



WWF's Poland take on *Our Baltic* ministerial declaration.

**Introduction/ Lead:** On September 28th Baltic Member States ministers for: fisheries, agriculture and environment gathered together at the high level conference *Our Baltic* organised by the European Commission. The conference resulted in signing the ministerial declaration committing the member states to increase their engagement in protection of the Baltic Sea environment. Will the declaration guarantee the real changes needed to save the Baltic?

### Endangered Baltic harbour porpoise

Ministerial declaration serves as a good basis for actions aiming in conservation of the marine mammals of the Baltic Sea and it highlights:

The need of improving the by-catch monitoring during fishing activities and data collection of those events/cases

Making use of pingers which scare away harbour porpoises from the nets, minimising the risk of entanglement

In addition, the declaration mentions the need for development of alternative seal-safe fishing gears which would protect the catch from seals predation. This is promising as it gives a chance to minimise the currently observed conflict between fishers and the seals.

### Fish and fisheries

Critical state of the Eastern Baltic cod as well as the western Baltic herring is a signal that we need urgent actions to bring back the richness of the Baltic Sea – which we remember from the past. The ministerial declaration “*Our Baltic*” indicates among others:

Re-commitment to achieve the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy, including the implementation of the Ecosystem Based Approach to Fisheries Management

Commitment to minimise the use of the fishing gears which are harmful to the biodiversity

The need of setting fishing limits in accordance with scientific advice from International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)

The need of avoid by-catch of the Eastern Baltic cod

Implementation of the ministers' commitments related to fisheries would give a chance for the Baltic fish stocks to recover. First occasion to make it happen will be the upcoming EU Fisheries Council (AGRIFISH), October 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> when ministers will decide on Baltic fishing limits for 2021.

### **Baltic nature reserves**

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are equivalent to the well-known terrestrial Natura 2000 sites, but they don't have appropriate management plans for their protection. MPAs cover 12.4% of the EU marine waters, but only 1.8% of them have management plans. The declaration signed by the ministers emphasizes the necessity to adopt these plans for the effective protected areas management and stresses that this process should take into account opinion of all the stakeholders, including local communities.

### **Dead zones**

Excessive nutrients run-off from farms to the Baltic Sea leads to the process of eutrophication which results in algae blooms and in a long-term in oxygen depletion in certain areas where marine organisms cannot function any longer (so called dead zones). Currently, 17% of the Baltic Sea area constitutes the dead zones and 97% is affected by eutrophication. WWF has been calling for concrete actions towards reduction of the anthropogenic pressure from land, crucial for saving the dying sea. Declaration signed by the Baltic Ministers is an attempt to respond to these threats caused by nutrients through:

- Aligning funding for nutrients reduction measures on a farm level from the EU Common Agricultural Policy
- Revision of the national programmes of measures for the implementation of the EU Nitrates Directive and their effectiveness to reduce nitrogen run-off from farms to waters
- Trainings for farmers and agricultural advisors regarding Baltic-friendly agricultural practices which would reduce nutrients run-off to waters and therefore contribute to achieve good environmental status according to the EU Water Framework Directive

### **Ghost nets**

The Ministerial Declaration addresses the need to reduce the amount of fishing gear ending up in the sea and its negative impact on the environment and biodiversity. The Declaration requires Baltic Sea Member States to:

- fully IMPLEMENT the Port Reception Facility Directive, which is relevant for all recommendations from the MARELITT Baltic project regarding harbour reception of derelict fishing gear (DFG), collection, sorting and waste management of retrieved and end-of-life fishing gear;

- coordinate and exchange the best practices in establishing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes for fishing gear containing plastic, to ensure that producers cover the costs of, among other, waste management, awareness raising measures, cleaning up litter and data gathering and reporting. An EPR scheme is potentially the most effective tool to diminish the amount of DFG by ensuring the return of all fishing gear to port and even more responsible handling of fishing gear at sea.

WWF welcomes the Ministerial Declaration and appreciates the willingness of the European Commission to protect the Baltic Sea. *“We want to thank the European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius, for taking the initiative to organise Our Baltic conference. We hope that the ambition expressed by the Ministerial Declaration will not rest on paper only, but will be put in practice via concrete and quick actions needed to improve bad condition of the Baltic”- summarizes ....[name].....WWF [national office]*

*Our Baltic Ministerial Declaration, 2020*

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/ministerial\\_declaration\\_our\\_baltic\\_conference.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/ministerial_declaration_our_baltic_conference.pdf)