

# **Ministerial Declaration**

## **‘Our Baltic’ Conference**

28<sup>th</sup> September 2020

# Declaration of the Ministers of Environment, Maritime Economy, Agriculture and Fisheries of Baltic Sea Member States and of the Commissioner for 'Environment, Oceans and Fisheries'

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## Preamble

1. We, the Ministers of Environment, Maritime Economy, Agriculture, and Fisheries of the Baltic Sea Member States and the Member of the European Commission in charge of 'Environment, Oceans and Fisheries', RECALLING with serious concern the situation of the Baltic Sea marine environment due to pressures from human activities and climate change<sup>1</sup>;
2. In particular, we EXPRESS our deepest concern for the following predominant pressures on the marine environment that have led, amongst other impacts, to the degradation of the biodiversity of the Baltic Sea, including seabed disturbance and fish stock depletion: 1) pollution from high nutrient inputs, leading to 97% of the Baltic Sea area being affected by eutrophication<sup>1</sup>, 2) persistently high levels of contaminants, including persistent organic contaminants and metals, pharmaceuticals, endocrine disruptors, as well as litter - in particular plastic waste including micro-plastic, from land and sea-based sources; 3) unsustainable fishing patterns<sup>2</sup> particularly in areas where active bottom trawling has taken place. We AGREE that, without further steps and efforts to tackle those pressures immediately and effectively, we will not witness further improvement in the state of the Baltic Sea and of its coastal areas;
3. RESTATING our commitment to full implementation of the relevant European legislation<sup>3</sup> and of the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development; RECOGNISING that the legal objective to reach Good Environmental Status by 2020 as required by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive will not be achieved for the whole Baltic Sea<sup>4</sup> and therefore urgent additional efforts are needed; We also ACKNOWLEDGE additional challenges to achieve good

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<sup>1</sup> As outlined in the recent State of the Environment Report 2020 (SOER 2020) of the European Environmental Agency (EEA)<sup>1</sup> and in the State of the Baltic Sea report (HOLAS)

<sup>2</sup> With bottom-contacting fishing gear representing a high proportion of seabed damaging activity in the region

<sup>3</sup> In particular the Nitrates Directive, the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the Habitats and Birds Directives, the Waste Framework Directive, the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, the Single Use Plastic Directive, the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation, the Integrated Maritime Policy, and the Common Agricultural Policy

<sup>4</sup> Particularly for what relates to eutrophication, contaminants, marine litter, commercial fish and seafloor integrity

environmental status of the Baltic Sea, due to prevailing natural conditions, and the time lag between implementing certain measures and the recovery of the marine environment;

4. RECOGNIZING the Council conclusions on Oceans and Seas of 19 November 2019, and reaffirming the importance of holistic, integrated and science-based policy-making, built on cross-sectoral as well as regional cooperation and coordination notably at the BALTFISH, HELCOM and Baltic Sea Advisory Council, within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region and through other international initiatives<sup>5</sup> to ensure clean, healthy, productive and sustainably used oceans and seas;
5. RECOGNISING both the climate-neutrality by 2050 and zero-pollution ambitions of the European Green Deal<sup>6</sup>; RECOGNISING key initiatives stemming from the European Green Deal and Horizon Europe such as the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Circular Economy Action Plan, the Bioeconomy strategy, the upcoming Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the missions on Healthy Oceans, Seas, and Natural Coastal and Inland Waters and on Soil Health and Food; RECOGNISING the interlinkages of challenges and the need to coordinate and to exploit available synergies across policy areas, the role of transformational change, the need to foster innovation and the importance of involving stakeholders, as well as the need for stepping up implementation and enforcement of existing EU environmental legislation;
6. RECOGNISING that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, exerting pressure on the planet's oceans, and needs to be tackled with both mitigation and adaptation measures in order to increase resilience of the marine ecosystems to its negative impacts, and RECOGNISING the need to drive the recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic towards a more resilient, greener and digital Europe;
7. STRESSING the importance of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (the Helsinki Convention) that involves all coastal countries and the EU, and RECALLING the role of its governing body the Helsinki Commission, in leading the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and regional efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14 and other water and ocean-related goals and targets and in coordinating the establishment of the Baltic Sea as a NO<sub>x</sub> Emission Control Area and as a Special Sewage Area under MARPOL Convention; REAFFIRMING our commitment to fully implement the Baltic Sea Action Plan and to achieve its ambitious update by 2021 at the latest<sup>7</sup>; ACKNOWLEDGING the role and shared responsibility of non-EU countries of the Baltic Sea region in protection, preservation and sustainable management of the Baltic Sea; RECOGNIZING in this context that continued cooperation of all contracting countries to HELCOM as equal partners will be necessary;

