



THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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Why has the Commission organised the Our Baltic Conference?

More than 85 million people live around the Baltic Sea basin. The Baltic Sea is of great value, offering many possibilities to develop profitable economic activities. This includes offshore renewable energies, fisheries, aquaculture, blue bio food and tourism – only to name a few.

The Baltic Sea is however the most polluted sea in Europe. It is affected, amongst others, by biodiversity loss, climate change, eutrophication, and elevated levels of contaminants such as pharmaceuticals and litter, in particular plastic waste.

The aim of the event is to take coordinated action among the EU and the 8 EU Baltic Member States to plan the removal of dumped munitions lying on the Baltic Sea's seabed. This situation causes the release of polluting chemicals affecting the marine ecosystem, and we need to address this problem together.

At this event we also want to highlight the progress that has taken place since the [first edition of the conference in 2020](#), by taking stock of the implementation of the 2020 Ministerial Declaration. At the same time, blue economy activities – those that use the ocean's resources sustainably in the Baltic Sea will be discussed.

What progress has been made since the first Our Baltic Conference of 2020?

The European Commission has produced a [report](#) to take stock of the implementation of the commitments of the 2020 Ministerial Declaration. The report shows the implementation is progressing well, thanks to initiatives adopted under the European Green Deal and thanks to efforts made by the EU Baltic Sea Member States at regional and national level.

These include:

- The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, and plans to revise legislation relating to water and pollution such as the proposal for a revised Urban Waste Water Directive.
- Implementation of the environmental and fisheries legislation are also having a beneficial effect to reduce pressures from marine litter, underwater noise and seabed loss and avoid degradation of the marine environment, notably by setting new limits in those areas.
- At regional level, the HELCOM (Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission) updated Baltic Sea Action Plan has provided a roadmap to make these commitments more concrete and ensure that the Baltic Sea ecosystems are preserved and restored.

What are the new commitments and how will they help making the Baltic Sea a healthier place?

A large quantity of chemical and explosive munitions were dumped in the Baltic Sea during World Wars I and II. This situation raises environmental concerns since the corrosion of munition casings due to mechanical and chemical processes results in the release of chemicals contained in the munitions. Additionally, chemical munitions have remained on the seabed far longer than originally intended.

Recognising the urgency of this situation and the long-lasting environmental damage that it entails, Member States and the Commission commonly agreed on a list of commitments that aim to clean the Baltic Sea of submerged munitions, making it more sustainable for our generation and those to come.

What is the link between these commitments and the improvement of the region's blue economy?

The blue economy refers to the sustainable and responsible use of ocean resources and marine environments to foster economic growth, create jobs, and promote social well-being, while taking into account environmental conservation and ecological balance.

In addition to the evident environmental implications generated by submerged munitions, from a blue economy perspective, they also impede the development and construction of offshore renewable energy sites.

While posing physical danger for example to fishing vessels, significant issues can also arise from the potential contamination of aquaculture sites due to the release of chemicals. The increasing need for the use of the seafloor and thus increased probability of encountering sea-dumped munitions heightens such risks.

How does this conference contribute to addressing the difficult situation of the Baltic Sea ecosystem, including of the fisheries sector?

This conference takes stock of the state of implementation of the commitments made at the last Our Baltic conference in September 2020. This will enable the participants to identify outstanding issues, which is a first indispensable step for addressing them.

Given the severe ecosystem problems of the Baltic Sea, the conference will help to establish short- to medium-term actions that Member States can take, such as nature-based solutions like mussel farming to restore deoxygenated zones. These measures can improve the Baltic Sea's ecosystem health, so that the needs of fish stocks for survival and thriving can be better met.

This is the best way to allow a future for fishers and fish stocks in the Baltic Sea. For now, many indicators are in the red for essential fish stocks such as cod and certain herring stocks. Without large scale cross-border measures by Member States to restore the living environment for fish in the Baltic Sea it seems very unlikely to recover the fisheries. For fisheries measures to deploy their full impact, the living environment for fish stocks needs to be restored first.

What is the Commission doing to support Member States remove dumped munitions?

The Commission is fully committed to address the issue of submerged munitions in the Baltic Sea through a comprehensive approach and through significant funding. A call for proposals was launched on 28 September 2023, for a €2 million project to:

- Strengthen cooperation on unexploded munitions among the Baltic Sea Member States;
- Identify and fill gaps in knowledge and data;
- Develop criteria and recommendations for priority areas;
- Encourage the sharing of data and best practices among relevant entities in the Baltic Sea Region;
- Raise awareness.

The project is expected to last 2-3 years and should be submitted by a consortium of at least 3 applicants from 3 different eligible countries participating in and/or cooperating with the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

In the past, the Commission gathered stakeholders, regional authorities, and the scientific community to assess the situation and identify challenges. The Commission has also funded research projects to monitor and evaluate the impacts of pollution linked to conventional and chemical weapons. A dedicated study funded by the Commission in 2021 analysed the data and mapping information available on unexploded ordnances (UXO), as well as the capabilities and technologies available to address the issue. The study revealed that the Baltic Sea is one of the most impacted sea basins in terms of pollution.