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ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTERS SEVERELY DELAY DEADLINES TO RESTORE THE BALTIC SEA

While the Baltic Sea Action Plan will be fully implemented, the good environmental status of the troubled sea will not be reached by 2021.

Today, Baltic Sea Environmental Ministers signed a HELCOM Ministerial Declaration, reviewing the progress on targets agreed in the 2007 HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), in Copenhagen, Denmark. The environmental NGOs, Coalition Clean Baltic, FISH and Oceana, welcome the Ministers' agreement to continue to fully implement the BSAP by 2021, but are concerned about the lack of action and the many delayed deadlines.

The coalition of NGO's issued the following joint statement: *"Today's outcome shows that these countries aspiration for an improved status of the Baltic Sea is not anywhere near ambitious enough. What we have here is a nice document with good intentions, but to see the change by 2021, we should already be putting the 2007 agreements into action."*

Rather than a firm recommitment to the 2007 agreements, today's declaration might ultimately make it impossible to reach good environmental status in the Baltic Sea by 2021 – the overarching target of the BSAP.

"Despite a focus on eutrophication – the most serious and complex threat facing the Baltic Sea – no substantial improvements were made on the reduction of nutrient discharge from the agricultural sector, making the Declaration much weaker than we had hoped", says Gunnar Norén, General Secretary for Coalition Clean Baltic.

The fisheries sections fared a little bit better in the final negotiations, and were actually strengthened in the final Declaration.

"We are pleased to see that the target of rebuilding stocks now includes the 2015 deadline, which was agreed as part of the reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy", says Niki Sporrang, Director at FISH. *"The inclusion of a range of measures to address the critical status of European eel, including lowering the fishing mortality in line with ICES advice, is also good to see."*

There is still a widespread lack of proper protection for species, habitats and biotopes in the Baltic Sea region. It is regrettable that Germany and Denmark have postponed the publication of the HELCOM Red List for Baltic Sea species and habitats, because of commercial interests regarding cod.

"The hesitation and lack of commitment we have witnessed are blocking the progress of the Baltic Sea Action Plan implementation, including the development of an ecologically coherent network of marine

protected areas. This network was meant to be ready in 2010, but has now been pushed to 2020”, Hanna Paulomäki says, Oceana’s Baltic Sea project manager.

To put the high ambitions into practice, countries urgently need to begin the very real work that remains. The current delays are not only jeopardizing reaching the goal of the Action Plan, but also the implementation of many EU directives, like Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which heavily rely on effective regional coordination.

More information:

National priorities for HELCOM countries

Joint NGO Observers Statement to HELCOM

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