

Havs och Vatten myndigheten

Policy Area HAZARDS within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

Steering Group meeting on 19 June 2023 (online)

MINUTES

PARTICIPANTS

Members:

Country	Name	Organisation
SWEDEN	Ida Holmgren (chair)	Ministry for Climate and Enterprise
DENMARK	Anne Munch Christensen	Ministry of Environment
ESTONIA	Margus Korsjukov	Ministry for Environment
FINLAND	Jukka Mehtonen	Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE)
GERMANY	Heike Imhoff	Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection
	Ulrike Pirntke	German Environment Agency
POLAND	Magdalena Frydrych	Bureau for Chemical substances
IGO	Lotta Ruokanen	HELCOM

Other participants:

Name	Organisation
Johan Magnusson	European Commission, DG Regio
Petri Koistinen	European Commission, DG Regio
Viktoriiia Hladi	Baltic Sea Strategy Point
Tom Schumacher	Baltic Sea Strategy Point
Anders Bergström	Norden Association / Swedish EUSBSR Presidency
Louise Floman (PAC Hazards)	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management
Maxi Nachtigall (former PAC Hazards)	Swedish Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure

1. Welcome and introduction

Ida Holmgren opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. The new Policy Area Coordinator, Louise Floman introduced herself.

The purpose of the meeting was to relaunch the Steering Group as a part of the EUSBSR Action Plan and discuss the continued development of the work of PA Hazards and the implementation of the Action Plan.

2. Adoption of the meeting agenda

The meeting agenda was adopted.

3. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) with the Swedish Presidency and the new Baltic Sea Strategy Point

Anders Bergström introduced the macro-regional strategies as policy frameworks, part of the cohesion policy, aiming at evening out differences and building a cohesive Europe. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is one of today four such strategies. With no own institutions and funding the strategies are based on aligning existing institutions and funding for their implementation. An Action Plan with indicators and targets is guiding the implementation. The strategies offer stakeholders to jointly, cross-sectorial, multilevel, and transnational develop solutions to complex societal challenges that can't be sufficiently addressed just by one country. An implementation format developed within these strategies are the flagships or policy-action processes. PA Hazards has today two such transnational platforms. These platforms are networks of stakeholders offering different ways of engagement such as projects, policy writing workshops or study visits to name three examples. The dominating funding of the macroregional strategies are the different Interreg-programmes, transnational and cross-boarders. However, in this new programme period the mainstream programmes, primarily ERDF and ESF+ open up for more of transnational cooperation. To facilitate this funding so called Managing Authority networks is set up in the four macro-regions. In the Baltic Sea one such networks exist from before.

Swedish Presidency

Each member state holds the Presidency in the macro-regional strategies for one year. The Swedish EUSBSR Presidency started 1 July 2022 and will be finalized on 30 June 2023. The Presidency will be handed over to Latvia. Priorities for the Swedish Presidency are implementation, communication, and the support to Ukraine. The new Action Plan and the years with the pandemic called for gathering key implementing stakeholders to elaborate on important areas such as monitoring and evaluation, funding, implementation formats and communication. Two meetings were held, one in Stockholm in September 2022 and one in Visby in June 2023 gathering National Coordinators, Policy Area Coordinators, EU Commission, members of Steering Groups and the Baltic Sea Strategy Point. The war in Ukraine influenced the Presidency and in December a conference was held in Stockholm and online with some 300 participants elaborating on how macro-regional strategies can support Ukraine now and later with the reconstruction after the war. This high-level meeting resulted in some concrete initiatives now being implemented or under preparation.

Baltic Sea Strategy Point

Tom Schumacher and Viktoriia Hladii from the Baltic Sea Strategy Point (BSP) presented their current work. BSP is a recently established body supporting the implementing stakeholders, primarily National Coordinators and Policy Area Coordinators. The team of five are located to Turku and Hamburg. Tom and Viktoriia presented the general structure of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The Strategy aims to generate more effective use of existing funds, structure, and legislation to deal with the challenges faced by the macro-region. It has three main objectives, save

the sea, connect the region and increase prosperity. There is 14 Policy Areas to support the objectives. PA Hazards supports the save the sea one.

The role of the PA Steering Groups is to advise Policy Area Coordinators (PACs) on the strategic and thematic direction within the PA, but also to work as a focal point at national level.

