

2nd Steering Committee meeting of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Priority Area Nutri “To reduce nutrient inputs to the sea to acceptable levels”

Meeting Minutes

May 14, 2013

Opening:

The second meeting of the Steering Committee of the EUSBSR Priority Area Nutri (PA Nutri) was called to order at 10:00 on 14 May, 2013, at the premises of the Chief Inspectorate of Environmental Protection of Poland in Warsaw by Ms Anna Sosnowska, Priority Area Coordinator (PAC).

Present:

Anna Sosnowska, PAC, Chief Inspectorate of Environmental Protection, Poland
Joanna Charytonowicz, PAC, Chief Inspectorate of Environmental Protection, Poland
Andrzej Podscianski, PAC, Chief Inspectorate of Environmental Protection, Poland
Kristiina Isokallio, PAC, Ministry of the Environment, Finland
Marja Kaitaniemi, PAC, Ministry of the Environment, Finland
Joanna Kirylo, DG REGIO
Thomas Johansson, NFP Sweden, Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management
Baiba Zasa, NFP Latvia, Ministry of the Environment, Latvia
Pekka Salminen, PRESTO Project, Union of the Baltic Cities
Stina Bergström, Baltic DEAL, Federation of Swedish Farmers
Anja Nysten, Belarus project, Nefco
Magdalena Gajewska, SUWMAB, Gdansk University of Technology
Arkadiusz Ostojki, SUWMAB, Gdansk University of Technology
Carolina Gunnarsson, Waternets, Regional Council in Kalmar County
Markku Järvenpää, CIRCUNUTS, MTT Agrofood Research Finland
Sanna Marttinen, CIRCUNUTS, MTT Agrofood Research Finland

Apologies:

Charlotte Betina Mogensen, NFP Denmark, Ministry of the Environment
Aiste Kubiliute, NFP Lithuania, Environment Protection Agency
Heike Imhoff, NFP Germany, Ministry of the Environment
Enn Liive, NFP Estonia, Ministry of the Environment
Mikhail Durkin, HELCOM Secretariat

A. EUSBSR, Action Plan and PA Nutri after the revision

Anna Sosnowska noted that PA Nutri now has appointed National Focal Points from each of the participating Member States. Present in the meeting were NFPs of Sweden and Latvia. The PACs expressed their wish that also the NFPs from Denmark, Lithuania, Germany and Estonia will attend future meetings.

Kristiina Isokallio presented the status of the EUSBSR after the revision process. The strategy was revised in 2012, and its new Action Plan was adopted in February 2013. The new strategy has three overall objectives: to save the sea, to connect the region, and to increase prosperity. The revision resulted in more specifically defined roles and responsibilities for the actors implementing the strategy and in targets and indicators set for the Strategy and its Priority Areas. Some Priority Areas are still in the process of defining their targets and indicators. For Priority Area Nutri, the targets are 1) reductions in the loads of nitrogen and phosphorus into the Baltic Sea, and 2) the sea area in good ecological status with regard to eutrophication. The data and monitoring of reaching the targets are based on the Baltic Sea Action Plan (target 1) and on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (target 2).

Priority Area Nutri currently has three ongoing Flagship Projects which will end by the end of 2013. New Flagship Projects are being sought.

B. Current status of ongoing Flagship Projects

The Flagship Project Leaders presented the current status of their projects.

Baltic DEAL. Vision to achieve greener agriculture for a bluer Baltic Sea driven by knowledge and advice. Achievements so far include a network of 118 demonstration farms, study trips and courses for farmers, agricultural advisors, media and policy-makers, handbooks and short videos, an online toolbox of 47 agri-environmental measures, and conferences. The project will be finished on 9 September, 2013. The final conference, Greener Agriculture for a Bluer Baltic Sea, will take place in Helsinki on August 27-28.

A question was raised about the sustainability of the project, i.e. if there is a plan in place to make sure the lessons learnt during the project will continue to be disseminated. The Flagship Project Leader explained that as the project is run by farmers' organisations and advisory organisations, they will keep using the knowledge gained in their own activities.

