



Resolution 1295 (2002)¹

State of the environment of the Baltic Sea

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Baltic Sea is one of the largest brackish water systems in the world. Because of its highly variable hydro-physical conditions (oxygen and salinity) specially adapted species have developed there. These unique characteristics cause the marine system of the Baltic Sea to be very sensitive. Any human activity that causes conflicts with the environment can have a severe impact on the ecosystem. The pressure from the activities of the 85 million people living and working in the Baltic Sea area is taking its toll.

2. One of the most serious environmental problems of the Baltic Sea is eutrophication caused by the presence of excess nutrients in the sea water, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus. These substances are introduced by waste waters from municipalities, by agriculture on its shores, by industrial pollution and by airborne deposits. Excessive nutrients can lead to dense algal growth, some of which is poisonous. Dead organisms which sink to the sea bed deplete the waters at the bottom of the sea of oxygen and cause an internal nutrient overload by dissolving nutrients from the sediment back into the water. Storms can bring these nutrients to the surface.

3. Some of the busiest shipping routes in the world are to be found in the Baltic Sea and maritime traffic is increasing at an alarming rate. Groundings and collisions are frequent and the danger of large oil discharges is increasing due to growing shipments of oil. However, the biggest source of pollution from shipping currently comes from illegal oil discharges. The growth in marine transport is also increasing the risk of the introduction of non-indigenous species, which are potentially harmful for the Baltic Sea ecosystem.

4. Serious problems are caused by discharges of hazardous substances. Of particular concern is the threat to health and the environment of the Baltic Sea posed by munitions and chemical weapons dumped after the second world war. To prevent these causing damage it is necessary to:

elaborate an international programme to eliminate the threat to the Baltic Sea caused by dumped chemical weapons;

examine the state of the chemical weapons which have been dumped, to forecast the development of the ecological situation in the locations where chemical weapons have been dumped;

constantly monitor and control the state of the marine ecosystem in designated locations;

devise methods of preventing discharges of poisonous substances in the sea and adopt other measures to avoid damage caused by dumped chemical weapons;

consider the possibility of banning military exercises and the use of deep-sea trawls by fishing-boats in the areas where the captured German chemical weapons were dumped;

ensure monitoring of the concentration of poisonous substances and that of their by-products in fish and other sea products.

5. The Assembly notes with satisfaction that regional co-operation in the field of the environment established by the Helsinki Convention (Helcom) has, since 1992, through the Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme, reduced pollution from several major cities discharging into the Baltic Sea directly or via rivers, and set up programmes for regulating and monitoring shipping.

1. Assembly debate on 28 June 2002 (24th Sitting) (see [Doc. 9470](#), report of the Committee on the Environment and Agriculture, rapporteur: Mr Tiuri). Text adopted by the Assembly on 28 June 2002 (24th Sitting).



6. The Assembly urges the member states around the Baltic Sea to:

engage their appropriate authorities in long-term environmental protection measures that will support sustainable development in the Baltic region;

increase their efforts in projects related to the protection of the environment, particularly projects related to the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources;

support studies and projects concerning the Baltic Sea region that aim at including environmental considerations in sectors of co-operation such as energy and transport (that is, support the development of integrated coastal zone management practices with nature conservation and biodiversity as a central goal);

implement, in a timely and effective manner, the outcome of the Extraordinary Helcom Ministerial Meeting of September 2001, thereby tackling issues related to the growing number of ships in the Baltic Sea;

fully implement the Helcom Strategy for Port Reception Facilities for Ship-generated Wastes and Associated Issues (the Baltic Strategy) in order to halt illegal discharges by ships into the Baltic Sea;

make use of the established network of general prosecutors in the Baltic Sea region to more effectively stop ships from deliberately and illegally discharging their cargoes;

promote scientific studies on the effects of hazardous substances, especially concerning:

- a. the impact of variable salinity on the toxicity of substances;*
- b. the impact of toxic effects on the whole ecosystem in the light of low biodiversity in the Baltic Sea environment;*

improve knowledge of the chemicals market and stocks of outdated hazardous chemicals in the Baltic countries;

promote environmental management investments aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises and municipalities.

7. The Assembly also calls on all member states that have dumped munitions, chemical weapons or other toxic substances in the Baltic Sea to provide Helcom with exact information on the dumping.

8. The Assembly calls on Helcom to:

monitor the introduction of alien (non-indigenous) species, including setting up an information and early warning system;

update the current Baltic Sea database on alien species;

consider measures to prevent the introduction of alien species, taking into account the ongoing work within organisations such as the International Maritime Organization and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

9. The Assembly calls on the European Union and the member states around the Baltic Sea to:

promote the application of an ecosystem approach in fisheries management, including sustainable fishing practices, in order to reduce by-catches of non-commercial fish, birds and mammals, and to avoid over-exploitation of fish stocks;

support research and financing of acute environmental projects in the Baltic Sea region, particularly within the framework of the Helcom Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP) and the European Union's Northern Dimension;

improve water supply and sewage treatment systems in cities where they are not satisfactory whilst implementing the highest possible standards and technologies.