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<sup>5</sup> Such as the Helsinki Convention, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and The Northern Dimension Environment Partnership, the relevant agreements under the IMO, and other relevant Regional Sea Conventions.

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/communication-european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/communication-european-green-deal_en)

<sup>7</sup> based on commitments made at HELCOM Ministerial Declaration 2018 : <https://helcom.fi/media/documents/HELCOM-Brussels-Ministerial-Declaration.pdf>

8. We ADOPT this Ministerial Declaration and COMMIT to its swift implementation:

### Implementing the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and supporting the Biodiversity Strategy to reduce pressures and protect the marine environment

9. We STRESS the urgent need to determine Good Environmental Status coherently across the region, with cooperation and coordination under the HELCOM umbrella notably through defining and complying with all existing and upcoming threshold values set in accordance with Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848. We will ENSURE that measures reported by March 2022 under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive are fully coordinated to the extent possible across our region to move towards Good Environmental Status;
10. We COMMIT to enhance international and inter-institutional cooperation in environmental inspection to ensure full compliance with European Union legislation and to further improve monitoring of the marine environment to provide the basis to set up appropriate measures to limit and prevent pollution;
11. We AGREE to push for an update of HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan in 2021 so that the updated plan ensures that the Baltic Sea can recover from the pressures addressed in this declaration in a reasonable time horizon;
12. We are CONCERNED that releases of harmful substances from submerged hazardous objects (sea-dumped munitions, warfare materials and wrecks filled with oil) may affect the marine environment and activities in the Baltic Sea. We RECOGNIZE the need for a full environmental risk assessment and joint research of the potential pollution in order to better identify the best environmental practice on how to address the issue of hazardous submerged objects in the Baltic Sea and develop financial support for the above mentioned actions with the involvement of HELCOM;
13. We COMMIT to improve the effectiveness of our network of marine protected areas by (i) where relevant widening the marine protected areas network in the Baltic sea in a coherent way and based on scientifically documented information to ensure an optimal level of protection of habitats and species, (ii) increasing the marine protected areas including strictly protected areas to progressively tend to the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – while recognising the need to further clarify these objectives and (iii) managing effectively and monitoring all protected areas;

### Fighting against anthropogenic eutrophication, notably through a sustainable agriculture

14. We COMMIT to continue to address all nutrient inputs at source with a priority on nutrients coming from agriculture<sup>8</sup> but also taking into account domestic and industrial sources and air

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<sup>8</sup> Most of the nitrogen and phosphorus input to the sea comes from rivers and mainly originates from agricultural activities, while municipal waste water treatment plants contribute with around 12 % of the

deposition; To this end, We RECOGNISE THE NEED to finalise the HELCOM Baltic Sea regional nutrient recycling strategy by 2021, and, in line with the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, to develop with the European Commission an integrated nutrient management action plan promoting recyclability and ensuring sustainability of nutrients, preventing harmful losses into the environment and, as appropriate in line with the SWOT analysis and the assessment of needs of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), reducing the losses of nutrients into the environment according to the Baltic Sea Action Plan and to relevant EU legislation;

