

HELCOM – the focal point for environmental information in the Baltic Sea Area

Nikolay Vlasov
Information Secretary
Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)



HELCOM

or the **Helsinki Commission**, is an intergovernmental organisation of the nine Baltic Sea coastal countries and the European Community working to protect the marine environment from all sources of pollution, conserve biodiversity and ensure safety of navigation



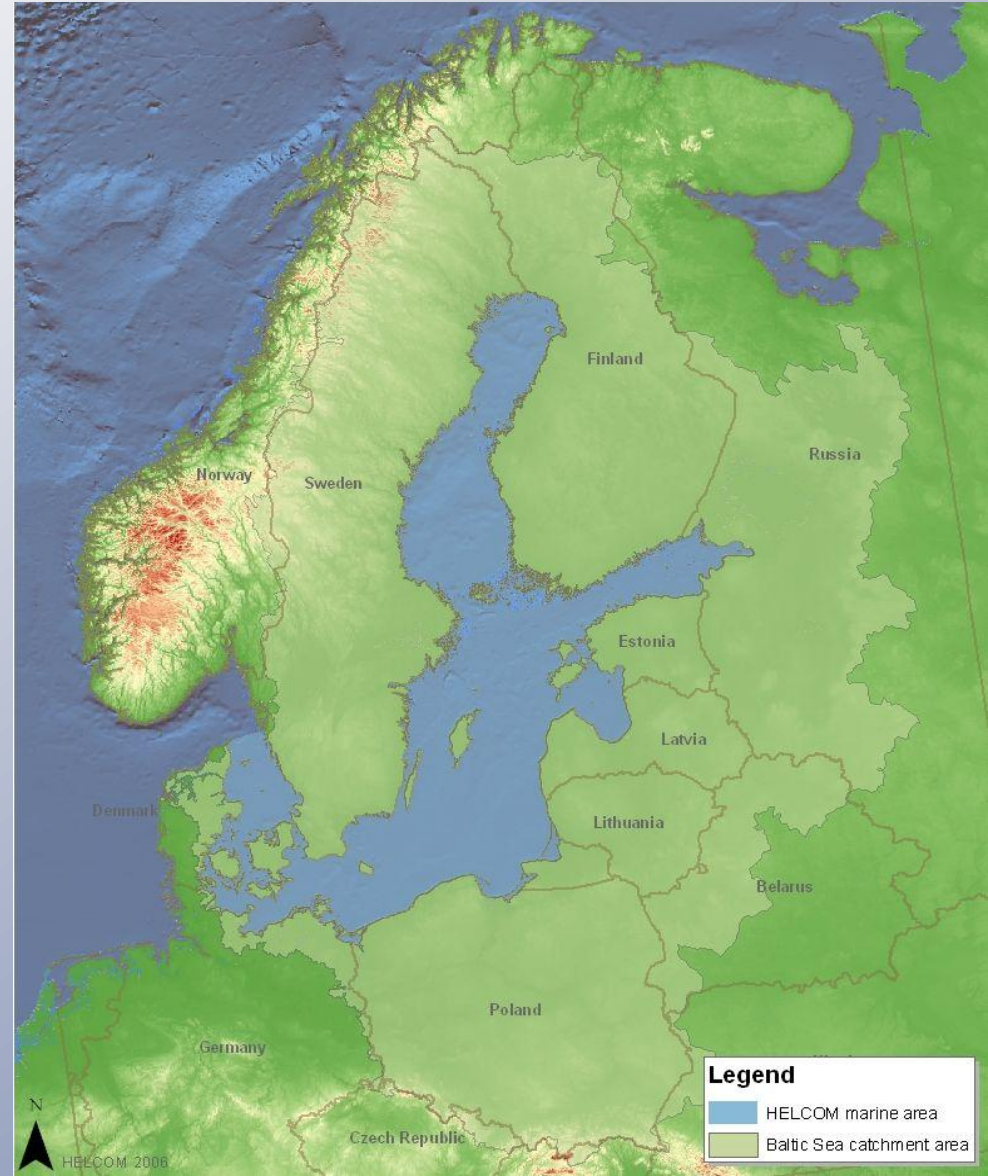
HELCOM

- **Governing body of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (signed in 1974, updated in 1992)**
- **Major body of the international environmental co-operation in the Baltic region**
- **For the past 30 years has served as the main environmental policy-maker for the Baltic Sea area, developing common objectives and actions**



