

## **Minutes of the Espoo Baltic Sea subregion meeting 11**

During the intersessional period 2021–2023, Estonia and Poland are the two lead countries in the Espoo Baltic Sea subregion. Therefore, two meetings on cooperation on the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA are planned to be organized. The first meeting – organized by Estonia – took place in a virtual format on 3 November 2021. The agenda of the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting and the list of participants are attached in annex 1 and annex 2, respectively.

### **1. Opening of the meeting**

Kaupo Heinma opened the meeting. He emphasized the importance of transboundary impact assessment: actually now it is even a more important tool (both EIA as well as SEA) in early assessment of significant effects, e.g. in the context of green transition. He also pointed out that this is the second time for Estonia to organize the Espoo Baltic Sea subregion meeting: in 2012, Estonia organized the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting.

### **2. Practicalities and introduction of participants**

Rainer Persidski introduced the meeting's agenda and the participants. As the virtual meeting format was used, then also the related practicalities were explained.

### **3. Update on the activities under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA**

The Secretary to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA, Tea Aulavuo, gave an update on the activities under the Convention and the Protocol. Some important issues to be discussed at the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Working Group on EIA and SEA were flagged and explained in more detail: the activity about identifying synergies and possible cooperation activities in marine regions, the implementation reports of the Convention and the Protocol in the period 2019–2021, and the seminar on sustainable infrastructure.

### **4. The role of SEA in coordination of spatial planning, including environmental aspects, and in exchange of information between Baltic countries about the potential environmental effects of implementing such plans**

The first and major part of the Baltic Sea subregion meeting 11 was dedicated to maritime spatial planning and SEA. As the starting point, two presentations were made.

The first dedicated presentation was made by Joanna Adamowicz (General Directorate for Environmental Protection of Poland) on the role of transboundary SEA in maritime spatial planning, based on the experiences of Poland. The following issues were discussed:

- expectations toward maritime spatial planning for the Baltic Sea;
- interest of conducting transboundary SEA for maritime spatial planning;
- scope and form of transboundary consultation process;
- unrecognized potential of transboundary SEA.

It was concluded that practice has proved that the formal character of SEA makes the results and outcomes of consultations more applicable. So, transboundary SEA is an important tool for coordination of maritime spatial planning for the Baltic Sea, considering that the procedure is treated as already established and functioning platform for cooperation and exchange of information and opinions between the countries. However, promotion for instance in

cooperation with HELCOM is also necessary. And in particular, there is a need to develop coherent and comparable tool for assessment of cumulative impact for maritime spatial planning.

## **5. Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan – experiences of Estonia as Party of origin**

The second dedicated presentation was made by Triin Lepland (Ministry of Finance of Estonia) about the Estonian maritime spatial plan, including experiences of Estonia as Party of origin. In this case, the so-called extended impact assessment approach was applied: the impact assessment process integrated SEA, together with the assessment of social, cultural and economic impacts. For that, a broad-based expertise was used.

An overview of the transboundary consultation process was given as well. For example, several transboundary meetings and webinars have been organized which have been rather popular among neighbouring countries. Therefore, the conclusions emphasized that in addition to official proceedings, it is necessary to provide the opportunity for direct communication – this is relevant not only in terms of potential bigger issues, but also concerning minor clarifications which usually are needed. Regarding technical aspects, the lessons learned show that usually comprehensive translations are necessary, since summaries might not be enough.

## **6. Reflections and discussion based on previous presentations (*tour de table*)**

After the two presentations, discussion between the countries took place in the format of *tour de table*. The countries were invited to describe their approaches, experiences and reflections, in relation to maritime spatial planning and SEA. With the purpose of preparing for the discussion, some indicative questions had been drawn up: what kind of significant challenges (including procedural) have been experienced by the countries, but also what can be considered as most important benefits. In addition, what kind of general observations can be brought out regarding the countries' interest to participate in such transboundary consultations.

All in all, the main purpose was to find a reasoned answer to the overall question: is SEA in a transboundary context an effective instrument to exchange information about the potential environmental effects between countries and to improve protection of the environment of the Baltic Sea.

In general, countries mostly share the same experiences. Maritime spatial planning is a complex and comprehensive process which involves a wide number of authorities and organizations. The countries also need to take into consideration the large amount of data and various interests. Therefore, throughout the maritime spatial planning procedure, SEA is an important and valuable tool in terms of gathering information related to environmental effects and consultation with the authorities and the public. Furthermore, SEA provides a structured way of working and communication, also between the countries.

At the same time, as always there is room for improvement. Countries emphasized the need for cooperation between the concerned authorities, working groups and contacts – in addition to the current practice. Especially useful is to share practical experiences. The experiences gathered during this maritime spatial planning cycle can and should be used in the next round of such plans. For example, the results of monitoring are a valuable input. In addition, maybe next time the countries in the region can also apply a more coordinated approach of exchange of information and consultations.

