

Minutes meeting Steering Group PA Hazards

4 October 2023, Riga/Teams

Participants:

Members of the Steering Group

Country	Name	Organisation	Participation
SWEDEN	Ida Holmgren (chair)	Ministry for Climate and Enterprise	Yes
ESTONIA	Margus Korsjukov	Ministry for Environment	Online
FINLAND	Jukka Mehtonen	Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE)	Yes
POLAND	Magdalena Frydrych	Bureau for Chemical substances	Online

Observers

IGO	Lotta Ruokanen	HELCOM secretariat	Yes
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Strategic advisors

	Johan Magnusson	European Commission, DG REGIO (Hazards)	Yes
	Anja Karppinen	Baltic Sea Strategy Point (BSP)	Yes
	Louise Floman	Policy Area Coordinator (PAC), Swedish Agency for Marine and Water management	Yes

1. Welcome and Adoption of meeting agenda

The Policy Area Coordinator informed the Steering group that we still do not have any Latvian member in the SG, despite the Latvian presidency of the EUSBSR from July 2023-June 2024. It was proposed that the Swedish SG Member, Ida Holmgren, would chair the meeting. The SG accepted this proposal.

7. Presentation: Baltic Sea Pharma Platform (BSR Pharma), Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE)

This agenda point was moved up due to practical reasons. Noora Perkola (SYKE) is one of the two managers coordinating the BSR Pharma platform. She gave a presentation of the history of the platform, ongoing activities and looking ahead.

The BSR Pharma platform was launched in 2017 by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency under PA Hazards. Events were organized in 2017 and 2019, and the platform was financed by Interreg Baltic Sea Region. The platform aims to support knowledge transfer and capacity building through training courses and workshops, testing of solutions, recommendations and lessons learnt.

Syke took over the platform in 2021, funded by the Finnish Ministry of the Environment. A new website has been launched, a questionnaire sent to the members to see what is expected by the

platform. A webinar was held in 2021, and a newsletter has been created. Fewer projects and calls relating to pharmaceuticals in the environment has led to lower activity among members and by extension, the platform. In addition, the platform is facing problems with financing.

SG members informed on a new PIE related project “APRIORA”, that has now been granted funding under the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme. In addition, there are national initiatives and two BSAP actions under HELCOM. HELCOM has funded one project that will start already in 2023, and is organizing two data calls for pharmaceuticals.

The SE chair proposed that the SG members could support the platform by ***compiling a list of ongoing national and regional projects and initiatives related to pharmaceuticals in the environment***. The suggestion was **approved** by the SG.

Ppt presentation is attached to the minutes.

3. Information on the implementation of PA Hazards and the way forward (PAC)

The PAC gave an overview of activities since she took up the position in June 2023. A mapping exercise of ongoing and past achievements has been carried out. A report on 2022 activities under PA Hazards was compiled and sent to the National Coordinator’s Group on 15 September after approval by the SG by written procedure. The report lined out fulfilment on indicators and activities carried out, some main activities were:

- 2021 Baltic Sea PFAS Network was created, run by the Swedish Environmental Research Institute (IVL)
 - 180 members, 21 coffee talks organised
- BSR PHARMA platform – Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) took over in 2021
- 2022 – a report was published in the context of BSR Pharma: „Antimicrobials Resistance in the Baltic Sea Region“. The report was written for the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), commissioned by EUSBSR PA Hazards and Helcom Secretariat. The report can be downloaded here.
- Project NonHazCity 2 → ended in July 2021. Now, NonHazCity 3 is up and running and is one of the finalists in the category “A Green Europe” in the annual [REGIOSTARS](#) award 2023, so please go in and vote.

Furthermore, Interreg Baltic Sea Region has a **focused call** for core projects tackling **hazardous submerged objects and dumped munitions**.

- 3 applications
- PAC has given feedback on relevance for and contribution to EUSBSR
- PAC has assisted projects in partner search (MuniMap)

Missing links

Some of the indicators lined out in the EUSBSR Action Plan from 2021 have not been achieved. This includes the indicators on developing policy recommendations/strategies for Pharmaceuticals in the environment (PIE) and on PFAS.

Decision by SG to use the project development money under PA Hazards to support activities under the two existing platforms; BSR Pharma and BSR PFAS platform. Activities supported will be project development seminars, thematic calls/workshops/seminars and other activities supporting project generation. ***The PAC will prepare a work plan for PA Hazards for 2024, including such activities, subject to approval of the SG.***

Another missing link is related to Action 2 “Mitigate and remediate contamination”: To develop a platform for contaminated sediments, marine spatial planning and blue growth, and to develop an action plan. The PAC has started a dialogue with some of the SG members. There are overlaps with activities under HELCOM, but also PA Nutri (internal loading).

The PAC suggested to have a thorough discussion on the way forward in the next SG meeting, and to organize a joint workshop together with PA Nutri. ***The proposal was approved by the SG.***

Orientation from the Steering Group to the PAC on how to work with individual projects

There are several ways to work with individual projects. The PAC has received several requests from project owners to receive a “flagship status”, and one request to issue a support letter. Many projects are interested in joining networks or to receive support or to organize joint events, which is very positive. The question is what the support should look like.

PA Hazards has previously granted flagship status to individual projects, however, this practice has been dropped or never used in most other PA’s. The Steering Group agreed to not use the flagship status for individual projects in the future. Instead, there are other ways to tie the projects to the Policy Area.

The SG suggested that issuing support letters could be done, if the project was deemed relevant by the PAC. The PAC will keep the SG informed on the support given to projects and projects relevant to the PA. If relevant, the PAC can also consult the SG.