4. PA Hazards in brief (Action Plan and priorities until 2020 for example the flagships)

Maxi Nachtigall gave an historical overview of PA Hazards from 2009 until 2022. The presentation is enclosed. In the present Action Plan, there are two Actions:

Action 1: Prevent pollution and reduce the use of hazardous substances

Action 2: Mitigate and remediate contamination

In the first Action there are two flagships:

- BSR platform on pharmaceuticals in the environment, **PIE**, coordinated by SYKE with focus on human and veterinary pharmaceuticals, and
- Highly fluorinated substances in the Baltic Sea Region environment, **PFASeOUT**, coordinated by IVL.

Furthermore, there is one project (ongoing or finalized):

- **NonHazCity 2**

In the second Action there is one flagship under preparation:

- **CONTAMINATE** - Clustering knowledge, expertise and data from ongoing projects, platforms, and networks on contaminated sediments.

And one project

- **Daimon 2**

5. Expectations from member states (tour de table)

Johan Magnusson (European Commission) underlined the strategic importance of the Steering Group (SG), not only within the Strategy, but also as ambassadors for the Strategy on national level. SG members are best placed to inform and alert respective national structures on what is happening in the Strategy, and how to go forwards. It goes both ways.

Johan also elaborated on what is new, and priorities in the new programme period. There are in fact some new structures; one novelty is the Baltic Sea Strategy Point, which means that we now have such functions in all four macro-regional strategies.

Johan also underlined that flagship is one implementation format in macro-regional strategies. The Steering Group can decide what formats to use, to go via dedicated platforms or not.

Anne Munch Christensen (DK): We support projects in line with the Strategy. We have seen some good products here in the past, that could be used for HELCOM. I see this as a good forum for exchange of information. Unfortunately, Denmark has limited possibilities to participate in this forum.

Margus Korsjukov (EE): One priority from our side would be to work on pharmaceutical platforms.

Jukka Mehtonen (FI): We would prioritise to work with medical substances. We see flagships and seed money as important tools.

Areas for action would be identification on chemicals, with a focus on environment and human health.

Magdalena Frydrych (PL): Risk assessment of hazards and pharmaceuticals has been identified as a priority by OECD and its Chemicals Committee, so it is important for us to work on it in this constellation as well.

My expectation from this group is to make assessments to identify what kind of substances that could potentially be a risk from the perspective of our region, considering also the effect from increasing temperatures.

We should also look at consequences and contamination from the war in Ukraine.

Plastic and microplastics are important factors in the Baltic Sea, and so is pesticides.

Lotta Ruokanen (HELCOM): PA Hazards is largely focused on pharmaceutical hazards.

Many of you mentioned identification of substances of concern. The HELCOM strategy has 30 substances referred to, of which 10 or 11 are related to the work of PA Hazards, so the work here could build on that. My expectation for this SG is to see how to continuously follow up on this.

HELCOM has two actions related to pharmaceuticals. One related to PFAS and one to horizontal topics. We are also developing new monitoring guidelines.

Ida Holmgren (SE): Like many others have pointed out we see the most urgent task of this group to identify the added value of the strategy and PA Hazards and find synergies with other Baltic platforms and networks.

Johan Magnusson: I see that many members of the SG would like to use this group as a way to share experiences. One added value of having us from DG REGIO in the group, is that we can bring in our colleagues from other Directorate-Generals, for example from DG ENVIRONMENT, if it is relevant to the Steering Group.

6. Next steps (timetable with work plan, Annual Forum, next meeting)

Louise Floman, new Policy Area Coordinator since 16 June, presented the ongoing work.

PA Hazards collaborates closely with PA Nutri, which is coordinated by Finland and Poland. PA Nutri and PA Hazards are jointly funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea programme. Both PA's contribute to the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action plan.

There is an established workplan for PA Hazards for 2022-2024. Focus areas are:

1. Platform on Pharmaceuticals
2. Platform on PFAS in the marine environment
3. Contaminated sediments

4. Support the implementation of measures to mitigate or minimize the load of hazardous substances to the Baltic Sea as agreed upon in the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan 2021.

Focus for me now as a new PAC will be to create a structure for the work on PA Hazards. One challenge to focus on is to unlock the potential of having cooperation projects in the national and regional development programmes, since their budget is considerably larger than the Interreg programmes.

The EUSBSR Annual Forum will be held on 4 and 5 October in Riga, Latvia. PA Hazards will be involved in one workshops focusing on cooperation between the Baltic Sea Region and Ukraine, and how to support a sustainable rebuilding of Ukraine after the war. The workshop is coordinated by PA Nutri.

Next Steering Group meeting will be held in conjunction with the Annual Forum in Riga.