

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013

Environmental Statement

1.1 Introduction

This statement has been produced as part of the approval of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. The statement concludes on the way in which the integration of environmental considerations has taken place as part of the decision of the Joint Programming Committee to finally adopt the Operational Programme by 13 November 2007.

The SEA process throughout the programming of the Baltic Sea Region Programme was started in June 2006, by the submission of a scoping report in which environmental issues, objectives and indicators relevant to the environmental assessment were identified and submitted to national environmental authorities through summer 2006.

On the basis of the submissions and comments received to the draft scoping report scope of the environmental assessment was decided and the work of producing a draft environmental report which was issued in November 2006 took pace - by providing a first environmental assessment of the BSP 2007-2013, version 3, dated 3. July 2006.

Both the scoping report and the environmental report were submitted for consultation among national environmental authorities in the countries under the Baltic Sea Region Programme; the environmental report and the draft operational programme, in addition, among the wider public in the countries under the Region Programme. Appendix 4 of the Final Environmental Report summarises the comments received during the consultation processes.

1.2 Contents

According to Article 9(b) of the Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, the environmental statement has been prepared on the basis of and attached to the final Operational Programme (programme) and include a summary of

- how environmental considerations have been integrated into the programme
- how recommendations and comments from the environmental report have been incorporated into the programme and how the consultation responses to the Scoping report and the Environmental re-

port have been considered in both the SEA process and the Programme.

- the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with.

In addition to the three points outlined above, the environmental statement provides a decision for how monitoring of the environmental effects of the implementation of the programme (Article 9(c) of the Directive) must be carried out.

1.2.1 Integration of environmental considerations into the programme

To what extent do the aims of the BSR Programme 2007-2013 emphasise sustainable development?

The general objective of the programme as well as one out of four objectives of the programme, emphasise sustainable dimensions vested into the objectives adopted.

To what extent do the objectives of the priorities of the BSR Programme 2007-2013 emphasise sustainable development?

The third priority, "Management of the Baltic Sea as a common resource", focus on environmental management explicitly.

The second priority, "to strengthen the development towards a sustainable, competitive and territorially integrated Baltic Sea Region by connecting potentials over the borders", has a specific target of at least five projects increasing the role of sustainable transport. It is, however, difficult to assess the significance of this target, as the total number of projects within this area is unknown.

In addition, the programme features five horizontal thematic issues of which one directly concerns ensuring sustainable environment. It is however, difficult to see through how this thematic issue will be applied in the selection of project applications to be supported.

The implementation provisions mention the establishment of national sub-committees consisting of authorities and non-governmental organisations, including environmental organisations to be involved in the implementation of the Programme.

To what extent is there an environmental impact by the projects to be expected?

At this stage it is hard to assess in detail to which extent an overall significant environmental impact from the programme activities may be expected. The objectives of the programme, its priorities and areas of interventions are in line with European and member states' environ-

mental policies (including Norway) and as far as documents have been made available during the SEA process also with policies of the partner countries Russia and Belarus.

It has only been possible to identify relevant environmental issues and criteria to be considered in the environmental assessment for a limited number of areas of interventions given in the text under each priority. More than half of the areas of intervention relate to activities which can be characterised as process designs aiming at changing processes and/or working modes in or of different societal segments. Such process designs may in the longer run lead to a change in practices and policies that may - as a consequence of including considerations of possible environmental impacts into the design of policies and or changes to practices - pave the way for changes in environmental impacts as related to their extent and direction.

The remaining areas of interventions relate to what may be called project designs, where it was possible to assess the likely environmental impacts.

If any significant impacts are to be expected these are primarily *positive* impacts that may contribute to a general minimization of environmental impacts of existing activities and practices across the Baltic Sea region. The only issues where potential negative impacts are identified are land use, land take and transport demand. However, this does not mean that the possibility of negative environmental impact from the programme on other issues can be excluded.

More detailed assessment of environmental impacts may only be done when the cooperation activities financed by the programme become fleshed out in funded initiatives rather than at this stage of the programming. For the purpose of ensuring that the integration of environmental considerations takes place when developing concrete activities under the programme a so called downstream environmental screening mechanism shall be included in the Programme Manual intended for application during funding application procedures.

