

Short version

A policy for a healthy **Baltic Sea**

Why haven't we made more progress towards a healthy and vibrant inland sea - despite stated ambitions and a comprehensive regulatory framework, both in Sweden and the EU, to prevent overfishing and other environmentally destructive activities? We have sought answers to this question in scientific literature and in dialogue with our politicians.



What stands in the way of effective marine environmental work?

The literature review reveals several obstacles to effective marine environmental management. The main reasons are:

Conflicting rules and varying compliance requirements

Laws, regulations and directives affecting the marine environment are not always harmonised. They are often conflicting and divided among different institutions with different priorities and objectives. There are also gaps in coordination between different sectors - for example, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) continues to fund intensive agriculture with little regard for marine environmental objectives. Varying compliance requirements also affect the implementation of marine environmental decisions. Decisions where implementation is voluntary are less effective because there are no legal incentives and penalties for not implementing the objectives set.

Lack of co-operation and common understanding of the problem

With a population of more than 90 million people around the Baltic Sea, spread over 14 countries, 9 of which directly border the sea, cooperation among countries is a prerequisite for successful marine environmental work. The basic prerequisites are geopolitical stability in the Baltic Sea region and that the countries around the sea have a common understanding of prioritised environmental problems in the sea and how they should be solved. In the next step, joint environmental improvement efforts are needed for effective measures.

Dealing with new research findings and uncertainties

The Baltic Sea environment is constantly changing, and new research is increasing knowledge about the ecosystem and measures that can improve the marine environment. This knowledge needs to reach decision-makers and regulations need to be updated based on new research findings. Scientific knowledge about our environment is often subject to uncertainties. Guidelines are needed on how to communicate uncertainties to decision-makers - and what can be said based on the knowledge we have today and the risks and consequences of various decisions. When science is uncertain, policymakers need to make greater use of the precautionary principle.

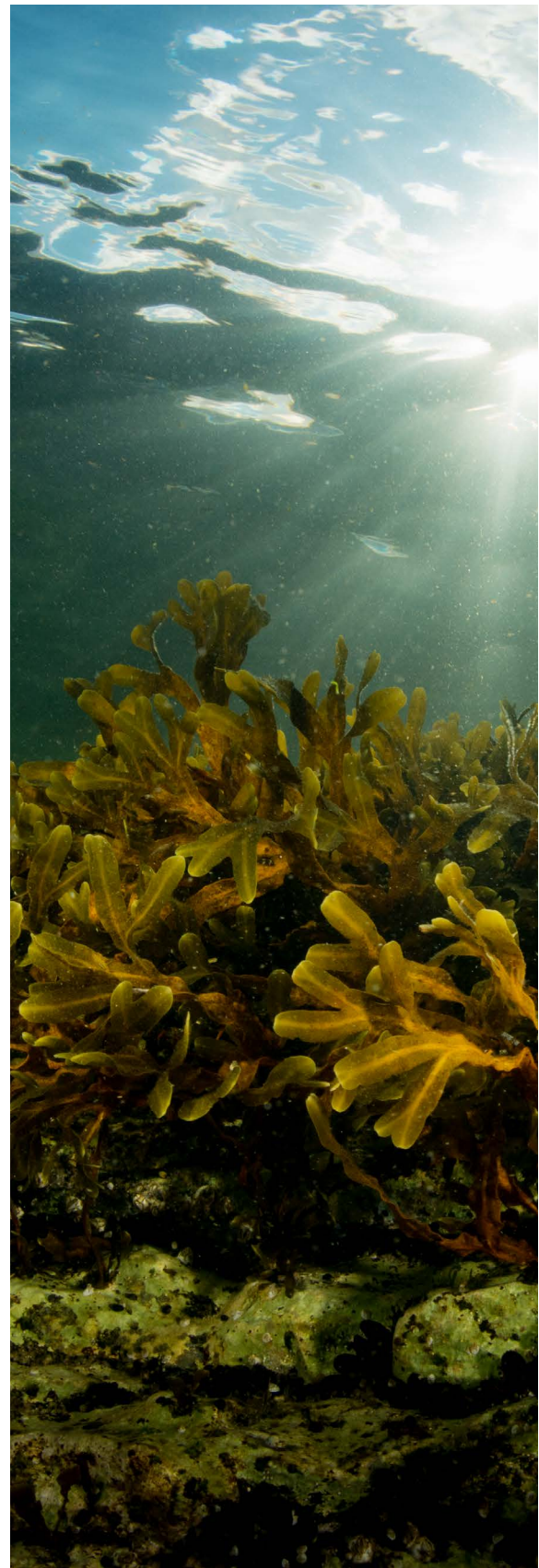


Photo: Nicklas Wijkmark/azoteliary.com

Lack of holistic approach and awareness of environmental problems

Research findings need to be based on different perspectives, including natural, social and economic sciences, to make informed decisions about the Baltic Sea. A broader perspective can ultimately lead to greater consensus on problems, causes and solutions. Effective governance and management of our inland sea also requires greater public awareness of the Baltic Sea's environmental problems. Scientists refer to a lack of ocean literacy, that is, knowledge about the sea, how it affects us humans and how we affect the sea. Without ocean literacy, it is difficult to understand how crucial the sea is for ourselves and our planet, which leads to people being less inclined to act on the problems that exist.