Baltic Sea

- Area: 415,000 km²
- 9 Coastal States
- Catchment area:
 - 1.72 million km² (4 times the size of the sea area)
 - 14 countries
 - 85 million people
- Natural specifics:
 - low temperature
 - low water exchange rate
 - brackish water
 - sensitive to human pressures



Main priority areas in HELCOM work

- Combating eutrophication caused by excessive nutrient loads
- Preventing pollution by hazardous substances
- Improving navigational safety and accident response capacity
- Protecting and conserving marine and coastal biodiversity



How do we work?

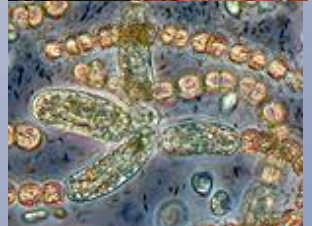
- The Commission unanimously adopts Recommendations for the protection of the marine environment, which the governments of the must act on in their respective national programmes and legislation.
- Since the beginning of the 1980s, the Helsinki Commission has been working to improve the Baltic marine environment, largely through some 200 HELCOM Recommendations.



Achievements

(since the 1980s)

- ~ 40% reduction in loads of nitrogen and phosphorus
- 50% reduction in discharges of 46 hazardous substances
- 79 of the designated 162 major pollution Hot Spots/sub-Hot Spots have been recovered
- Up to 90 Baltic Sea Protected Areas have been established, which serve to protect and restore sensitive eco-systems and fauna and flora. Populations of seal, white-tailed eagle have been recovered, as well as wild salmon populations restored, etc.
- Improved safety of navigation and accident response capacity

