

Date: 15 November
2024

Time: 09:30–11:30 CET
Microsoft Teams

Participants:

Magdalena Frydrych, Bureau for Chemical Substances (chair)
Frank Jensen, Danish EPA
Margus Korsjukov, Ministry for Environment, EE
Jukka Mehtonen, Finnish Environment Institute
Maruta Vehi, Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Centre
Anders Wallberg, Ministry for Climate and Enterprise, SE

Observers:

Maria Linderöth, Swedish Chemicals Agency
Lotta Ruokanen, HELCOM secretariat
Heidrun Fammler, Baltic Environmental Forum Deutschland

Johan Magnusson, DG REGIO, European Commission
Svea Horn, Baltic Sea Strategy Point
Louise Floman, Policy Area Coordinator, Swedish Agency for Marine
and Water management

PA Hazards Steering Group meeting and workshop

MINUTES

1. Opening of the meeting

Magdalena Frydrych

Chair of Steering Group, Bureau for Chemical substances, Poland

- a. Approval of agenda
- b. Introduction round

2. Update from Policy Area coordinator

Louise Floman

Policy area Coordinator (PAC), PA Hazards, Swedish Agency for Marine and Water management

a. EUSBSR Annual Forum in Visby, 29-31 October 2024

PA Hazards organised and co-organised three events:

- Seminar: Let's talk about PFAS! Connecting PFAS Strategies in the BSR (69 registered)
- Workshop: Aligning cross-sectoral efforts to align policy goals on saving the sea (67)
- Seminar: Empowering Sustainable Rebuild of Ukraine (89 registered).

PA Hazards had its own stand at the Networking village, which generated a lot of interest and new connections, including the idea to invite the Estonian Rescue Board (see agenda point 3).

PA Hazards participated at the Engagement day, with an aim to engage with new stakeholders. Results included linking up Sumy university (Ukraine) with a new project lead by IVL (Swedish Environmental Research Institute) and a number of stakeholders including Lviv university. The project “Achieving Zero PFAS” received funding from the Swedish institute, with the aim to develop the project idea further and to build the partnership. The idea is similar to the one from Sumy university, and it is perfect timing to join the project at this phase. A potential idea to link up with the EMPEREST project for mobile wastewater treatment facilities was also brought up.

b. Ongoing activities - BSR PHARMA platform, collaboration with Ukraine

Collaboration with Ukraine

PAC informed that topics requested by Ukrainian partners at the Annual Events were environmental monitoring and adaption to EU standards, mobile test labs to test the water quality. A discussion among the SG members showed that there is cooperation brewing already. Heidrun Fammler (Baltic Environmental Forum) informed that the NonHazCity 3 project is looking for Ukrainian NGO's to participate, since there is an issue with pollution from housing and construction material now in Ukraine. Ukrainian potential partners have signalled their interest, although they are not eligible in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme. NHC3 is currently looking into funding from the Finnish ministry or the Swedish institute.

Magdalena Frydrych, chair of the SG, expressed believe that that Ukrainian participants will be key invitees to next year's Annual Forum in Poland under the Polish presidency as Ukraine will be its important topic.

In addition, Poland hosts the program “Polish Aid”, under which preparing a project on chemical safety for Ukraine could be considered, with a special focus on establishing a legal framework for sound management of chemicals.

BSR PHARMA platform activities

In 2024, a process has been carried out together with BSR PHARMA Platform (run by Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE)), where initially, a call was launched for topics for seminars and workshops. The questionnaire was sent to the platform members and published on the webpage, allowing anyone to reply. On 25 October, a webinar was held on topics identified in the questionnaire: UWWTD, Water framework directive and Environmental Quality Standards, including extended producer responsibility. 91 people participated, to learn more on the effects of the updated directives, and to discuss potential issues and knowledge gaps in smaller groups. An expert roundtable will be held on 25 November, including European Environment Agency and ECHA, national experts and regional stakeholders, to further discuss the issue. A report will be finalized in January 2025.

c. Communication activities (LinkedIn and presence at EUSBSR annual forum + articles)

Louise Floman (PAC) informed also on communication activities and targets from the annual work plan for 2024. Regarding the target to publish 1-2 articles per month on the EUSBSR webpage, there is room for improvement. Relevant events are added on the webpage since this autumn.

A LinkedIn account was created in April, with increasing activity in the autumn, peaking around the EUSBSR Annual Forum. The trial period showed that LinkedIn is the right medium for communicating with relevant stakeholders, and targets for presence here will be introduced in the 2025 work plan.

Regarding visibility in relevant events such as the EUSBSR Annual forum, the targets were reached.

The steering group took note of the information and thanked for the initiative which would enlarge the public and increase the knowledge on either the regional Baltic Strategy or PA Hazard itself.

3. Discussion on firefighting foam and the ban of PFAS

Background: The EU Regulation on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POS Regulation) results from the ban, according to which **from July 4, 2025**, it is no longer allowed to use fire extinguishing foams with PFOA content for class B fires. Remaining stocks will have to be properly disposed of. A need to exchange on this topic has been identified, and an invited guest will present the topic to start off the discussion.

Proposed follow-up is to task the Baltic Sea PFAS Network with organizing a dialogue on the topic in 2025 (see proposed Work plan for 2025 under agenda point 4).