15. We PROMOTE the maximum amount of manure that can be applied on agricultural areas as laid down in the relevant criteria under the Helsinki Convention, taking soil characteristics, soil nutrient status, agricultural practices and crop types into account;
16. We AGREE to review Nutrient Input Ceilings (NIC's) of HELCOM's nutrient load reduction system utilising the existing scientifically justified Maximum Allowable Inputs (MAIs), with the aim to include them in the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan update so that their full implementation will lead to a recovery of the Baltic Sea from eutrophication, in a reasonable time horizon;
17. We COMMIT to ensure the full implementation and enforcement of the Baltic Sea Emission Control Area for nitrogen oxides (NECA), entering into force in 2021, to ensure significant reduction of Nitrogen emissions from ships to air and sea - thereby protecting the health of coastal citizens and the biodiversity of the seas;
18. We RECOGNIZE with concern that large amounts of phosphorus have accumulated in lakes, coastal waters and in the Baltic Sea during the past decades due to anthropogenic activities, resulting in an enhanced internal flux of phosphorus between sediments and the water thereby exacerbating eutrophication; to this end we ENCOURAGE further improving the knowledge base regarding the nature and dynamics of internal nutrient reserves and the development of measures to remediate these internal fluxes, provided that commonly agreed regional principles and an adequate risk assessment framework are in place in HELCOM to meet the necessary environmental requirements.

## Reducing pollution and contaminants of emerging concern

19. Drawing where relevant on the Commission's scientific and technical expertise, we ENCOURAGE efforts to establish a common monitoring and assessment programme for contaminants of concern (including pharmaceuticals, pesticides and other relevant micro pollutants) compliant with ongoing national programmes, including those required by existing EU legislation (such as marine litter, including micro plastics). In line notably with the Directive on priority substances in the field of water policy (EU) 2019/39, we ENCOURAGE efforts to tackle those pollutants with the

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riverine nitrogen load and 24 % of the riverine phosphorus load. 30% of total nitrogen input is due to atmospheric deposition (HELCOM, State of the Baltic Sea Report <http://stateofthebalticsea.helcom.fi/> 2018)

involvement of HELCOM through measures looking at their whole life cycle prioritizing measures at their sources, reducing their use and defining end-of pipe measures when necessary;

20. Drawing where relevant on the Commission's scientific and technical expertise, we COMMIT to promote and proactively implement preventive or mitigation measures to reduce chemical pollution to levels that are no longer harmful to human health and the environment. In particular, we will minimise persistent, bioaccumulative and persistent, mobile toxic substances (including pharmaceuticals) or their transformation products and we will address combined effects of different pollutants;
21. We REAFFIRM our preparedness to the full implementation of the Single-Use Plastic Directive (EU) 2019/904, the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive 94/62/EC as well as the requirements of the Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC to identify products that are the main sources of littering, and take appropriate measures to prevent and reduce litter; When implementing these directives, we COMMIT to ensure exchanges of best practices amongst Baltic Sea Member States and develop synergies with the HELCOM regional action plan against marine litter; We COMMIT to promote and actively work for a global agreement to reduce and prevent plastic marine litter and micro plastics;
22. We will INCREASE our efforts under the MSFD and HELCOM to monitor and assess marine litter on beaches, in the water column, and on the sea bed, as well the impacts, such as ingestion of and entanglement in marine litter items by marine wildlife using common methodologies in line with those agreed at EU level and applying threshold values in line with those agreed at EU level in order to ensure that properties and quantities of marine litter do not cause harm to the coastal and marine environment of the Baltic Sea.

### Securing sustainable fisheries and aquaculture to improve the biodiversity to avoid the degradation of the marine environment and to secure food supplies

23. WE RE-COMMIT to favour cooperation between fishery and environmental organisations, in particular BALTFISH, HELCOM and the Baltic Sea Advisory Council, to contribute to a coordinated approach for the protection of the marine environment and sustainable management of fisheries in the region;
24. We RE-COMMIT to achieve the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), in particular to effectively implement the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management and in maritime spatial planning, which will help in reducing cumulative pressures on the marine environment, and so contribute to the preservation and restoration of ecosystems and the provision of ecosystems services, contributing to the availability of food supplies and socio-economic including employment benefits. In this regard, we further COMMIT to establish appropriate conservation measures under the CFP in protected areas and for sensitive species as necessary;
25. In order to achieve Good Environmental Status of the Baltic Sea in relation to sea-floor integrity and biological diversity<sup>9</sup>, we COMMIT – when and where necessary - to limit the use of fishing gear most harmful to biodiversity and to reduce by 2025 the footprint of sea-floor disturbance by

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<sup>9</sup> Descriptors 1 and 6 of annex I of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive

bottom-contacting fishing gears, particularly in sensitive areas; in addition we INVITE further development of new, more selective and less harmful fishing gear;