Lobbying can contribute to unsustainable resource use

There is a case for reviewing the influence of different lobbying organisations on decisions about the Baltic Sea environment. Lobbying can influence decisions in different directions - it can either contribute to more, or less sustainable resource use.

Our politicians agree on identified problems

During the interviews with our Swedish politicians, many of the problems above were highlighted. The different parties share perceptions of the serious environmental challenges facing the Baltic Sea and see the need for legislation, international co-operation and local action to reverse the negative trend. However, each party represents different solutions, often reflecting their ideological frameworks and priorities.



Photo: Lance Anderson/Unsplash

The parties** priority issues for the Baltic Sea



Emphasises the importance of reducing fishing pressure and banning industrial trawling, introducing a marine environmental law and strengthening the protection of the marine environment and ecosystems.



Wants to reduce fishing pressure, move the trawl limit and reduce eutrophication through a wide range of solutions such as upgraded wastewater treatment plants and advice to farmers.



Wants to save our endangered fish stocks, create sustainable fisheries that can contribute to food consumption and emphasises the importance of limiting eutrophication.



Emphasises the importance of stopping industrial fishing, introducing a marine environmental law and at the same time speeding up the work on measures for a healthy Baltic Sea.



Wants above all to reduce pollution and improve the water quality in the Baltic Sea, thus ensuring that the fish is safe to eat and creating a common understanding of the Baltic Sea's environmental problems within the EU.



Wants to find a balance in fishing that favours industrial fishing, the processing industry and small-scale fishing - and at the same time limit emissions through more effective upstream work.



Emphasises the importance of democratic societies as the basis for environmental work and to safeguard existing EU regulations with the aim of protecting fish stocks in the Baltic Sea. They also want to reduce eutrophication from private sewers and traffic.

*Politicians from all eight parliamentary parties were contacted for interviews - six out of eight parties accepted. Two MEPs were contacted for interviews - one of them accepted.

The way forward

The literature review and interviews with our politicians clearly show that change is needed. To achieve a policy for a healthy Baltic Sea and speed up the marine environmental work, we need to:

- **Harmonise rules and targets:** Ensure that laws, targets and guidelines for the marine environment are harmonised for more effective protection and better management of the sea.
- **Strengthen international co-operation:** Improve co-operation between the EU and HELCOM* to ensure they work towards common environmental goals.
- **Introduce new control mechanisms:** Introduce an independent review mechanism that can regularly revise and update regulations and management strategies based on the latest science.
- **Act in the face of uncertainty:** actively use the precautionary principle to make wise decisions even when the science is uncertain.
- **Assessing risks and consequences:** Consider the consequences and risks of decisions affecting the Baltic Sea environment.
- **Tougher penalties for environmental offences:** Ensure that violations of environmental laws are met with severe penalties to deter and prevent future offences.
- **A holistic approach:** take into account a wide range of scientific, social and economic aspects in marine environmental management.
- **A unified view of the problems:** Work to ensure that countries around the Baltic Sea have a common and well-informed view of the environmental challenges in order to bring about positive change.
- **Raise awareness:** Work to increase public understanding and engagement in the health of the Baltic Sea through education and communication.
- **Monitor lobbying:** Monitor and report on how different interest groups influence environmental policy to ensure that decisions favour long-term sustainable management.

*HELCOM or the Helsinki Convention is a regional agreement between the Baltic Sea coastal states to protect the environment of the Baltic Sea, including the Kattegat, and applies to the entire catchment area. The parties to the Convention are Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, the Russian Federation and the EU.



This is a summary of the report **A policy for a healthy Baltic Sea**. You can find the full report (only in Swedish) on our website WWW.BALTICWATERS.ORG

A policy for a healthy Baltic Sea

Ensure coherence among laws and targets affecting the marine environment.



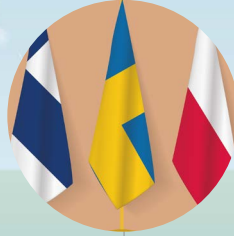
Take multiple perspectives into account in marine environmental management.



