

The Baltic Sea Regional Project, BSRP, and activities of Component 1.

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The continued degradation of the Baltic Sea ecosystem has affected the water quality, modified its biodiversity, and impacted the regional fisheries. The four major threats to the Baltic Sea are (i) eutrophication, (ii) contaminants, (iii) overfishing, and (iv) invasive species. In response to this situation, five countries in the eastern Baltic Sea area (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russian Federation) initiated the planning of a common, cooperative project aiming to improve the ecosystem health and productivity, its goods and services, and by that the social and economic development in this area. After six years of preparation, a GEF Trust Grant Agreement on Project Phase 1 was signed on March 17th, 2003, between the World Bank and HELCOM, as the Implementing Institution. The Project will run in three phases of which the first will be for 2003-2005 with a total budget of US\$ 12 million. The total project cost for the period 2003-2008 is expected to be US\$40.0 million, of which a GEF Grant will provide US\$18.0 million to the recipient countries. The cooperating countries, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden, Norway and USA, will provide in-kind support from national and local environmental programs. Additional funding will come from various grant programs of the European Union and bilateral assistance from Nordic countries.

The long-term objective of the BSRP is to introduce ecosystem-based assessments to strengthen the management of Baltic Sea coastal and marine environments through regional cooperation and targeted, transboundary coastal, marine and watershed activities. To achieve this, the three international bodies HELCOM, IBSFC, and ICES, and the countries in the region will utilize project-developed tools and methodologies for sustainable ecosystem management. Measures will be taken to improve decision-making at the regional, national and local level by strengthening assessment and monitoring systems and supporting efforts to develop and implement ecosystem-based management of Baltic resources. By this the Project will contribute to the Joint Comprehensive Baltic Sea Environmental Action Program (JCP).

The Project has four inter-related components that are based on the concept of the Large Marine Ecosystem (LME):

Component 1 - Large Marine Ecosystem Activities, managed by ICES, aims to: (i) introduce ecosystem-based assessments and management for the Baltic Sea; (ii) coordinate and integrate the regional monitoring and assessment capacity; (iii) improve management practices to increase and sustain fishery yields and biological productivity of the Baltic Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (LME); and (iv) in the long term, improve both the marine ecosystem and the economic benefits and standard of living of the fishing and coastal communities.

Component 2 – Land and Coastal Management Activities, managed by HELCOM in conjunction with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU).

Component 3 – Institutional Strengthening and Regional Capacity Building, and

Component 4 – Project Management, which includes the overall project management activities, will be managed by HELCOM.

Co-operative planning and implementation of the project will allow collective efforts to have a much greater impact by improving the targeting of priority actions, facilitating better leveraging of human and financial resources and broadening the links between Baltic governments and organizations.

The success of the project will be dependant on good coordination and the ability to fill in significant gaps within the existing monitoring and assessment programs in the Baltic Sea for cost-effective outcomes. There is a need to enhance and strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of laboratories in the recipient countries. For this purpose, coordination centers (CC) for overall coordination of the activities within the productivity, environmental health, fish and fisheries, and socio-economic modules for all LME activities will be created in several key institutes. These centers will be supported by a series of lead laboratories (LL) and national laboratories (see the attached Component 1 organization chart). With beginning in late 2003/ early 2004, the common tasks for the coordination centers and lead laboratories will be: to organize initial coordination/technical workshops in their focus area; to review technical upgrade needs and prepare technical specifications for equipment purchases; to organize and train staff as required for new equipment and techniques; to act as reference centres within their specialty towards other BSRP laboratories and ICES; to coordinate compilations, data processing and assessments; to participate in appropriate regional fora and ICES working groups; to assist in the preparation for organized integrated evaluations and assessments and report results to ICES and HELCOM WG/Committees and other bodies. Scientific advice to support the BSRP local management units (CCs and LLs) in the recipient countries will be produced by 4 specific Study Groups arranged under the ICES Baltic Committee. After the formal approval at the ICES Annual Science Conference (September, 2003), these SGs will now assemble for their first meetings in October 2003 – January 2004. The main tasks approved by ICES Statutory meeting (Tallinn, September 2003) are the following:

