

Abstract

Presentation at: The Ecosystem Approach in Research and Management. Helsinki, Finland 25-26 October 2003

The Baltic Sea Regional Project, BSRP

Jan Thulin, ICES, Baltic Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Activities Coordinator

Andris Andrushaitis, Baltic Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Activities Assistant Coordinator

The continued degradation of the Baltic Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) 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, and Russian Federation) initiated the planning of a common, cooperative project. The goals of the project are to improve the ecosystem health and productivity, its goods and services, and by that the social and economic development in this area. After an application by the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) the GEF Council approved a PDF-Block B grant for the Baltic Sea Regional Project in May 1999, and a Project Appraisal Document was approved by GEF in March 2001. In February 2003, the World Bank approved all project documents, and a GEF Trust Grant Agreement on Project Phase 1 between the World Bank and HELCOM, as Implementing Institution, was signed on March 17th, 2003. Thus, after six years of preparation the Baltic Sea Regional Project was formally started.

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, 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 BSRP will contribute to the Joint Comprehensive Baltic Sea Environmental Action Program (JCP).

The BSRP has four inter-related components that are all 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 successful and cost-effectiveness outcomes. There is a need to enhance and strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of laboratories in the recipient countries. For this purpose, key institutes will be appointed coordination centre for overall coordination of the activities within the productivity, environmental health, fish and fisheries, and socio-economic modules for all LME activities. These centers will be supported by a series of lead laboratories and national laboratories. With beginning of the active phase in late 2003/ early 2004, the major tasks for the coordination centers and lead laboratories will be: to organize initial coordination/technical workshops in their focus area; 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 procurements, 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. Activities of BSRP local project management units (CCs and LLs) in recipient countries will be supported by scientific advice produced by 4 specific Study Groups arranged under the ICES Baltic Committee. After formal approval at ICES Annual Science Conference (September, 2003), these SGs will assemble for their first meetings in October/November 2003. Further information on BSRP may be found on the homepages of the cooperating international bodies: ICES - <http://www.ices.dk/projects/balticsea.asp>.