Heikki Rajalo from the Estonian Rescue Board introduced the situation at hand in Estonia. Currently, the changes concern a number of actors including airports, firefighting trucks, factories and industries but also office buildings and schools. These actors have very different level of knowledge and capacity to safely replace the foam and dispose of the old one. Estonian authorities have sent out letters to larger industries and businesses, that store large quantities and have better capacity to dispose of it. But there is a concern from EE authorities that many will not be able to comply with the new regulation before the deadline, due to both lack of knowledge and capacity, and possibly lack of political will. There is also a risk that some actors will replace the foams banned in the POS regulation with fluorine C6 foams, which might be banned through the REACH regulation and thus need replacing again soon.

Estonia has discussed with companies in EE, Finland and Sweden, who also expressed concerns over safe disposal of the foams.

DISCUSSION

Magdalena Frydrych (Bureau for Chemical Substances, Poland) confirmed that the situation in Poland is similar, with low awareness among suppliers of firefighting foam. Airports are aware, nevertheless risk of not keeping the deadline.

Maria Linderöth (Swedish Chemicals Agency) informed that in Sweden, a project financed with public money supported the collection and destruction of foam from civil protection services and

military training sites. Furthermore, there is a database with identified sources and contaminated water. The same information and financing do not exist for the industry, however.

She suggested developing a project on this, possibly coordinated by the Baltic Sea PFAS network, funded jointly by the countries.

Furthermore, Maria will share a translated report on substitute foams that could be useful to other countries to this end.

Jukka Mehtonen (SYKE) informed that there had been discussions on the Finnish side to have such a project as well.

Frank Jensen (Danish EPA) informed on the situation in Denmark. Last year, Denmark banned PFAS in all training facilities, since it is a source for spreading of PFAS. He does not consider the substitution of foam a major problem for Denmark, but is open to collaboration. A destruction facility exists in Denmark.

The steering group decided to follow-up this discussion by organising a dialogue for exchange with relevant stakeholders in the spring of 2025.

The members agreed that in addition to national representatives, regional authorities, rescue boards and suppliers should be invited.

4. Approval of PA Hazards workplan 2025

The steering group approved the work plan for 2025, *see Annex I*.

5. Revision of the EUSBSR Action plan

Introductory words by:

- Johan Magnusson (directorate-general for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission) underlined the importance of the strategy to show results and political relevance. Introducing better indicators was part of this, aligning the strategy with structural funds programmes.
- Svea Horn from the Baltic Sea Strategy Point (BSP) explained the new template for Policy Areas and underlined that it allowed for EUSBSR actions to be better monitored.

PAC explained that today's aim was not to approve a final version of the draft, but to guide the PAC in finalising the draft. The final draft must be approved by the SG before being submitted by 31 December 2024. It is part of a two-part process, where the National Coordination group will decide on the structure of policy areas, and the final actions will be prepared in the spring of 2025.

Proposal to include circularity and consolidating upstream and downstream measures (Action 1):

Heidrun Fammler asked to develop a clearer goal formulation to highlight chemical risk management, the link to climate, sectoral integration and circularity in Action 1.

Lotta Ruokanen (HELCOM) asked for more specific wording on “consolidating upstream and downstream measures” to explain it to the larger public. In addition, she underlined the importance to link actions to HELCOM regional action plan on hazardous substances.

Moreover, potential climate indicators could be found in the HELCOM climate proofing of action plans document.

Proposal to include microplastics in the Action plan:

Microplastics and marine litter are currently not included in the EUSBSR Action Plan at all. There is a momentum to work on these issues now, with for example the revised UWWT directive and REACH regulation including monitoring of microplastics, and related actions in HELCOM under the regional action plan on marine litter could be included.

PAC lined out possibilities to either include it as a separate focus area under action 1, or under “circular economy” in action 2. One risk of having it as a focus area is the **limited capacity of the PAC organization**.

SG members strongly agreed that microplastics should be included. Important issues to tackle were monitoring. In addition, the mere inclusion of microplastics in the EUSBSR action plan would help to support projects tackling this when applying for funding, showing the political relevance of the issue.

The steering group agreed on:

- *Process:* Establishing a reference group with regional and local actors, and civil society if relevant, to consult on relevant actions. PAC will organise one workshop and/or send a questionnaire to the reference group in the spring 2025.
- *Content:* To keep the current structure with two actions.
- To include “microplastics” as another focus area, next to pharmaceuticals in the environment and PFAS, possibly under action 1.
- To include the development of a joint reference group with PA Nutri on wastewater treatment in the PA, but to not make it an indicator in itself. Indicators should focus on the outcome of the reference group, not the creation of it.
- To contribute to the planned reference group by PA Nutri on recycled nutrients, no specific indicator since the proposed indicators on policy briefs, recommendations, workshops and other activities is sufficient to cover this.

Indicators:

- To include an indicator on developing policy recommendations/strategies/workshops on microplastics
- To add “campaigns” to the indicators on developing policy recommendations etc
- To keep the indicator on “develop action plan for contaminated sediments”, but take out “marine spatial planning and blue growth”.
- To replace the indicator on developing an action plan on remediation of contaminated sediments with an indicator on developing policy briefs and recommendations instead.
- To change the indicator on engagement of relevant stakeholders to specify inclusion of regional and local stakeholders

Follow-up: The PAC will consolidate the draft Policy area and send it to written consultation in a timely manner.

6. AOB

- a. Presentation of GoBaltHaz - project platform development, Heidrun Fammeler

This point was postponed due to time restraints. It will be handled through email instead.

7. Timeline for next meetings

- Online meeting, February 2025
- Online workshop (if needed) March/April
- Meeting in Łódź, Poland, in the week starting with 25 May 2025.