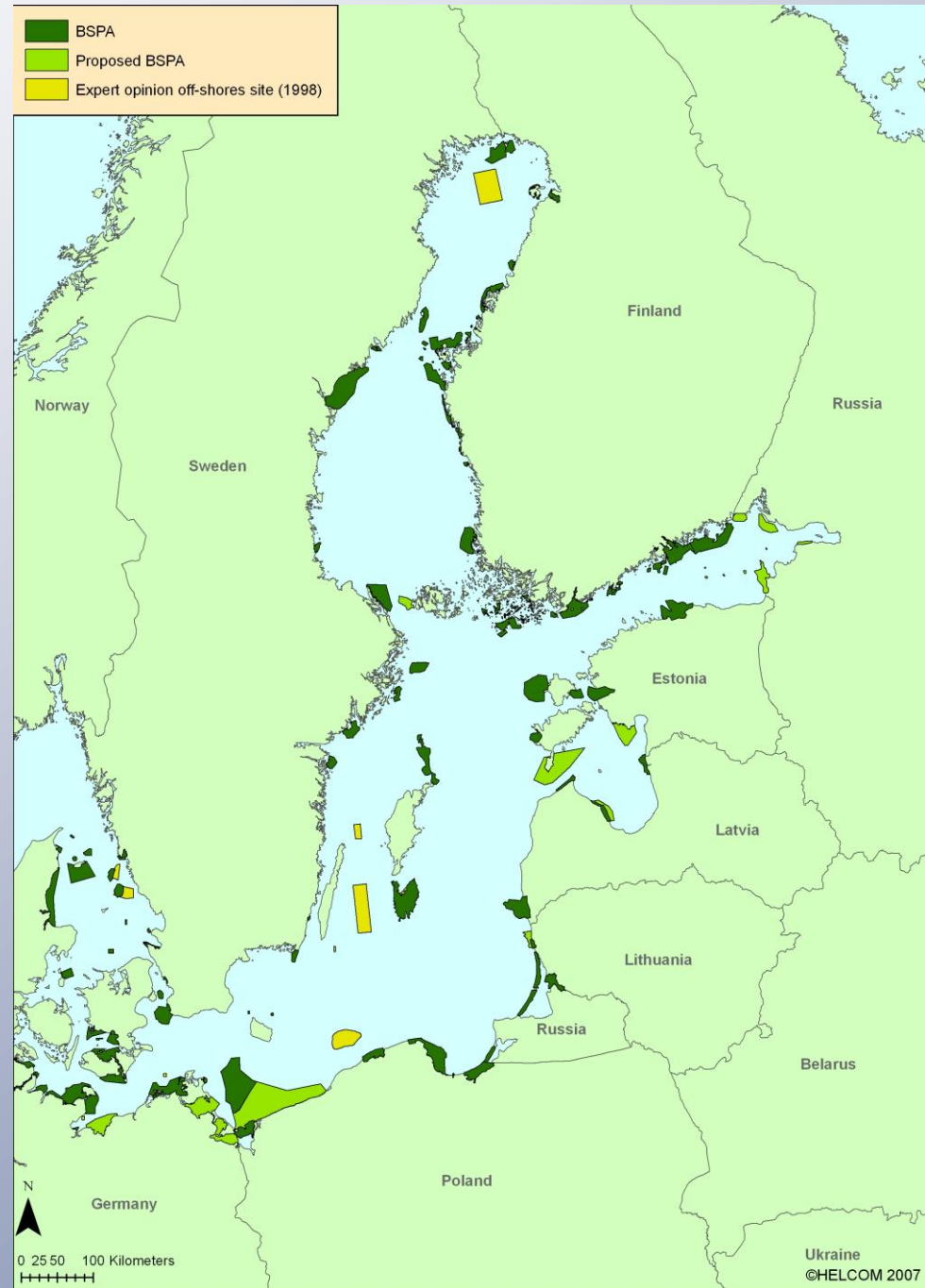


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Baltic Sea Protected Areas

111 sites:

- 86 Designated BSPAs
- 15 Proposed BSPAs
- 10 Expert Opinion 1998 sites

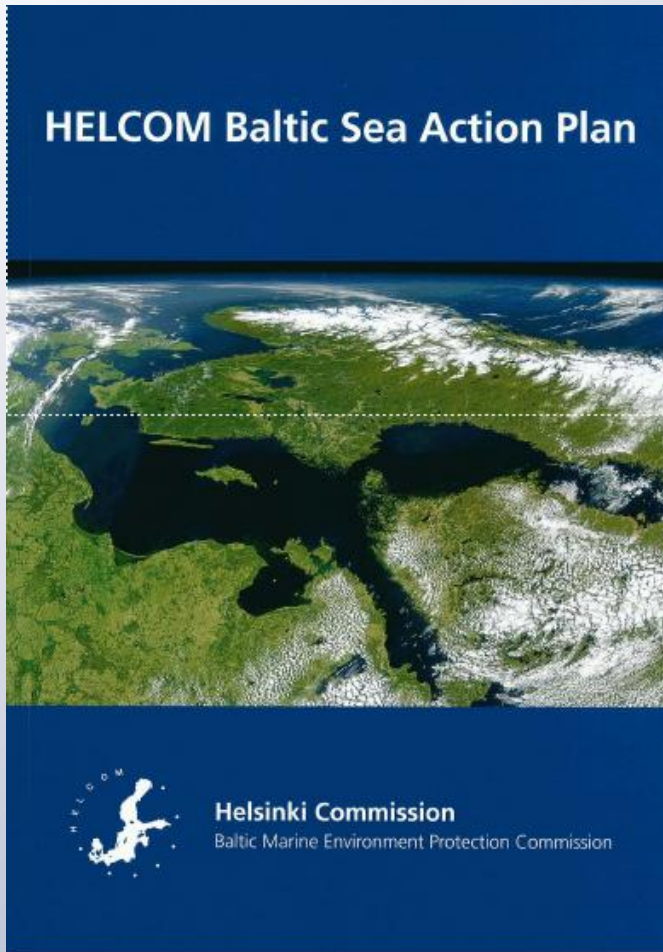


Work ahead

Despite remarkable progress in past years, the overall state of the Baltic Sea remains unsatisfactory. Many of the environmental problems, especially eutrophication, are proving difficult to solve, and it could take several decades for the marine environment to recover.



