Coalition Clean Baltic
FOR PROTECTION OF THE BALTIC SEA ENVIRONMENT

Warsaw, Poland, 4 November 2026

Statement of the Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB) to the 2026 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting

Dear Ministers, distinguished delegates and partners in safeguarding the Baltic Sea,

Since the first BSAP was adopted in Kraków in 2007 and updated in Lübeck in 2021, associated HELCOM Ministerial Meetings have reaffirmed our shared responsibility to protect the Baltic Sea as a whole, from its catchment to the open. Yet, despite decades of regional cooperation, the Baltic remains in a critical ecological state. The collapse of several commercial fish populations and deteriorating conditions for other fish stocks illustrate the scale of biodiversity loss and disruption of marine systems. These crises are compounded by eutrophication, climate change and the degradation of marine habitats.

Environmental risks are heightened by increased military tensions and threats to critical maritime infrastructure due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which has fundamentally changed the geopolitical context in the region. These challenges make effective regional cooperation, including actions supporting a green recovery in Ukraine, more important than ever. **Environmental protection, climate action and biodiversity restoration are integral to regional security, resilience, food security and the well-being of our societies.** The 2026 Ministerial Meeting must translate this understanding into concrete, measurable actions.

Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB) calls on HELCOM Contracting Parties to:

1. Make ecosystem restoration a political priority. With its *Shadow Restoration Plan CCB* outlines a path towards more ambitious and effective restoration of the Baltic Sea ecosystem. CCB calls for a source-to-sea approach combining passive recovery with active restoration of marine and coastal habitats, rivers, wetlands and essential fish habitats, including spawning and nursery areas. Particular attention must be given to oxygen-depleted seabeds, migration routes, river connectivity and habitats essential for threatened and declining fish populations. Restoration must be adequately financed, scientifically grounded and aligned with the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and HELCOM BSAP commitments. The recovery of fish populations and of the ecological processes across the source-to-sea continuum, including bolstering aquatic oxygen levels, must become a measurable indicators of progress towards a healthy and resilient Baltic Sea.

2. Tackle the climate and biodiversity crises together. CCB urges HELCOM Contracting Parties to pursue comprehensive climate mitigation measures that also help halt and reverse biodiversity loss. This requires rapid greenhouse gas emission reductions at source, a transition away from fossil fuels, and the protection and restoration of carbon-rich marine and coastal ecosystems. Ecosystem restoration is regarded as one of the most cost-effective climate mitigation methods and is also one that does not subject the Baltic's fragile ecosystems to new stressors. Climate action must not create new environmental pressures and risks for an already vulnerable sea, such as those posed by marine carbon capture and storage (CCS) projects in the Baltic Sea would. HELCOM should uphold the precautionary principle and ensure that climate mitigation, biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration reinforce one another.

3. Make maritime activities more secure and sustainable. The changing security environment reinforces the need for responsible maritime governance that protects both critical infrastructure and the marine environment. Particular attention should be paid to environmental risks from substandard vessels, and to strengthening pollution prevention, monitoring and preparedness for environmental emergencies. CCB urges HELCOM to extend this approach across the maritime sector, addressing vessel emissions, underwater noise, contaminants, waste and wastewater, harmful antifouling substances, biofouling and pressures from maritime infrastructure. Stakeholder contribution to the *Clean Boating Guide for the Baltic Sea Region* illustrates how regional commitments can be translated into practical guidance and best environmental practices for recreational boating and marina operators.

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Coalition Clean Baltic **CCB is Member of IUCN, BSAC; GWP Partner; Observer at HELCOM, NASCO, IWC.** ***Coalition Clean Baltic is a network of environmental NGOs sponsored by:***
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4. Strengthen regional cooperation, circularity and implementation. The 2026 Ministerial Meeting must take stock of progress under the 2021 BSAP and address the implementation gaps that threaten its 2030 objectives. CCB calls for stronger national implementation, adequate financing, science-based monitoring, transparent reporting and meaningful participation of civil society. We also call on HELCOM to **make the circular economy part of its agenda** by providing, well before 2030, a shared regional framework for resource efficiency, waste prevention, safe nutrient and material recycling, pollution reduction and the transition towards more circular production and consumption. Such a framework should strengthen policy coherence across the region, create opportunities for cross-border cooperation and help reduce pressures on marine ecosystems, including those arising from excessive nutrient inputs, hazardous substances and marine litter.

HELCOM must remain an effective platform for environmental cooperation, scientific exchange and coordinated action, even amid geopolitical tensions. Security concerns must not become a justification for weakening environmental commitments or excluding independent civil society from shaping regional policy. Ministers should also establish a clear pathway towards an ambitious post-2030 BSAP that responds to emerging environmental pressures and the evolving climate and security context.

The Baltic Sea cannot afford another decade of unfulfilled commitments. CCB calls on ministers to demonstrate that regional cooperation can deliver tangible ecological recovery, including the restoration of depleted fish stocks, despite today's uncertain times. Protecting the Baltic Sea is inseparable from safeguarding our common future: it is an essential investment in a resilient, secure and sustainable Baltic Sea Region.

A healthy Baltic Sea is our shared responsibility. Coalition Clean Baltic regrets that this ministerial cannot deliver the commitments that are needed.

CCB Co-Chairs Bettina Taylor and Regan McEnroe