

IOW Press Release of 20 February 2013

HELCOM workshop in Warnemünde: Experts agree on a position paper on the effects of climate change in the Baltic Sea.

On 5 and 6 February 2013 around 50 experts in Warnemünde came together, following an invitation of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) and the research program "Baltic Sea Experiment" (BALTEX), to provide advice on much-needed adjustments to the Baltic Sea Action Plan, whose implementation is aimed at restoring the ecological status of the Baltic Sea by the year 2021.

Please also refer to our press release dated 05.02.2013.

"The consequences of climate change for the Baltic Sea as stated in the present form of the Baltic Sea Action Plan are not sufficiently considered but urgently must be integrated into its comprehensive list of measures," says Ulrich Bathmann, Director of the Leibniz Institute for Baltic Sea Research Warnemünde (IOW) and host of the workshop. "HELCOM, as a link between science and policy, has recognized this need and has acted accordingly."

During the workshop, the 50 experts from all the Baltic Sea countries, including scientists, representatives of HELCOM and BALTEX, and experts from politics, the responsible authorities, and environmental organizations, discussed the latest research results and their consequences for the implementation of the Action Plan. On the final day, the participants agreed on a position paper with recommendations to be presented by the environmental ministers of the HELCOM Baltic states at a meeting in early October in Copenhagen.

The most important requirements set out in the position paper are as follows:

1. Climate change diminishes the positive effects of the Baltic Sea Action Plan measures that have been implemented to date. Therefore, especially the planned reductions of nutrient inputs should be intensified, for example in order to prevent the further spread of anoxic zones.
2. The impacts of climate change also exert additional pressure on the biodiversity of the Baltic Sea. Therefore, the already existing pressures exerted by humans on biodiversity should be significantly reduced, including the deposition of toxic substances such as PBT and pesticides, hunting and fishing beyond established limits, the by-catch of marine mammals and seabirds in fisheries, underwater noise, and especially nutrient runoff.

3. The warming of the Baltic Sea is creating new "ecological niches" for non-endogenous, invasive species. Monitoring programs should be designed as an early warning system, especially in ports and in the vicinity of fish farms, where the risk of immigration of so-called "alien species" is particularly high.

4. The oceans absorb about a quarter of the CO₂ released by human activities. The resulting acidification of the water and its consequences for marine organisms have hardly been investigated in the Baltic Sea and will have to be more diligently addressed in future research programs.

"The workshop again demonstrated the importance of international coordination in the Baltic Sea region in order to achieve its good ecological status", says IOW director Bathmann. "Collaboration between science and politics at all levels is therefore becoming increasingly important."

Contact:

Dr. Barbara Hentzsch, Public Relations, IOW
(Tel.: 0381 / 5197 102, Email: barbara.hentzsch@io-warnemuende.de)

Nils Ehrenberg, Public Relations, IOW
(Tel.: 0381 / 5197 106, Email: nils.ehrenberg@io-warnemuende.de)

The IOW is a member of the Leibniz Association, which currently includes 86 research institutes and a scientific infrastructure for research. The Leibniz Institutes' fields range from the natural sciences, engineering and environmental sciences, business, social sciences and space sciences to the humanities. Federal and state governments together support the Institute. In total, the Leibniz Institute has 16 800 employees, of which approximately are 7,800 scientists, and of those 3300 young scientists. The total budget of the Institute is more than 1.4 billion Euros. Third-party funds amount to approximately € 330 million per year. (www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de)