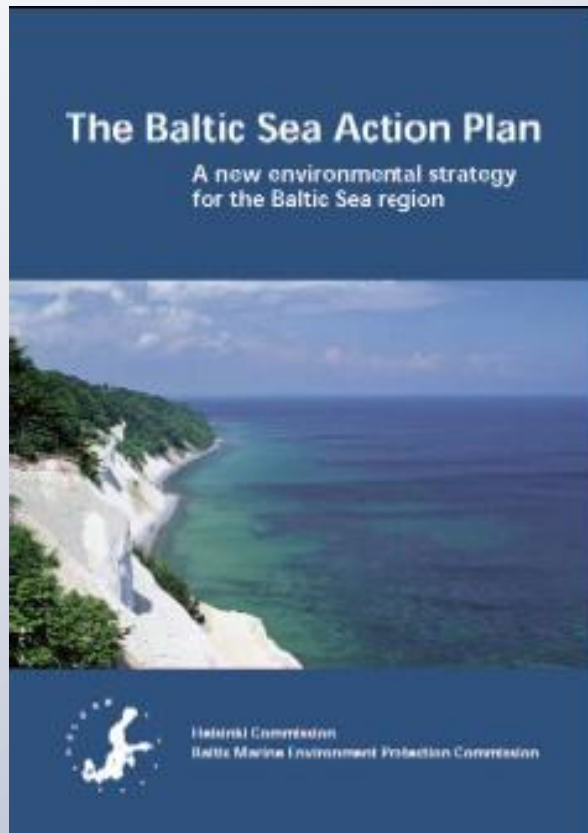
HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan



In order to ensure that all possible steps are taken to improve the state of the marine environment, HELCOM adopted an ambitious BALTIC SEA ACTION PLAN to drastically reduce pollution to the Baltic Sea and restore its good environmental status by 2021



HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan - adopted 15 November 2007



- Adopted by environment ministers and the EC representative
- Based on ecosystem approach to management of human activities
- Common vision, goals and objectives (with sub-regional, measurable targets and indicators)
- Four priority issues:
 - Eutrophication
 - Hazardous substances
 - Maritime activities (shipping)
 - Biodiversity and nature protection



HELCOM Information and Communication Strategy

Communications is one of the most crucial elements in today's work of HELCOM. The Commission attaches special importance to increasing public awareness about its activities and the environmental trends in the Baltic Sea.

In 2001, HELCOM adopted an **Information and Communication Strategy** in order to enhance the visibility of its work and to raise environmental awareness in the Baltic Sea Area. Its objectives are to:

- Present a professional, state-of-the-art platform for Baltic environmental information
- Provide up-to-date, user-targeted information about the Baltic Sea environment, and arguments for its protection
- Raise the visibility and accessibility of the HELCOM amongst its target groups and the public
- Increase political and public interest in the Baltic Sea environment and the work of HELCOM





Communication tools:

- HELCOM website
- Press releases
- Press conferences, interviews
- Newsletters, brochures, posters
- Books
- Scientific reports, thematic assessment
- GIS
- Teaching materials
- Documentary films



HELCOM website

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Helsinki Commission

Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission




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HELCOM hopes this website will provide inspiration for anyone wishing to gain an insight into the environmental issues affecting the Baltic Sea - and for everyone interested in protecting our common sea.


HELCOM News

- 16.05.2008 Kaliningrad to host a Stakeholder Workshop on the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic recovery plan
- 15.05.2008 HELCOM experts to discuss further actions to limit pollution to the Baltic Sea from land-based sources
- 30.04.2008 Almost twenty illegal oil discharges detected during Super CEPCO flights
- 28.04.2008 HELCOM HABITAT Group to discuss implementation of the Baltic recovery plan

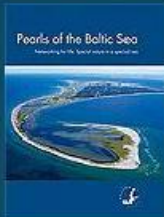
[More news →](#)

Baltic News

- 14.05.2008 A detailed 50-year survey of the state and evolution of the Baltic Sea released (IOW)
- 14.05.2008 EU marine framework directive to enter force (ENDS)
- 09.05.2008 MEPs get stuck into EU climate package debate (ENDS)
- 08.05.2008 Speech by President of Finland at the Überseedub in Hamburg (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland)




HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan wins European Regional Champions Award



HELCOM releases a book on the Baltic Sea Protected Areas - "Pearls of the Baltic Sea".

Click [here](#) to read about it.



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Some of the recent HELCOM communication, education & public awareness projects

The Baltic Sea – Discovering the sea of life



A male arctic tern, *Sterna paradisaea*, greets a female with a gift of fish as part of this species' typical courtship ritual.

Cormorants have fared well around the Baltic Sea in recent decades and spread back into many areas where they had previously disappeared.

