

Rüdiger Stempel

Executive Secretary,
Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission HELCOM

Partners in CLIME: cooperation between HELCOM and Baltic Earth as a key element in science-based regional climate policy

As the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity and pollution accelerates, the Baltic Sea is heavily impacted by all three dimensions of the crisis. To quote the 2023 State of the Baltic Sea Report: “The Baltic Sea is under increasing impacts from climate change and biodiversity degradation catalyzed by eutrophication, pollution, land use and resource extraction.” It should be noted that the impact of climate change on Europe, including the Baltic Sea Region, is more pronounced than the global average, marginal seas warm faster than the open ocean and the Baltic Sea is warming faster than any other regional sea. This is already becoming evident as precipitation in the northern reaches of the Baltic Sea is increasing, ice cover is declining, the frequency and duration of marine heatwaves is growing, and distribution patterns of species are shifting northwards.

Against this somber background, the Baltic Sea Region does, however, offer an encouraging example of successful science-policy cooperation in seeking to tackle the challenges of climate change, exemplified by the long-standing cooperation between the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) and Baltic Earth. Since 2018, this cooperation – the fulcrum of which is the joint HELCOM-Baltic Earth Expert Network on Climate Change (EN Clime) – has contributed to reducing the lag between scientific work and policy implementation, establishing an exchange that forms the basis of informed, science-based decision-making within HELCOM. Perhaps the most visible output of this joint endeavor is the HELCOM-Baltic Earth Climate Change Fact Sheet, first published in 2021, revised in 2024 and currently being updated with a view to publishing a third edition by the end of this decade.

As HELCOM continues to implement its 2021 Baltic Sea Action Plan, which takes account of climate change as a cross-cutting, overarching issue (a so-called “Horizontal Topic” in the diction of the Plan) and starts looking beyond the Plan’s 2030 target date, cooperation between the Commission and Baltic Earth will continue to be a key element in regional efforts to mitigate and cope with the impacts of a shifting climate.