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## **Statement from the Baltic Sea Farmers' Forum on Environment (BFFE) on the Declaration of the 2021 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting and on the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP)**

On behalf of around two million farmers around the Baltic Sea, BFFE is grateful for the invitation to provide a statement to the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting. All parties recognize that the Baltic Sea is facing high pressure from human activities and climate change, and that there is a need for increased resilience of Baltic Sea ecosystems. Two hundred actions have been suggested, many of which can also be found in EU legislation, such as the Water Framework Directive.

For farmers, there is a fundamental need for good health status of soil and water, since that is the basis for all production. It is also a deep concern for many generations of families inheriting land and trying to preserve good status for the next owner. The major challenge to the health status of the Baltic Sea is pollution from diffuse sources on all kinds of land, which are difficult to measure and differ from one year to the next.

### **BSAP – aftermath and farmers' reflections**

Fourteen years have passed since the first version of BSAP, during which time no country has achieved the national maximum allowable inputs (MAI) of nitrogen and phosphorus emissions to the Baltic Sea. Moreover, nitrogen and phosphorus leaching from agriculture have not decreased as expected. There are general and country-specific reasons for this failure to meet the targets. BFFE believes that at present the limiting factor for achieving the MAIs is not lack of scientific knowledge about what farming practices are necessary. Our view is that there are two other main obstacles: 1) *Existing monitoring on Baltic-friendly measures does not recognize the improvements achieved by farmers.* Communication of existing data needs to be much improved. 2) *Food is too cheap and therefore measures by farmers are not financially viable.* Current food prices do not allow food production and cultivation to be climate-friendly, Baltic Sea-friendly, biological diversity-friendly, and at the same time cheap. Food is now so cheap that about 30 per cent is thrown away. If some of that wasted money could be used to fund concrete measures within farming, the MAIs would be reached faster. The sooner that insight is translated into action, the better for all.

### **A growing population requires increased food production**

In the long time frame in which HELCOM and BSAP operate, it is also necessary to bear in mind that population growth in the Baltic Sea region will influence the scope to achieve the MAIs. Average intake of dietary nitrogen is about 5 kg per person and year, so every additional million people in the population will require an extra 5000 tonnes of food annually, mainly as protein. To produce 5000 tonnes of nitrogen in edible plant parts, 10-15,000 tonnes of extra nitrogen will be needed. This aspect is often overlooked in water protection work.

### **Sustainable agriculture**

Sustainable agriculture is generally defined as ecologically and economically sustainable. Becoming socially sustainable is an increasing concern around the Baltic Sea and very crucial for farmers' decision to stay on their farm or move to town. The social situation varies from region to region, but has to be considered when actions are planned close to the farm. Another important part of sustainability is the possibility of supplying biomass to an increasing bioeconomy from water and arable and forest land in the region. Ecosystem services supply is also becoming more important for the farming community and for society.

### **Development of advisory services and the possibility of collaborating with the authorities**

There are many good examples of the ability of improved advisory services to tackle the current challenges facing agriculture, forestry, and aquaculture. There is also published evidence that on-farm advice leads to concrete measures. In some Baltic countries, there is strong collaboration between farmers and authorities through an increasing number of catchment officers. In general, it is the hope of BFFE that implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive will lead to better participation by farmers and the general public in water protection work. Another promising option for EU members is the opportunity to form innovation groups and innovation projects within the EIP-Agri program. In the next CAP period, these ideas will be expanded in Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), where knowledge transfer to and from farmers will be developed in parallel with existing Research & Development programs. To summarize, there are several ongoing processes that are generating new methods to involve farmers in Baltic Sea protection measures.

### **Natural conditions such as internal loads, retention, and climate change**

It has become clear in recent years that more focus is needed on internal loads to the Baltic Sea and how to address these, and on prevention of nutrient losses from field to sea. In general, more attention must be devoted to making Baltic Sea farming measures more surgically precise. Landscape conservation, regional variations, and local adaptations to soil types are still not being taken into account in planning. Another issue will be climate change, with both extreme heat waves and flooding having already arisen during the growing season in recent years. These extreme events are very difficult to handle, since planning is based on a 'normal' year without extreme weather.

### **Examples of important farming measures**

As part of their management regime, farmers regularly calculate nutrient balance as a farm gate budget. They know that, in the long term, soils must not be left bare during the winter but kept as green as possible at all times, preventing erosion and phosphorus losses. Precision agriculture can be a more effective management tool to avoid effects on the Baltic Sea, since nutrients can be better placed in time and closer to seeds. Further developments in minimum/zero tillage systems and smart machinery can also help farmers retain nutrients in the field.

### **Recycling with care**

There is strong demand for recycling of organic residues and nutrients from fork to farm and much progress has been made, but farming needs to receive cleaner side-streams. There is an urgent need for measures encouraging people to recycle with care and avoid waste where possible.

### **Baltic Sea Action Plan**

At the 2018 HELCOM Ministerial meeting, BFFE pointed out that the impact of climate change on nutrient loads to the Baltic Sea should be taken into account in the updated BSAP. BFFE also

highlighted the slow rate of improvement in the health status of the Baltic Sea, due to the long time lags in responses to measures implemented to reach the target. Implementation of the BSAP and monitoring of its effects are matters of increasing urgency. Farmers are doing their best to reduce nutrient loads, but lack the appropriate tools to deal with extreme conditions. All members of BFFE want to reduce the time needed to see effects of nutrient load reductions in terms of better water quality in the Baltic Sea.

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