Raise public awareness and engagement in the health of the Baltic Sea.

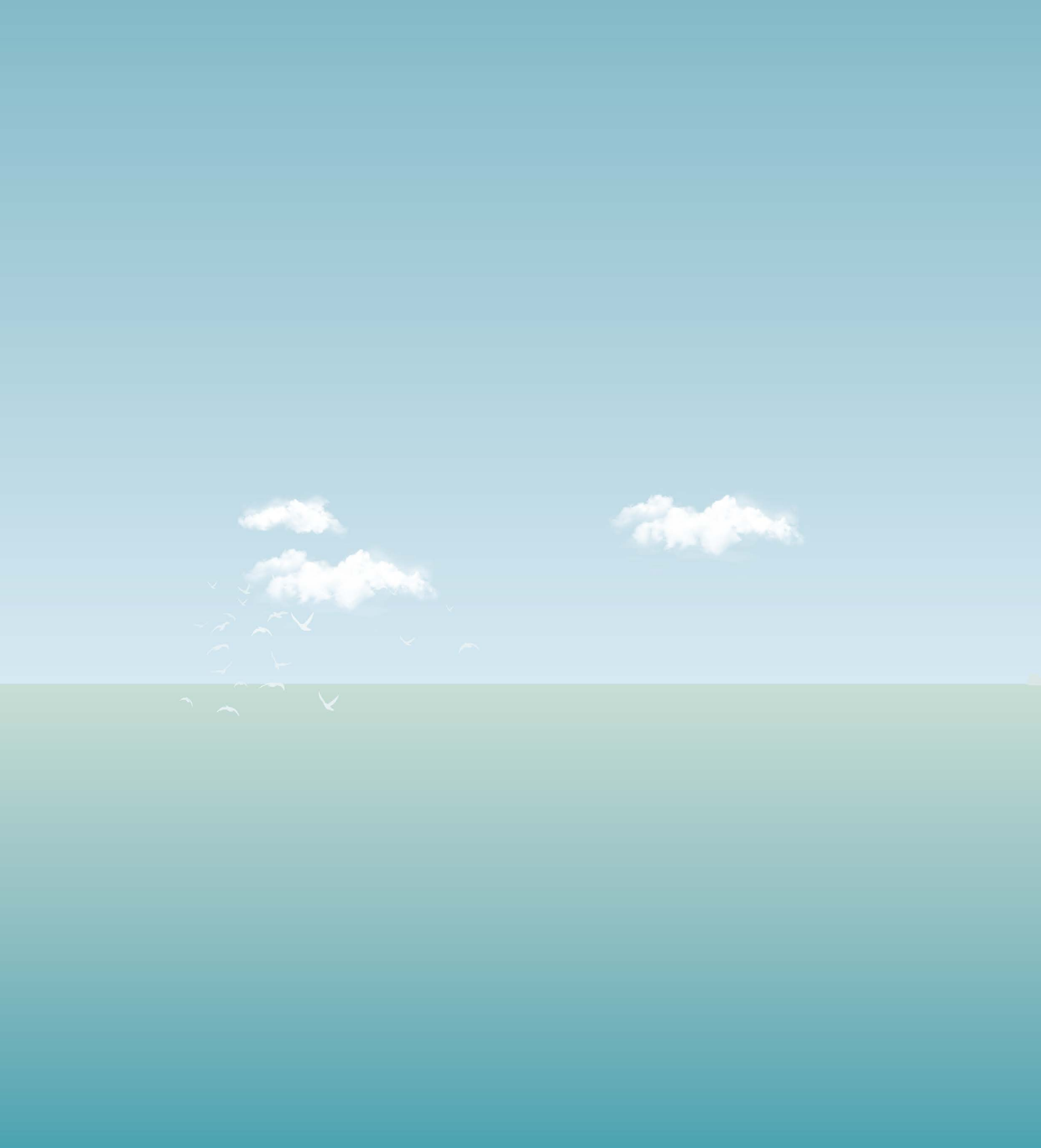


Create a common view of the environmental challenges in the countries around the Baltic Sea.



Use the precautionary principle to make wise decisions when the science is uncertain.





BalticWaters is an independent foundation engaged in efforts to improve the Baltic Sea environment. The foundation conducts large-scale environmental projects with focus on action-oriented measures, and applied research to show which measures can contribute to a healthier sea and viable fish stocks. The projects are carried out on land, along the coast, and in the sea. BalticWaters also develops and disseminates knowledge about the Baltic Sea to the general public, governmental authorities, and decision-makers. The aim is to increase knowledge about the challenges facing the sea and build public opinion so that decisions are taken, and measures are implemented.