26. We RECALL the necessity to be consistent with and take into account the best available scientific advice provided by the International Council of the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and provisions of the Baltic Sea Multi-annual Plan when setting Total Allowable Catches (TACs) for the Baltic Sea fish stocks. Moreover, we RE-COMMIT to apply appropriate management measures and when justified, remedial measures including spawning closures to rebuild the depleted fish stocks in the Baltic Sea;
27. We will STEP UP fisheries control and enforcement to promote a culture of compliance among operators. We COMMIT to improve monitoring of incidental by-catches of the critically endangered population of harbour porpoise and other endangered marine species and to implement where relevant proportionate and precautionary measures based on scientifically documented information for their favourable recovery and conservation;

### Securing adequate funding and promoting a sustainable blue economy

28. RECOGNISING that increased public and private investment is essential for achieving an innovative and sustainable blue economy in the Baltic Sea area, we strongly INTEND to mobilise available private and public funding sources in support of the commitments made in this declaration, notably where funding is available through programmes funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds in the 2021-2027 programming period and by funding adequate measures under the Common Agricultural Policy. In particular, we INTEND to dedicate funding to the implementation of the updated HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and we commit to take into account priorities of the revised Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and its Policy Areas aiming to save the Baltic Sea in the programming and implementation of post-2020 relevant programs;
29. In line with the European legislation, we COMMIT to properly assess the potential impacts of future investments to be made in the Baltic Sea Region in order to avoid or limit their potentially harmful impacts; we COMMIT to not provide funding for projects with potential harmful overall impacts;
30. We INVITE private sector and financial institutions to join all efforts to accelerate the transition towards more sustainable practices, notably through research and innovation, and to restore the natural capital of the Baltic Sea in order to improve the opportunity of a growing sustainable blue economy, particularly in coastal and rural areas;
31. We COMMIT to encourage the diversification of the economic activity linked to the seas, by using under-exploited renewable marine resources and waste from the fisheries and aquaculture sectors to provide new goods (e.g. recreational activities, nature conservation and restoration activities, use of algae and rest streams from fisheries fish waste for production of food and feed, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals and services);
32. While RECOGNISING the mid and long term positive socio-economic and societal effects expected from the implementation of this declaration, we COMMIT to carefully assess the possible short term challenges for specific sectors or local communities and support – where and

when relevant - necessary sectoral adaptation including by using European and national public funding where available to overcome these effects.

### Monitoring our commitments

33. The implementation of the commitments included in this declaration will be regularly monitored on the basis of existing EU reporting schemes. These reports will be made accessible to the public.



# Annex – List of specific actions to implement the Ministerial Declaration and focusing on the main pressures on the marine environment of the Baltic Sea

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In order to implement the Ministerial Declaration adopted today and to ensure that it is accompanied by concrete measures, we commit further to the implementation of the relevant measures at national level from this Annex.

## Eutrophication

1. Within legal requirements of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and in line with HELCOM recommendations, we RECOMMIT to further reduce anthropogenic Nitrogen and Phosphorus releases into the Baltic Sea, in the basins affected by eutrophication;
2. Under the Nitrates Directive, we will REVISE the designation of Nitrates Vulnerable Zones, where appropriate, and if necessary, we will adopt the whole territory approach taking into account all the areas of the Baltic Sea catchment basin where agriculture has a significant contribution to nutrients flows; We will REVISE measures in Action Programmes of the Nitrates Directive as soon as possible and maximum within 4 years<sup>10</sup>;
3. We will ensure the national implementation of the National Emissions reduction Commitments Directive (EU)2016/2284 so that emissions of air pollutants, and in this particular case of ammonia, are decreased and respect the emissions reduction commitments for the period 2020-29 and for 2030 and beyond;
4. We will ensure implementation of the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) by :
  - implementing cross compliance and developing voluntary measures in order to contribute to the good status under the Water Framework Directive
  - depending on the availabilities of funds, including in our post-2020 CAP strategic plans ambitious and attractive measures for farmers exploring the possibility to involve result-based payments, to achieve a significant reduction of nutrient losses to water
  - ensuring that training is provided to farmers and farm advisors in order to make these actions feasible;
5. We will CONTRIBUTE by a better nutrient management, to reduce nutrient losses in the environment to progressively tend to the Commission's proposed objective in the Farm to Fork and the Biodiversity strategies of reducing nutrient losses at EU level by 50% while ensuring no deterioration in soil fertility;