PRESTO. The project is focusing on improving wastewater treatment by investments in Belarus and building capacity of operational staff and academics also in Latvia and Lithuania. So far three wastewater treatment plans are well into the implementation of their investment plans, while one has been cancelled due to financial difficulties. To replace the cancelled investment at Baranovichi, a new investment plan is in preparation for the associated partner Lida. The project

has also succeeded to facilitate strong and sustainable cooperation between the operating staff and academics, the latter even in the form of founding a new joint professorship and a common university course on wastewater management.

Assessment of regional nutrient pollution load and identification of priority Investment projects to reduce nutrient pollution from Belarus to the Baltic Sea. The objective of the project is to screen the field of nutrient sources in Belarus and to identify cost-efficient opportunities for concrete projects aiming at reducing nutrient loads. The assessment of the current nutrient load sources has been carried out by consultancy Poyry, and the analysis of cost-efficiency of possible measures is underway. The action plan for prioritized investments will be ready by 21 December 2013.

C. New Flagship Project proposals

SUWMAB. The focus is on treatment wetlands that can be used as wastewater treatment facilities in scattered settlements and small municipalities (<2000 p.e.) As a large number of households in rural Poland is still without proper wastewater treatment systems, treatment wetlands could constitute a low-cost option improving the quality of wastewater into watersheds, with no need for heavy regulatory procedures. A question was raised whether the planned partnership of three academic institutions is the right choice for managing the practical work of the project, and whether the farmers in the target areas are themselves interested in the solutions. Ms Gajewska explained that the farmers need wastewater treatment in order to apply for environmental subsidies from the EU, which motivates them to participate. Another question was whether the solution could have a strategic impact within the BSR as winters in northern areas hinder the functioning of the wetlands. Ms Gajewska said there have been no problems at the treatment wetlands constructed so far in other projects.

IWAMA. The focus is on capacity building through the creation of a Baltic Smart Water Hub, which would continue running on its own after the project finishes. It was asked why UBC would be the best organization to run such a project. Mr Salminen replied that UBC has strong expertise and experience in coordinating such projects, whereas the technical expertise should come from technical universities. Other questions raised were what added value the hub would bring to other initiatives, e.g. International Advanced Water Management Center in St Petersburg, and how much interest there is to such a hub from the operators. Ms Salminen said that the hub would address both BSR-wide and national issues, and that the operators are interested in learning to save money by optimizing their operations. It was also asked whether the IWAMA project could focus on cooperation of the different initiatives and project within the field. Mr Salminen said it is a good idea to search for synergies with other projects, and possibilities for clustering with similar projects will be looked into, keeping in mind that clustering should not lead to lack of focus in the projects. **NFP Sweden expressed his support to this project. Also NFP Estonia had expressed his support in an e-mail.**

WaterNets. The project is built around the concept of Waster Users' Partnerships (WUPs), which means networks of all actors influencing or being influenced by the water of a river basin. The objective of the project is to facilitate the implementation of regulation, HELCOM recommendations, national water management programmes etc. by strengthening cooperation through the WUPs. The planned activities include creating 1 new WUP in each BSR country, implement concrete measures in the river basins selected, and to increase cross-sectoral dialogue. During the discussion, it was asked whether the WaterNets project could cooperate with SUWMAB in order to establish treatment wetlands within the river basins selected for WaterNets. A question was also raised about the participants to the WUPs. It was clarified that the focus is on water, so any actor with influence to or influenced by water within a river basin – e.g. municipalities, regional water authorities, industries, farmers, NGOs etc. – can be relevant participants. Discussions are ongoing to include Russia in the project as a full partner.

CIRCUNUTS. The idea of CIRCUNUTS is to take the treatment of nutrients to the next level: not only to clean up wastewater, but to bring them back to use by recycling them. The activities in the project would include mapping of the latest processes of recycling nutrients from manure, sludge, biowaste etc. by their potential to produce manageable, safe fertilizer products comparable to the inorganic fertilizers in use today. The output of the project would be a database of the technologies in nutrient recycling analyzed by their efficacy, safety etc. **Pekka Salminen from UBC expressed his support to this project.**

Baltic Deal Bridge / Baltic Deal 2. The idea of BD Bridge is to sustain the work of Baltic DEAL until the next calls for EU funding open. The Bridge phase will be financed by the Swedish Institute, and it aims at maintaining the demonstration farm network and at preparing an application for Baltic Deal 2. The Bridge phase has 23 partners. A question was raised whether the information on best agri-environmental practices will be disseminated outside the partner unions and demo farms. Ms Bergström explained that there have been numerous events, fairs etc. where the project has been present spreading information. A question was raised whether there has been any impact assessment of the activities of Baltic Deal so far. Ms Bergström said she doesn't know.

