

## Statement at the 40<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Helsinki Commission, 6-7 March 2019

Dear colleagues,

On this 40<sup>th</sup> occasion to meet, CCB is grateful to share the concerns of civil society organizations and almost a million individual members of CCB's network around the Baltic Sea. We hope what we share today is received openly and seen for its intention to better our collective situation in the Baltic Sea region.

CCB trusts that you will hear and take action with us, without delay, as our concerns are connected with continuous and increasing violations of the fundamental principles and provisions of the Helsinki Convention:

- Precautionary principle and science-based management;
- Transparency, trust and sharing information to minimize transboundary impacts;
- Joint measures for reaching joint goals, instead of prioritizing actions of "overriding national interest"

Regretfully, within the year since last Meeting there were number of examples of such violations, including:

- **Wiping out a strip of old-grown forest and a part of the protected bog** with rich biodiversity and numerous red-listed species of fauna and flora **at Kurgalskiy Peninsula, Russia** ([HELCOM MPA](#) and [Ramsar](#) site) as a preparation of the landfall of Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline; the works have started even before the formal permission was granted by the authorities and consultations were held with Ramsar Convention
- **Logging and clearing out coastal forest at the Vistula Spit, Poland** as a part of preparatory works for construction of a navigation canal across the spit ([HELCOM MPA](#) and [Natura 2000](#) site) – before the conclusion of both a local appeal process and a review by the European Commission are accomplished
- **Supporting Total Allowable Catches for the Eastern Baltic cod** stock significantly higher than scientific advice for almost every year since 1996, leading to a total collapse of Eastern Baltic cod population in 2019
- **Protecting 'traditional' eel fisheries in several countries**, while accepting the fact that the European eel in the Baltic Sea is critically endangered

These examples, when considered with other events in years past and persistent, lead us to conclude that we must not only reaffirm our commitment to both the Helsinki Convention (1992) and the HELCOM BSAP, but hold ourselves accountable for our shortcomings and seek reconciliation for harm done. HELCOM promises, in terms of truly applying the ecosystem approach and ecosystem-based management to all BSR human activities, have to be proved by real actions. To begin we must reverse short-sighted claims of sectorial measures in urgent national interest, except for those clearly connected to states of emergency, like e.g. cod stock collapse. Human activities leading to major pressures should be addressed equally strict and without derogations.

As recognized in the 1992 Helsinki Convention, the "protection and enhancement of the marine environment of the Baltic Sea Area are tasks that cannot effectively be accomplished by national efforts alone." It implies a responsibility and courage on the Contracting Parties to safeguard and implement already accepted commitments, go stricter and beyond applicable national and the EU law, though make use of coherence with it.

CCB made it clear one year ago in our [Civil Society Declaration on Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea](#) that BSR residents are getting frustrated and disappointed by countries inaction. Civil society is competent enough to be treated as an equal partner, to be heard and consulted appropriately and to be able to deliver policy inputs.

Nobody else will do this for us, and we certainly cannot do it alone. HELCOM has the platform and passion to empower change, fueled by our interconnectedness and shared love for our home, the Baltic Sea. This can be our new story, but we agree to join only if it ambitious enough and not just 'realistic' as claimed by many.

We have coordinated this call to you with colleagues from [WWF BEP](#) and [BEF](#) and hope they share CCB's views.