Fishermen's unintentional catches

As the spring progressed on Gotland and its neighbouring islands, the flow of migrating birds slowed, and was replaced with enthusiastic displays of courtship and busy nest-building.

A tern approached his partner with a gift of a fish, which she readily accepted. Guillemots were busy on their steep rocky castles. Only one creature on this busy coastline lay motionless: a dead bird caught in a forgotten fishing net.

Carelessly spaced fishing gear frequently causes deaths among birds. Fishing lines can also get tightly tangled around a bird's leg, causing necrosis, and leading to the slow and painful death of a crippled bird.

As the dead bird's carcass slowly decayed on the shore, new life was teeming all around. The swans felt a growing urge to continue their journey. The illness of the male had caused them to lag behind their schedule. The illness of the male had caused them to lag behind their schedule. They glanced at each other, extended their necks, spread their wings, and started their accelerating run on the surface of the sea, soon building up enough speed to take flight.

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Good times for birds

The last century has been a good time for many bird species. Some have experienced a significant growth in population. In the Baltic, for example, the cormorant, *Phalacrocorax urinator*, and the avocet, *Recurvirostra avocetta* – appearance, since its curved beak points upwards at an angle in many species. Meanwhile, some species that only used to be found in parts of the sea have spread their territories northward. The large and colourful shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna*, and the avocet, *Recurvirostra avocetta* – appearance, since its curved beak points upwards at an angle in many species. Meanwhile, some species that only used to be found in parts of the sea have spread their territories northward. The large and colourful shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna*, and the avocet, *Recurvirostra avocetta* – appearance, since its curved beak points upwards at an angle in many species. Meanwhile, some species that only used to be found in parts of the sea have spread their territories northward.

One reason for the spread of these birds is a change in wildlife. Hunting and egg collecting have become less popular, and birds are able to live and breed successfully. More recently, many species have suffered from DDT, PCB and other toxic chemicals, a few of which have been recovered, thanks to effective measures to ban or limit their use.

Moreover, the increase in bird populations is also due to the effects of eutrophication, the process caused by excess nutrients in the water. Species that feed on phytoplankton have benefited from the proliferation of these creatures in the ecosystem.

On the other hand, in the last couple of decades, some bird populations have come to a halt. Some species' numbers have declined. One of the main reasons for this is the disappearance of nesting habitats, especially coastal meadows, which have been converted into recreational areas. Another factor in these declines is disturbance by boats, which can be fatal for small chicks. Eutrophication also plays a role here, as it may inhibit the growth of vegetation in shallow waters, a food source for plant-eating birds.



The Baltic Sea
Discovering the sea of life





In the underwater landscape, green algae occur near the surface, whereas red algae prefer to grow a bit deeper down.

Algae assorted by colour

While foraging in shallow waters with rocky bottoms, the cygnets were able to explore another type of underwater world: verdant gardens of algae.

Such gardens contain various species of algae growing attached to underwater rocky outcrops and loose rocks. One peculiar feature of these gardens is the way the algae are neatly assorted by colour. Green algae flourish closest to the surface. Below this green layer lies a zone of brown bladderwrack, and the deepest vegetation zone is dominated by red algae. This algal assortment by colour is common around the Baltic Sea, where the various types of algae tend to predominate at depths best suited to their requirements regarding the availability of sunlight.

during the next year will grow to form new algae identical to the parent. The *Ulva* algae, in turn, are divided into males and females. They reproduce by releasing large quantities of the algal equivalents of eggs and sperm. To avoid wasting these precious reproductive materials, the whole process is orchestrated by the temperature of water, and possibly also by the phase of moon.

The bladderwrack, *Fucus vesiculosus*, also reproduces sexually. At the tips of their "branches" individuals have vesicles that produce either sperm or eggs, which are then released into the water. In order to do this at about the same time, bladderwracks synchronise their releases with the full moon and the new moon.

Red algae are small, often less than ten centimetres long. One important species in the Baltic is *Furcellaria lumbriçalis*. Red algae can thrive at depths down to twenty metres, where very little light penetrates, but they more usually grow at depths of two to four metres, and as the autumn proceeds and light gets scarcer, they spread into shallower waters. As the winter sets in, most individuals die off, but small fragments nevertheless survive until the spring, when they start growing again.