Ppt is attached to the minutes.

4. Information from the European Commission (Johan Magnusson)

Johan Magnusson underlined that there are better ways to work with projects than granting flagship status, and to avoid that terminology altogether. A good way to work is to cooperate and find synergies, not only between different Priority Areas, but also between the different macro-regional strategies (MRS).

There is also the possibility to invite other experts from relevant directorate-generals, for example from Environment, to meetings or workshops if relevant. DG REGIO is striving to engage their colleagues from “line DG’s” in the MRS.

The MRS Week 2024 will take place the second week of June, the week after EU elections. It will take place in Brussels, conference venue “the Egg”.

The [REGIOSTARS](#) award is ongoing and the public vote on projects is open until 14 November, so **please vote!**

5. Tour-de-table (20 min)

Magdalena Frydrych (PL) informed that they had made an inventory of sediment projects, after a dialogue with the PAC on ongoing projects and activities on sediments.

There was also an ongoing dialogue between the PAC, the PL national coordinator and herself on the chairmanship for the Steering Group PA Hazards. Since there is no Latvian member of the SG and Poland will take up the chairmanship after Latvia, Poland might be suggested to chair a meeting in the spring 2024.

Jukka Mehtonen (FI) informed the SG about activities under HELCOM, to which Finland is participating actively.

He also informed on new regulatory changes; EU restrictions on fire-fighting foams are proposed by ECHA. Finland is also in the process of revising targets and indicators related to the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (3rd cycle), and preparing a new state of the Baltic Sea 2024 report, which could be relevant to the work under PA Hazards.

Finland also participates in the BSR PFAS network “Coffee Talks”, organized by the Swedish Environmental Institute (IVL). A PFAS webinar will be organized in January 2024.

Relevant project examples are screening of PFAS in Finnish soils (SYKE & Geological Survey of Finland), MEDGOF pharmaceuticals in the Gulf of Finland (Syke, 2023-24), and APRIORA, on improved risk assessment.

Margus Korsjukov (EE) informed on Estonian activities relevant to the subject matter at hand:

- Review of the process of elaboration and implementation of river basin management plans. It is a broader process and involves all themes and sectors, incl. haz. substances in aquatic environment
- Implementation of river basin management plans
- Involvement in WFD/EQSD/GWD revision process in terms of haz. substances initiated by European Commission
- Watch List substances ongoing survey according to EQSD
- Involvement in HELCOM processes, i.e developing holistic approach for hazardous substances, BSAP implementation, PFAS project, etc

Lotta Ruokanen (HELCOM) informed on two ongoing data calls. One update of the State of the region report on pharmaceuticals.

EMR report; proposal from contracting parties to have additional aspects.

The HAPhazard project is working on a holistic framework for assessing, prioritizing and managing hazardous substances, a revision on HELCOM substances.

Ongoing project “EMPEREST” – a sister project to the project APRIORI, also focusing on Waste Water Treatment but on PFAS instead of PIE.

6. Discussion and adoption of Rules of Procedure (*Annex 2*)

The deadline to adopt the Rules of Procedures was in 2022, and should be adopted as soon as possible. The document presented by the PAC had been prepared based on the template provided by the Baltic Sea Strategy Point.

One small difference is under Art. 10, “Frequency and format of meetings”. The additional text lays out good practice; to organize physical meetings back-to-back with larger events such as the EUSBSR Annual Forum. It does not set out a minimum of physical meetings – it can be decided by the SG.

The additional text also requires SG members to inform the chair/PAC if they cannot participate in the meeting. It also provides with an opportunity to make their views known to the chair before the meeting, and to have it included in the meeting minutes.

The Steering Group approved the Rules of Procedures.

7. Decision on observers to the Steering Group (*Annex 3*)

The EUSBSR Action Plan (2021) stipulates that a Steering Group consists of representatives of the national or regional governments of the EUSBSR Member States. The objective is that the SG include members from all EUSBSR Member States. A Member State can also appoint more than one representative to an SG, if this is necessary due to the structure of the Member State or similar reasoning. In this case, one of the representatives has to be nominated as the main representative and act as such.

A Steering Group may also invite representatives of non-EU neighbouring countries or organisations to join the group as members or observers, upon a decision taken by consensus by the EUSBSR Member States representatives in the group. The decision has to be endorsed by the National Coordination Group (NCG).

In the past, SG Hazards has included several observers. The PAC has been contacted by some actors, that all have been observers in this SG before. It concerns HELCOM, the Swedish Chemicals Agency and Baltic Environmental Forum. The presidency and the PAC consider these organisations as relevant to the SG, and would like to suggest to grant these organisations the status of observers.

The Steering Group adopted the following decision unanimously:

“The Steering Group for PA Hazards decides to grant observer status to the organisations listed below the SG, and asks the PAC to send the decision to the National Coordination Group for endorsement.”

The decision refers to the following organisations:

- *HELCOM*
- *Swedish Chemicals Agency*
- *Baltic Environmental Forum*"

8. Next meeting

The EUSBSR Action plan stipulates a minimum of two SG meetings/year. The PAC suggested to have three meetings in 2024 and 1-2 physical meetings, since the SG is still relatively new. The SG indicated that they would like to have one physical meeting, in conjunction with some other meeting to make the most of it.

SG meetings 2024

- **January/February** Steering Group meeting and **joint workshop** together with **PA Nutri**, in Stockholm
- **Online meeting in May/June**
- Meeting in the autumn – either physical, back-to-back with the EUSBSR Annual Forum, or online