

June 6, 2003 – Plenary Session VI

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The Baltic Sea is recognised by WWF as a European and Global priority. The Baltic has been included in the Global 200 Ecoregions identified by WWF as the 200 most important areas in the world to conserve.

The Baltic Sea has been recognised as a Global 200 Ecoregion due to its important and distinctive biological diversity, and because of the threats it faces.

WWF works in all the countries around the Baltic Sea, through national WWF organisations in the west, through WWF offices in Poland and Latvia, and through independent partner organisations in Estonia, Lithuania and Russia (St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad).

Due to the recent recognition of the Baltic Sea as a global priority, WWF is presently working to establish a new, coherent programme for the Baltic. The work is carried out jointly by people from all the countries around the Baltic.

WWF has chosen a holistic approach in this programme development. We are looking at:

- Social and cultural factors
- Economy, and
- Ecology

We are trying to identify the **root causes** of the problems faced by the Baltic Sea, and developing a **long-term vision** for the area. The vision is about re-creating a Baltic Sea with the natural values it once had, as a place that people around the sea will be happy with and proud of, and which will fulfil their needs.

The vision translates into a number of key **immediate priorities for WWF's work in the Baltic region:**

Shipping

The Baltic Sea must be declared a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) by the IMO, and there must be corresponding new regulations of shipping (shipping routes, pilotage, etc.). Existing plans in this direction need to be accelerated. Immediate priorities include:

- Policy and campaign work in all the countries, and at the European and Global level
- Development of specific, local proposals for implementation (shipping routes, pilotage, etc.)

Protection of marine and coastal nature

Work to establish networks of marine and coastal protected areas must be intensified in accordance with the long list of international decisions in this regard, latest at the recent G8 meeting in France. Immediate priorities include:

- Develop specific proposals for networks of protected marine and coastal areas under for EU Natura 2000 scheme in the new EU member states.
- Develop proposals for networks of protected marine and coastal areas along the Russian coasts.

Fisheries

Fisheries in the Baltic Sea are unsustainable from all angles. Not only for the fish stock and the ecosystems, but equally so for the fishermen. There is a real crisis, which must be solved very quickly. The crisis should also be seen as a possible basis for an improved dialogue between various stakeholders in the fisheries. Immediate priorities include:

- Establishment of sustainable management regimes for key species, including a moratorium on cod fishing as recommended by ICES, and measures to ensure continued progress for the Baltic Salmon.
- Initiatives to engage consumers and use the market, i.e. through informing the public as has happened in Sweden through WWF Sweden's Fish Consumer Guide.

Coastal protection and management / Sustainable rural development

Ecological functions of coastal ecosystems must be maintained—or be restored, where they are lost. Key types of areas include coastal wetlands, lagoons, and free-flowing rivers. This is an important part of a strategy to reduce the runoff of nutrients to the Baltic Sea—as a complement to securing a sustainable reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) by means of a much stronger focus on sustainable rural development. Immediate priorities include:

- Policy work to influence the upcoming CAP reform, active in both old and new member states.
- Model projects to show solutions in practice, in sites like: Nemunas River and Kursiu Lagoon (Lithuania and Russia), Vstula River, Finnish Archipelago Sea, etc.

EU Accession

Much work has already gone into the EU Accession issue, and a number of potential improvements can be seen on the environmental front. This necessitates, however, that the process is followed through from the present stage of having legislation and institutions in place to a new stage of implementation, for which the countries in the eastern Baltic Sea still lack important capacity. Immediate priorities include:

- Working with new member states and NGOs there to secure implementation of legislation.
- Working in the old member states to develop new development visions for important parts of society, e.g. agriculture. This in order that the western development model ceases to be the unquestioned driving force for growth and development all over.

Engaging business

Business is a key part of the problems facing sustainable development, but could and should also be a key factor in the solutions. WWF has strong experience in working with business in the west, but not yet much experience in the east, where the experience in these things is also much more limited. Immediate priorities include:

- Engage more business partners in finding sustainable solutions
- Engage potential business partners in the east

In addition to these immediate priorities, WWF will also be working on issues related to:

- Climate change
- Toxic chemicals

However, in the near future these issues will not be high priorities for activities in the Baltic, but will rather be worked on in global or European forums.

The overall challenges as WWF sees them are:

- Much more support and investment is needed in the area of Baltic sustainability.
- There is a specific need for support to NGOs in the east, where capacity and funding opportunities are not near enough for them to deal sufficiently with these issues.
- Partnerships need to be established for exchange of information and ideas, and for specific joint action between various types of partners:
 - o Governments and inter-governmental institutions
 - o Farmers and fishermen
 - o Local government
 - o Business
 - o Churches and religious groups

This symposium can, I hope, be the inspiration for such kinds of partnerships. I believe this is a challenge for all of us: How can we establish productive relations with new partners, for example the churches?

I can promise two things:

- WWF will do all in its might to solve the problems of the Baltic Sea within the priority areas mentioned, and we will achieve important results.
- These results will not be enough, however, so we need your support and/or partnership to bring us all forward.