Baltic herrings and many other small fish form large shoals as an effective defence strategy. When a predator comes looking for a snack, your odds of survival are a lot better if there are millions of similar fish around you

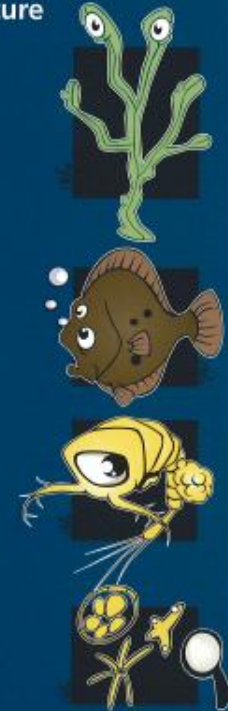


HELCOM teaching materials on Ecological Objectives



Lord of the Things

An adventure to discover Ecological Objectives – a healthy and diverse Baltic Sea of the future



Pearls of the Baltic Sea

New HELCOM book takes readers on a grand tour of the Baltic Sea Protected Area



Pearls of the Baltic Sea

Networking for life: Special nature in a special sea



From Rønner to Stavns

A large area in the Northern Kattegat includes Waters around Rønner, Læsø Frindel-Terrnberg bank, and Waters around Læsø. Here, reefs appear both above and under the water surface, and north of the Danish island of Læsø they contain a unique richness of algae. Out of a total of 290 species found in the Kattegat, these reefs harbour 238 of them, including many species rarely found elsewhere in this part of the Baltic region. Common seals come here in large numbers.

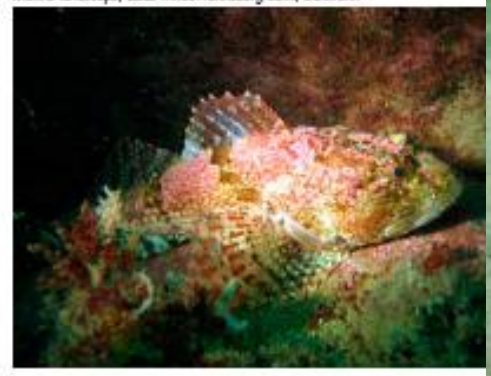
On shallow sandbanks permanently covered by water, boulders provide a good environment for algae such as spiral wrack, bladderwrack and serrated wrack. Eelgrass meadows grow over large areas of sandy bottoms in the southern parts of the area. Some sandy and muddy areas are above water during low water periods. All of these shallow "wet" areas, together with coastal meadows and dunes, make ideal places for waders and other birds.

Northeast of Læsø the water is salt and the currents are strong. A "hilly" landscape of highly diverse sandy and silty-muddy bottoms, at water depths that vary from 9 to 50 metres, opens up with stone reefs, bubbling reefs and a rich vegetation of algae. This is home for breeding harbour porpoises – during the summer over 1,000 animals may gather here, more than anywhere else in the Baltic. It is also a place for herring and wintering birds.

The bay of Aalborg Bugt with the Randers Fjord and Mariager Fjord, extends along the eastern coast of Northern Jutland, over large areas of shallow water, coastal meadows, dunes (klitter), wetlands and semi-natural grazing land.

As the Randers Fjord and its surrounding landscape is a textbook example of the development of this kind of fjord-like landscape after the retreat of the ice sheet, research and education takes place here.

Marine landscape, Læsø Frindel-Terrnberg Bank, Denmark.





Marine landscape, Læsø
Trendal-Tenneberg Bank, Denmark.



landscape along the fjord is characterised by large areas of old seabed and old high-river banks. The outer mouth area constitutes a transition zone where freshwater from the inner parts of the fjord meets the marine water of the Kattegat. It is a flat and shallow area, surrounded by reed beds, dikes, low-lying meadows and cultivated land. Sandy islands appear during periods of low water. Birds rest here in large numbers, and the waters harbour large stocks of salmon, sea trout, twaitt shad and sea lamprey.



The Baltic - A Sea of Surprises

- A Sea of Ice
- A Fragile Sea
- Voyagers
- Sensitive Shores



THE BALTIC
Sea of Surprises



Thank you!

For more information please contact:

Helsinki Commission
(HELCOM)
Katajanokanlaituri 6 B
FI-00160 Helsinki
Finland

www.helcom.fi

