The oil transport is increasing here because the Baltic Sea is one of the main routes for oil from the oil fields of Siberia to Central Europe. Safe and sound navigation is the basis for protection against accidental oil and chemical spills. Response actions are only secondary means. In the same way supervision and surveillance are only secondary means to prevent illegal deliberate pollution. International co-operation is needed. Just the southern coastline of Finland is about 10 000 kilometers long. The control has improved and new multipurpose vessels equipped for oil and chemical spill response are built for Finland, Russia, Estonia and Sweden. We are still not fully prepared to meet a realistic, major oil spill. Our goal is to be able to collect 30 000 tons of oil at sea in three days. A chemicals spill is not as probable, but the damage may be much worse. Finland is preparing to ratify two international agreements on marine spills of hazardous and noxious substances: OPRC-HNS-protocol and the HNS-convention. We are improving our legislation for the inspection and security of ships. Finally a draft plan for emergency situations caused by major oil spills will be finalized during the autumn.

The increasing eutrophication will remain the main threat against the ecosystems of the Baltic Sea. We have a significant input of nutrients to the ecosystem from several sources and the eutrophication may also be affected by for example climate change. The only sustainable solution is permanent reduction of inputs of nutrients from human activities. There are ideas about adding chemicals into the seawater to bind nutrients or about increasing the levels of oxygen by mixing the water artificially. The chemicals' indirect effects on the eco system are too complex and the potential risks are huge and unacceptable. Everyone who has seen a storm at sea must wonder if any man-made water mixer actually can become a sustainable solution to oxygen deficiency in the Baltic Sea.

Some countries have presented their national implementation programs for the Action Plan. The implementation status shall be scrutinized in 2013. At that time the plan may be adjusted.

International agreements and conventions have been criticized as ineffective and cumbersome. Without these agreements the state of the Baltic Sea would be much worse than it is today.

Mankind has managed to solve some environmental problems. The acidification and the depletion of the ozone layer are decreasing. Some toxic and persistent compounds have been banned, although we do not know enough about all chemicals on the market.

HELCOM's role is still very important. Cooperation between Russia and EU is essential for the future of the Baltic Sea. The agreements between states would not do any good at all to the Baltic Sea unless we all, the general public, industries, NGOs, scientists, civil servants and politicians together actively support each other in the work save our sea.

On behalf of the ministry for the Environment I wish you a successful conference and many useful discussions and contacts in a spirit of constructive cooperation.