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1 **Press release**

2 **15.10.2003**

3 **12 million USD Baltic environmental project up and running**

The main actors involved in a large environmental project in the Baltic Sea region met last week in the Secretariat of the Helsinki Commission in order to prepare the detailed planning of the coordination and implementation of the new project. HELCOM is the overall responsible manager of the project which will be managed in close cooperation with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the International Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission (IBSFC).

"It was a very constructive meeting which enabled us to discuss our understanding of the many diverse aspects of the project and refine the implementation plans", says Ms. Anne Christine Brusendorff, Executive Secretary of HELCOM. "The project forms a substantial and important supplement to the work we are already undertaking in HELCOM in order to restore and protect the ecosystems of the Baltic Sea."



The Baltic Sea Regional Project is based on the Large Marine Ecosystem concept and will provide support to integrated land, coastal and open sea activities to strengthen the local and regional capacity for achieving sustainable ecosystem management of the Baltic Sea resources.

The project will develop and utilize management tools for sustainable ecosystem management and it will empower local communities to manage agricultural and coastal resources and promote the sustainable use of fisheries. Sustainable management will improve ecosystem health while providing social and economic benefits to farming, coastal and fishing communities and sectors such as businesses and tourism in the recipient countries.

The project will support the improvement of data collection and data analysis, assessment and evaluation. Investments targeted at a cost-effective reduction of nutrient run-off from farms and activities for coastal zone management in the recipient countries will also be supported by the project.

recipient countries will also be supported by the project.

Project activities will be undertaken along the Baltic coastal areas and in the adjacent coastal and open sea areas of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Russian Federation.

In addition to ICES the main implementing actors will be the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) strongly supported by local partners in the receiving countries.

Additional information

The Project has several inter-related components:

Component 1 - **Large Marine Ecosystem Activities** - is managed by ICES.

The long-term goal is to improve both the marine ecosystem and the economic benefits and standard of living of the fishing and coastal communities. It aims to improve monitoring of the Baltic Sea environment and assessing its state by strengthening the institutional and technical capacity of laboratories in the recipient countries. This Component will help to implement ecosystem approach to manage human activities affecting the sea and to introduce holistic, ecosystem-based assessments. An important aim is to improve management practices to sustain fishery yields.

Component 2 - **Land and Coastal Management Activities** - is managed by SLU supported by WWF.

Important activities of the land-based part of the project are capacity building and on-farm environmental investments e.g. construction of manure storages and small scale natural sewage treatment facilities as well as practical testing of cost-effective measures for reduction of nutrient run-off from farms. Special wetland management actions encompass small-scale investments in renovation or construction of wetlands for increased retention of nutrients and monitoring and assessment of non-point source pollution from agricultural farms and watersheds.

Component 3 - **Institutional Strengthening and Regional Capacity Building** - is managed by HELCOM in cooperation with ICES and IBSFC.

The component will strengthen the regional institutional capacity between the nine countries of the Baltic Sea catchment area. Also socio-economic assessments aspects will be considered.

Project participants

In addition to HELCOM, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the International Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission (IBSFC), the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) supported by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) will play a major role in the implementation of the project together with local partners in the receiving countries.

local partners in the receiving countries.

Financing the project

The Baltic Sea Regional Project is financed by a \$5.5 million Trust Fund Grant from the World Bank acting on behalf of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Contributions from other co-financiers and project beneficiaries including Finland, Norway, Sweden, the United States and the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) may bring the total funds available for the overall project activities to more than \$12 million.

The GEF Trust Fund Grant Agreement for Project-phase 1 between the World Bank and HELCOM was signed on 17 March 2003. The Grant Agreement became effective on 30 May 2003.

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