It was agreed that the PACs will prepare some further questions to the project proposals.

C. Seed money possibilities for new projects

Ms Kirylo from DG Regio presented the different Seed Money possibilities that aspiring EUSBSR Flagship Project developers can apply for in order to finance the preparatory phase of their project. The Seed Money Facility of the EUSBSR has had its first application round, for which they got 25 eligible applications totaling more than 1M €. Although the Facility can only commit 50% of its total funds of 1,3M € in this first round, Ms Kirylo stressed that competition is tight and only one or two projects from each PA can receive grants from the Facility.

Another option for funding is the Swedish Institute, which gets a new budget and new thematic priorities each year. The competition for the SI funding is less tight than for the EUSBSR Seed Money. There are three pathways for applying funding from the SI, namely the Seed Money, Thematic Partnerships and the Leadership Programme. The SI prioritizes participation of Russia and Belarus in its projects.

CBSS also has Seed Money available this year. So far they have only received five applications and still have more than 1 M € of funds available. CBSS gives priority to SEBA (South-East Baltic Area) projects.

Finally, also the Nordic Council of Ministers has funds available for project applications from the Nordic Countries. The projects must be prioritized by the NCM councils of ministers and committees of senior officials.

Project developers were encouraged to request a letter of support from the EUSBSR team at DG Regio whenever applying for funding from the EU Commission. Concerning the coming years, the Baltic Sea Region Programme may directly manage part of its funds as EUSBSR Seed Money. Similarly, some funds may be allocated as Technical Assistance for the PACs/HALs/NCPs, and a third allocation may be capitalization of projects, which will focus on the sustainable use of the results of the projects. However, the BSRP negotiations are delayed and the first call will probably not open for applications until in early 2015.

D. Work plan for the rest of 2013

Anna Sosnowska and Joanna Charytonowicz presented the plans of PA Nutri for activities in 2013. Cooperation possibilities have been sought with PA Agri (presentation of PA Nutri in a stakeholder seminar of PA Agri in Helsinki in August), PA Hazards (willingness to cooperate on both sides, topic e.g. sludge management, no specific plans), PA Ship (possibly a common meeting or seminar in the autumn on shipping sewage and port reception facilities) and HA Involve (HA Involve planning a Flagship Project involving PA Nutri). Ms Kiryllo pointed out possibilities to also cooperate with HA Neighbours and HA Bioeconomy. NFP Latvia supported cooperation especially with PA Ship and PA Agri, and suggested also PA Inno as a possible partner. NFP Sweden supported cooperation with PA Ship. Pekka Salminen/PRESTO supported cooperation with HA Neighbours. Sanna Marttinen/CIRCUNUTS and Magdalena Gajewska/SUWMAB supported cooperation with PA Hazards. Carolina Gunnarsson/WaterNets supported cooperation with HA Involve. The PACs will work on the ideas further.

The Annual Forum of the EUSBSR will be held in Vilnius on November 11-12. The focus will be on environmental issues with one workshop addressing eutrophication. The Priority Area can suggest speakers and moderators to the workshops, as well as have a stand in the Networking Village if they wish. PA Nutri still has to decide on these.

As for other activities for PA Nutri, there are possibilities to arrange a stakeholder workshop later this year. The PACs welcome any suggestions on topics. A possibility is to have the workshop together with HELCOM. HELCOM has indicated their interest into a workshop on wastewater treatment in small municipalities and scattered settlements. Another issue discussed was a possible information leaflet on PA Nutri to be handed out during conferences, seminars etc. The PACs will discuss the issue further.

E. Other issues

Joanna Kirylo stressed that currently, thematic priorities for all EU funding programmes for 2014-2020 are being defined, and everyone should ensure that the EUSBSR overall objectives are represented in the programme documents in a balanced way.

F. Identification of new Flagship Projects

Next steps for finding new Flagship Projects for PA Nutri were discussed within the Steering Committee.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 16:40 by the PACs.

Minutes submitted by Marja Kaitaniemi