## **7. Presentation of the results of the DAIMON (Decision Aid for Marine Munitions) project, a research project dealing with underwater munitions**

Doctor Michał Czub (Polish Academy of Science) made an elaborated presentation of the results of the DAIMON – i.e. Decision Aid for Marine Munitions – project which is a research project dealing with underwater munitions. In this context, the discussion of chemical weapons means the potential threats from chemical warfare agents which are toxic to humans and land based organisms. The Baltic Sea has become a global research polygon for the chemical warfare problem and continuous research has been carried out by several institutions, also in the form of the DAIMON project which took up the question how to proceed with the identified underwater warfare objects. As a result, a set of methods called the EcoTox Toolbox was developed which supports the case by case decision-making processes.

## **8. Organization of transboundary public hearing meetings in virtual/hybrid formats – countries' experiences (*tour de table*)**

The last discussion item in the agenda was about organizing transboundary public hearing meetings in virtual and/or hybrid formats – countries were invited to share their experiences. So far, such meetings have usually taken place physically, but above all due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic situation already for some time there is a practical need for hybrid meetings (i.e. physical meeting together with electronic format) and virtual meetings (i.e. meeting only in electronic format).

In general, some countries in the region have experiences in organizing transboundary public hearing meetings in virtual and/or hybrid formats. However, these experiences are still limited. At the same time, organizing such meetings as part of domestical impact assessment procedures is rather common now.

When comparing physical meetings and virtual or hybrid meetings, in practice both formats may have certain advantages as well as disadvantages. In both cases, the issue of potential difficulties related to the possibility to participate may come up. For instance, in case of physical meetings mainly due to the venue, in case of virtual meetings potential technical hindrances (yet a wider possibility to participate via internet). At the same time, the aspect of costs can be brought out as an important factor. Also the issue of simultaneous translation is very relevant.

Nevertheless, countries are gathering more experiences in this regard and in conclusion, it is very likely that the format of virtual and/or hybrid meetings will prevail in the future.

## **9. Any other business**

Poland informed the countries about the plan to organize the next Espoo Baltic Sea subregion meeting hopefully as a physical meeting in summer 2022.

## **10. Conclusions and closing of the meeting**

Rainer Persidski thanked the participants and closed the meeting.

## ANNEX 1

### ESPOO BALTIC SEA SUBREGION MEETING 11 AGENDA

Date: 3 November 2021, 10.00–16.30

Venue: virtual meeting (Zoom link will be sent to the participants separately)

**10.00–10.15 1. Opening of the meeting**

*Kaupo Heinma, Ministry of the Environment of Estonia*

**10.15–10.35 2. Practicalities and introduction of participants**

*Rainer Persidski, Ministry of the Environment of Estonia*

**10.35–11.00 3. Update on the activities under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA**

*Tea Aulavuo, Secretary to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA*

**11.00–11.30 4. The role of SEA in coordination of spatial planning, including environmental aspects, and in exchange of information between Baltic countries about the potential environmental effects of implementing such plans**

*Joanna Adamowicz, General Directorate for Environmental Protection of Poland*

**11.30–12.00 5. Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan – experiences of Estonia as Party of origin**

*Triin Lepland, Ministry of Finance of Estonia*

**12.00–12.15 Coffee break**

**12.15–13.30 6. Reflections and discussion based on previous presentations (*tour de table*)**

*Discussion hosted by Rainer Persidski, Ministry of the Environment of Estonia*

**13.30–14.30 Lunch**

**14.30–15.15 7. Presentation of the results of the DAIMON (Decision Aid for Marine Munitions) project, a research project dealing with underwater munitions**

*Dr. Michał Czub, Polish Academy of Science*

**15.15–16.00 8. Organization of transboundary public hearing meetings in virtual/hybrid formats – countries' experiences (*tour de table*)**

*Discussion hosted by Rainer Persidski, Ministry of the Environment of Estonia*

**16.00–16.15 9. Any other business**

**16.15–16.30 10. Conclusions and closing of the meeting**

## ANNEX 2 – List of participants

Country/ organization	Name	Authority
<b>Denmark</b>	Christina Lea Hoff Johansen	Ministry of the Environment and Food
	Helle Ina Elmer	
	Sif Zimmermann	
<b>Estonia</b>	Kaupo Heinma	Ministry of Environment
	Sigrid Soomlais	
	Rainer Persidski	
	Rauno Künapuu	
	Kaspar Anderson	Ministry of Finance
Triin Lepland		
<b>European Commission</b>	Milena Novakova	
<b>Finland</b>	Lasse Tallskog	Ministry of Environment
	Seija Rantakallio	
<b>Germany</b>	Alice Kinne	Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety
	Lukas Vollmer	
<b>Latvia</b>	Sandija Balka	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development
<b>Lithuania</b>	Beata Vilimaitė Šilobritienė	Ministry of Environment
	Rasa Griskeviciene	
<b>Norway</b>	Mari Lise Sjong	Norwegian Environment Agency
<b>Poland</b>	Dorota Toryfter-Szumańska	General Directorate for Environmental Protection
	Joanna Adamowicz	
	Joanna Przybyś	
	Marta Truszevska	Ministry of Infrastructure
	Natalia Zając	
Michał Czub	Polish Academy of Science	
<b>Secretary</b>	Tea Aulavuo	Secretary to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA
<b>Sweden</b>	Elin Celic	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management
	Egon Enocksson	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
	Richard Kristoffersson	