
Document title	Update on establishment of Bogskär MPA in Åland
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Submitted by	Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB)
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Background

Within a few days in December 2023, a decision was taken and then annulled to designate a Natura 2000 area, Bogskär, in the southern Åland Sea. As a response to this, the case was appealed by Ålands Natur och Miljö and the issue was brought last year by CCB to IC WG BIODIV 3-2024 and IC HOD 5-2024. Following the considerations at these meetings, the Ministry for the Environment in Finland invited the stakeholders, Provincial Government of Åland, Finnish authorities, and NGOs (Ålands Natur och Miljö, WWF and CCB), to a dialogue to further discuss the process for establishing the Bogskär Natura 2000 area. It consisted of series of meetings, including offline in Helsinki on 3rd of September 2024.

Recently, the Supreme Administrative Court of Finland [dismissed the appeal](#) to overturn the decision by the Provincial Government of Åland to establish this area as an MPA. However, the Court found that the grounds for the decision of the Provincial Government of Åland to revoke the establishment of the MPA were based on factual [errors in the procedure](#) for establishment of a nature reserve. This means that the procedure did not take into account [Åland's MSP](#), concerned stakeholders were not properly consulted (e.g. neither companies with exploration rights in large parts of the area nor Åland Fishermen's Association) and certain statutory rights and rights based on international agreements were not considered. The Court also confirmed that a new decision in the case will be issued by the Provincial Government of Åland after further preparation for establishment of the MPA has been completed and errors above rectified.

WWF and CCB thank Finland for the efforts undertaken and welcome all parties involved in further driving the case towards establishment of the Bogskär MPA as a valuable nature reserve of the Baltic-wide importance, inviting stakeholders for a series of consultation workshops. Given the complexity and sensitivity of the issue, a suggestion has been submitted by WWF and CCB to IC HELCOM 3-2025, where it is proposed that stakeholder workshops are organised and that these are moderated by a neutral party. HELCOM's role in moderating these workshops could be considered, taking into account the current [HELCOM's Chair priorities](#) in seeking balance between the Blue Economy and environmental protection, as well as in strengthening dialogue and engaging the public in decision-making, as well as vast expertise and knowledge on Baltic MPAs and coherent management of those. Also taking into account the connection of the case to practical [implementation of ecosystem-based approach in MSP](#), the role of IC HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG in acting as the moderator for the stakeholder dialogue could as well be considered.

Action requested

The Session is invited to

- [note](#) the updated information regarding Bogskär MPA;
- [discuss](#) the case and possibilities to give expert advice on how to ensure the designation of areas that contain high biological and nature values identified using relevant and scientific data;

- consider for EG MPA to take part and support stakeholder workshops with information on how to set a management plan and gather valuable scientific data for starting a new MPA designation process.

Annex

The Bogskär is a biologically important area with a mosaic of reefs (1170 Natura habitat) and canyon-like deep parts where many species thrive in a relatively undisturbed environment. In fact, part of the area is already a HELCOM MPA since 2015 ([ID: 401](#)).

Areas free from exploitation or extended disturbance are increasingly rare in the Baltic Sea. Thanks to its versatility and relative undisturbedness, Åland's southern sea area is an important area both for reproduction and foraging for several species, including Baltic herring and cod, several marine mammals and seabirds. **The importance of the area for the marine species and its special character has been confirmed in the ongoing project LIFE20 IPE/FI/000020 LIFE-IP BIODIVERSEA. Monitoring of the presence of porpoises has been ongoing since 2012.**

The area in the southern Åland archipelago represents a dynamic geological environment. Reef habitats in the area are classified as vulnerable and are important hotspots for biodiversity such as algal communities and blue mussel communities. Surveys also show that blue mussel coverage was > 90% at most survey points with elements of both red and brown algae.

The harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) occurs in small numbers but regularly in the area. The harbour porpoise population in the main basin of the Baltic Sea is classified as critically threatened and is in need of immediate protection measures. The area is the northernmost area with regular occurrence of harbour porpoises in the main basin of the Baltic Sea. Based on monitoring results, porpoises occur regularly in the area in all seasons.

The Baltic ringed seal (*Pusa hispida botnica*) population is declining rapidly. The southern stocks of Baltic ringed seal are threatened by e.g. climate change, fishery in the form of bycatch and other anthropogenic disturbance, and the need to protect the southern population of Baltic ringed seal is great. The current population in Åland and the Archipelago Sea is separate from the one in the Gulf of Bothnia. There is currently only a few hundred individuals with numbers declining. The Bogskär area is considered important for the Baltic ringed seal's foraging.

The grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) occurs regularly in the area which is used both for foraging and moulting. Between ten and a hundred individuals have been observed in flight counts during the molting period. The grey seal provides an added diversity value for the protection of the area, even if the species does not constitute a primary reason why the area needs to be protected, as the species is currently not to be seen as threatened within the Åland water area.

The Bogskär area probably contains the largest population of marine fish species on Åland and Finland.

About 30 different species of fish are found here, a significant part of which are marine species. Rare species such as Fourbeard rockling (*Enchelyopus cimbrius*) have also been found in the area. The area is an important foraging area for economically important fish species such as Cod (*Gadus morhua*), Salmon (*Salmo salar*), Sea trout (*Salmo trutta trutta*), Baltic herring (*Clupea harangus membras*) and Sprat (*Sprattus sprattus*). Based on monitoring studies in the area, the density of pelagic fish is the highest among all open sea areas in all of Finland. A significant conservation value can be attributed to the area's fish stocks due to its versatility and marine character, and fisheries exclusion zones/nature reserves can, over time, improve both fish and shellfish populations and restore ecosystem functions.

Within the area, there are important IBA and FINIBA bird areas designated by BirdLife International and the Finnish Environment Agency. Especially seabirds such as eiders and terns use the area for foraging and resting. During the breeding season, males of various seabirds also gather in flocks in the area.