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<sup>10</sup> In line with the requirements of the Nitrate Directive

6. We will clearly IDENTIFY in the third River Basin Management Plans under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), the gap to good status and we will DESIGN the Programmes of Measures in order to (1) close that gap, taking into account the recommendations by the Commission based on the implementation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> River Basin Management Plans, (2) contribute to the programme of measures under the MSFD, and (3) ensure that the programs of measures are adequately funded. In each Member State we will also CONTINUE to improve international cooperation, such as ensuring a harmonized approach for status assessment and a coordinated approach for designing Programme of Measures under MSFD and WFD;
7. We will PROMOTE ecologically sustainable sea-based measures, where appropriate with potential for eutrophication abatement such as mussel cultivation and blue catch crops;
8. We will further explore the potential for eutrophication abatement measures that reduce the internal load of nutrient.

## Contaminants of emerging concern

9. We COMMIT to tackle contaminants of emerging concern, where necessary, and, where upstream measures are not sufficient to protect our water bodies, through a national framework for the identification of Urban Waste Water Treatment plants that should be improved to deal with these contaminants. These efforts will be supported by appropriate upstream measures such as rendering industrial processes environmentally friendly, following BAT-conclusions - obliging industry to build pre-treatment facilities, and through awareness-raising campaigns and collection schemes in pharmacies;
10. To support the EU's zero pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment and in line with the objectives of the upcoming EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, we also COMMIT to :
  - Work to develop national measures and regional strategies, including to minimise PerFluorinated Alkyls (PFA's) emissions,
  - Continue to focus national efforts on identifying Persistent, Bioaccumulative and Toxic (PBTs), or very persistent, very bioaccumulative (vPvBs) or persistent and mobile substances (vPvMs, PMTs) under REACH, Continue to focus efforts on identifying new substances for nominations to the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants.

## Marine litter

11. To fully IMPLEMENT the Single-Use Plastic Directive<sup>11</sup> and to reduce the amount of litter from single-use plastic products and fishing gear ending up in the sea and their unintended effects on the environment and biodiversity, we will:

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<sup>11</sup> Directive 2019/904 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment

- Effectively enforce the ban on the items listed in the Annex (Part B) to the Directive (single use plastic products for which sustainable alternatives are readily available);
- Effectively enforce the ambitious and sustained reduction of the consumption of the single-use plastic products listed in Part A of the Annex to the Directive;
- Exchange best practices between Baltic Sea countries in order to put together a coordinated effort to identify more sustainable or reusable alternatives for single-use plastic products;
- Coordinate and exchange the best practices between Baltic Sea Member States in establishing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes for all single use plastic products and fishing gear containing plastic, to ensure that producers cover the costs of waste management, awareness raising measures, waste collection for public collection systems, cleaning up litter and data gathering and reporting;
- Exchange best practices between Baltic Sea Member States in order to reach the 90% separate collection target for single-use plastic beverage bottles by 2029, either through setting up deposit refund schemes or establishment of targets for EPR schemes;
- Exchange best practices between Baltic Sea Member States in order to develop efficient and effective awareness-raising campaigns to inform consumers about the relations of consumer behavioural decisions and waste generation, and to incentivise responsible consumer behaviour, in particular on availability of re-usable alternatives and reuse systems, and on the Impact of littering and other inappropriate waste disposal on the marine environment;
- Ensure effective marking (labels) on a number of single use plastic products, such as wet wipes, sanitary items, cups for beverages and tobacco products with plastic filters, to inform consumers of appropriate waste management options, the presence of plastic in the product and resulting negative impact of littering or other appropriate means of waste disposal on the environment;

12. To fully IMPLEMENT as much as possible by anticipation Directive 1994/62/EC on Packaging and Packaging Waste as amended by Directive 2018/852, and Directive 2008/98/EC as amended by Directive (EU) 2018/851, we will:

