

Revive the biological diversity of the Baltic Sea

MPAs provide a useful tool in protecting and restoring threatened, declining and sensitive species and ecosystems. In the Baltic Sea, 12% is designated as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in order to protect sensitive and biologically diverse areas. However, most of these sites in the Baltic Sea are poorly managed or not managed at all.

Destructive fishing practices, dredging and other unsustainable activities are still common and allowed in many of these areas. So, in fact most designated MPAs are far from well-protected. To safeguard biodiversity, a minimum of 30% of the Baltic Sea should be effectively protected coupled with comprehensive management plans.

Concrete actions

- Designate 30% of the Baltic Sea as Marine Protected Areas and ensure their effective management.
- Ensure proper management on existing protected areas.

Restore water quality by reducing nutrients flows to the Baltic

Eutrophication is a major Baltic Sea problem, caused by too much load of nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorus. More nutrients give increased production of algae, causing algal blooms, bad sea water transparency/light penetration, oxygen debt in bottom water and dead bottoms. The marine ecosystem will be transformed negatively via reduced depth-distribution of bladder wrack, disturbance of fish feeding and reproduction, and threatens biodiversity. By doing so, eutrophication throws out of sync the sensitive balance in the marine environment and creates a negative feedback loop which threatens to turn the Baltic into an impoverished sea.

The source of the eutrophication affecting the Baltic is well known—the harmful environmental practices of agriculture and industry around the Baltic Sea. The combination of unsustainable industrial animal farming and over-fertilisation has resulted in a sea that is slowly dying because it is overloaded with nutrients. About 80% of all nutrients in the Baltic Sea come from land-based activities including sewage, industrial and municipal waste water and agricultural run-off. 50% of the total nutrient load comes from the agriculture sector.

Concrete actions:

- Reduce the amount of agricultural nutrient run-off into the Baltic Sea.
- Ensure that rules for agriculture around the Baltic Sea adhere to strict limitations of nutrient surplus per hectare.

Recover fish stocks to ensure long-terms sustainability

Recovery of the fish stocks and particularly of the cod populations is key to the environmental and economic recovery of the Baltic Sea. Careful management of cod, as well as its main feed species – sprat and herring – will help improve the Baltic Sea environment and create a long-term future for a sustainable fishing industry. As a top predator in the Baltic Sea food chain, cod has a very important role in the ecosystem, keeping the ecosystem in balance.

A mix of destructive fishing practices, high levels of bycatch and unregulated fishing led to the decline in the once thriving cod populations. But the Baltic cod is now slowly recovering due to favourable water

conditions and timely management actions in recent years. It is therefore very important that we continue managing this natural resource in a responsible way.

Concrete actions

- Ensure that scientific advice is followed when fishing limits are set and enforced, in order to build up the biomass of fish stocks, particularly for key species such as cod.
- Set long term plans for management of key fish stocks in the Baltic to ensure both biological and economic sustainability.
- Respect of wider ecosystem function must be central part of Baltic Sea fisheries management.