Study Group on Baltic Fish and Fisheries Issues in the BSRP [SGBFF]

- a) Review existing knowledge on environmental processes affecting fish stock dynamics in both the open sea and coastal areas of the Baltic;
- b) Determine those oceanographic processes and their temporal and spatial variability in the Baltic that influence the distribution and productivity of the fish, including consideration of open sea-coast interactions;
- c) Suggest ways to integrate the above mentioned processes into enhanced assessment models for commercial fish stocks and new models of coastal fish community structure;

Study Group on Baltic Ecosystem Health Issues in support of the BSRP [SGEH]

- a) Prepare a review of developments regarding ecosystem-based approaches to the monitoring, assessment and management of fisheries and the marine environment, with particular reference to progress in ICES, HELCOM, OSPAR and the North Sea Conference process, keeping in mind the aim of establishing and implementing the ecosystem approach in the Baltic Sea;
- b) Further develop the concept of an ecosystem approach particularly adapted to Baltic Sea needs and applications, including at the coastal sub-systems levels, as appropriate for the aims of the BSRP and taking into account work already done in ICES;
- c) Elaborate a scheme for the delivery of research and scientific advice for ecosystem-based management in the Baltic Sea area, that is timely and user friendly:
 - i. involving: the development and application of a system of ecological indicators and related reference points reflecting the objectives, constraints and state of the key elements of the ecosystem in a coherent picture; and
 - ii. supported by the application of appropriate conservation measures necessary to protect threatened or vulnerable species and habitats.
- d) Discuss and propose a strategy for implementing the development of a habitat classification framework and habitat maps for the Baltic Sea (In collaboration with HELCOM HABITAT and ICES WGMHM).

A Study Group on Baltic Sea Productivity Issues in support of the BSRP [SGPROD]

- a) Commence a summary of the evidence for links between land-based nutrients inputs and long-term changes of both productivity and biodiversity in eutrophied areas of the Baltic Sea;
- b) Commence development of a system of indicators that characterize productivity at different trophic levels in the Baltic Sea that are important to ecosystem-based management taking into account the work already undertaken by ICES ACE and the EEA;
- c) Establish an inventory of available productivity data and characterize their use;
- d) Identify information gaps along important trophic transfers in the Baltic Sea ecosystem;
- e) Study the feasibility and efficiency of automated methods for productivity data collection (e.g. satellite imagery, ships of opportunity, profiling instrument platforms etc.), in collaboration with BOOS;
- f) Recommend measures to adapt the existing measurement programmes to improve the assessment of Baltic Sea productivity within the framework of ecosystem-based management.

Study Group on Baltic Ecosystem Model Issues in support of the BSRP [SGBEM]

- a) Analyse the scientific basis of ecosystem and fishery models of the Baltic and explore possible connections of them in future generations of Baltic Sea models;
- b) Define needs for data to initialise and validate models and identify gaps in process descriptions to stimulate targeted measurements;
- c) Recommend variables included in the BSRP – monitoring to support future modelling activities;

In accordance with the Project Implementation Plan, a Program Implementation Team (PIT) has been created at the HELCOM secretariat. The PIT arranged its first meeting with representatives from the cooperating bodies, the project coordinators and the WB on 9-10 September, 2003. Component 1 is currently in the process of selecting Local project managers (LPMs) for its CCs and LLs, and so is Component 2 for its Local implementation units (LIUs) in the various Baltic beneficiary countries. During November 2003 the components will organize joint meetings with representatives of project key institutions and stakeholders in Kaliningrad, Russia. Similar meetings will be arranged in the other beneficiary countries around the turn of the year.

Further information on the BSRP may be found on the homepages of the cooperating international bodies: ICES - <http://www.ices.dk/projects/balticsea.asp>, and HELCOM <http://www.helcom/projectsmeetings/GEF-BSRP>.

Component 1 Organization