- comply with the new recycling targets for packaging in line with the new calculation of recycling rules as detailed in Commission Implementing Decision 2019/665;
- put in place, modernize, transform, and expand the necessary infrastructure for effective separate collection, sorting and recycling of packaging waste;
- take measures to prevent unnecessary packaging, generation of packaging waste and to minimise the environmental impact of packaging;
- take measures to encourage the increase in the share of reusable packaging and of system to reuse packaging in an environmentally sound manner;
- ensure that the waste management in the Baltic Sea region proactively addresses litter prevention<sup>12</sup> to achieve good environmental status as defined in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive;
- explore options to enhance cooperation in the field of waste management in order to share best practises, in particular for utilising existing waste management and recycling infrastructure across the Baltic Sea region;

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<sup>12</sup> in conformity to the requirements laid down in Article 9 of the Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC

- fully IMPLEMENT the Port Reception Facility Directive (EU) 2019/883 to fight the threats of marine litter and nutrient pollution, resource depletion and climate change.

## Fisheries and biodiversity

13. We COMMIT to continue the work in the framework of BALTFISH to:
  - introduce more selective gears in demersal fisheries, to effectively reduce by-catches, notably of eastern Baltic cod;
  - protect the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise by additional mitigation measures for the reduction of incidental by-catches such as effective acoustic deterrent devices for fisheries using bottom-set gillnets and entangling nets or where relevant any combination of these nets areas referred to by ICES as important distribution and protection sites;
14. When relevant to limit fishing effort, we COMMIT to effectively control the actual engine power of fishing vessels, for example by controlling the fishing vessels' power balance;
15. We ENCOURAGE efforts to improve the knowledge on recreational fishing in the Baltic Sea by collecting relevant data so that this can be taken into account in the scientific assessment of fish stocks;
16. We will ADOPT all necessary measures to ENSURE full implementation of by-catch limitation, notably for eastern Baltic cod, and PROMOTE, as appropriate, the use of remote electronic monitoring as a method to tackle illegal discarding;
17. We COMMIT to improve the monitoring of fisheries' incidental by-catches of Baltic Proper harbour porpoise and other protected and endangered marine species including other mammals and birds; we therefore COMMIT to efficient and proportionate monitoring and data collection (e.g. EU data collection framework, appropriate tools), and where relevant to implement incidental by-catch mitigation solutions (e.g. the use of acoustic deterrent devices and technical measures such as fisheries restricted areas)<sup>13</sup> needed to achieve the favourable conservation status of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise, using national measures and regionally-coordinated measures inter alia through BALTFISH joint recommendations to the European Commission; We furthermore COMMIT to promote the use of seal safe and selective fishing gears; We also COMMIT to promote the exchange of best practices and proof of the use of more sustainable fishing techniques through improved data collection and implementing effective incidental by-catch mitigation solutions;
18. We COMMIT to intensify efforts to collect accurate data on landings, discards, fishing effort, incidental by-catch and to take measures aiming at increasing the number of Baltic Sea stocks with biological reference points (i.e. flatfish stocks);

19. We RE-COMMIT to fully implement Regulation No 1100/2007<sup>14</sup> and to strengthening transboundary cooperation, including at regional and international level, to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the recovery of the stock of European Eel while respecting legal obligations under EU and international law;
20. In view of the implementation of the national biodiversity commitments stemming from the new EU Biodiversity Strategy and of the Nature Directives we ENCOURAGE efforts to:
- develop a coherent, representative and effectively managed Marine Protected Areas network accompanied with effective management plans, including strictly protected areas where justified based on scientifically documented information,
  - complete a sufficient and coherent designation of marine Natura 2000 sites, and where justified based on scientifically documented information, implement the necessary management including clear conservation objectives and measures, zones where natural processes remain undisturbed, fisheries and other management measures corresponding to conservation objectives, and appropriate assessments of potentially damaging activities,
  - protect species, including through the prevention, and as far as possible elimination or reduction of incidental by-catch (especially of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise),
  - improve conservation measures to reach a favourable conservation status of protected species and habitats,
  - develop good management practices, including maritime spatial planning with the involvement of an ecosystem approach, ensuring the coexistence of socio-economic activities and biodiversity (e.g. offshore windfarms and birds, marine mammals, cormorants and fishermen) and plan protected areas and conservation measures in a transparent process in which stakeholders can participate extensively.

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<sup>14</sup> Council Regulation (EC) no 1100/2007 of 18 September 2007 establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel

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