1.2.2 How has the environmental report and results from public consultations been taken into account in the final Programme?

To what extent have the consultation responses to the Scoping report and the Environmental report been considered in the SEA process?

The scoping report was submitted to the national environmental authorities in the countries under the Baltic Sea Region Programme for comments. Very few comments were received and to the extent possible

the received comments have been accommodated by the inclusion of the following items in the Environmental Report:

- an environmental baseline description based on the latest report on the status of the environment in Europe
- brief account of the EU Environmental Policy Framework
- an assessment of the relevance and consistency of the proposed BSR Programme to the EU Environmental Policy Framework

National consultation of the draft Environmental report took place from July to the end of October 2006.

Submissions were received from Norway, Finland, Sweden, Germany, and Denmark. Few of the comments received were directly related to the contents of the draft Environmental Report. Some of these comments gave rise to amendments of the Environmental Report. The amendments incorporated are:

- assessment of the 0-alternative (likely significant environmental impacts from not adopting the programme as is)
- insertion of a new appendix IV to this report containing an account of all submissions received from consultation
- clarification of some headings employed in the draft Environmental Report (heading of chapter 4) and some of the headings employed in appendix II)
- insertion of this section containing a brief account of the amendments to the Environmental Report

Comments to the draft Environmental Report not incorporated in the report were concentrated on:

- the environmental objectives against which the assessment were carried out should have included regional environmental objectives (specific reference to HELCOM objectives) as well as to national environmental objectives

The reason for not including the environmental objectives adopted by regional and national authorities/organisations was that the rather abstract nature and lack of precision in the directions for support, as well as in the definition of strategic projects, did not make it relevant to include further environmental objectives than those adopted at the European Community level. It was simply deemed fruitless to provide yet another set of policy framework objectives when the programming was deliberately held at an abstract level.

It was specifically assessed during the environmental assessment phase that the inclusion of these additional environmental objectives would not lead to an enhanced identification of probable and likely significant environmental impacts.

Other comments received that affects the way in which the integration of environmental considerations could be catered for in the implementation of the BSR Operational Programme

- the downstream assessment procedure proposed in chapter 7 of this report should be incorporated into the Programme Manual as well being highlighted in the Implementation Chapter of the final BSR Operational Programme.

The downstream assessment procedure has been integrated into the latest version of the programme document's chapter on SEA and will be included in the Programme Manual.

To what extent have the recommendation and comments from the environmental report been considered in the Programme?

The environmental assessment presented in the environmental report (November 2006) was limited for two reasons (cf. the environmental report):

- the **characteristics** of the directions for support
- the **level of detail** in the description of the directions of support

Some amendments were made in the final draft version of the Programme compared to the July 2006 version of the Programme upon which the environmental assessment is based.

The most significant one is the inclusion of an additional area of support under Priority 3, Enhanced maritime safety, which is likely to have a positive impact on the environment.

Other amendments to areas of support under the Programme are proposed but these are minor and are mainly proposals for a change of wording.

The system of indicators for measuring programme performance has been developed considerably since the July 2006 version of the Programme which provides some kind of direction of the type and character of projects to be supported as well as their relative importance under the Programme - measured in numerical terms. There is no indication of their relative importance in terms of budget allocation.

Nor, is the programme explicit about criteria for selection of project applications to be supported, and hence there is no indication of the degree to which environmental considerations in the selection of applications will constitute a significant parameter in the selection of projects.

However, selection criteria will be laid down in the Programme Manual together with the downstream assessment procedure proposed in the Environmental Report. This procedure will ensure that environmental considerations are included in the assessment of individual project funding applications in case a project is not caught by the national environmental assessment procedures as established as part of the member state's implementation of Directive 2001/42/EC on the environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes.

1.2.3 Reasons for choosing the programme, in light of alternatives

The reason for adopting the programme is that the overall environmental impacts from the programme are deemed to be positive. The only alternative that has been considered at programme level is the 0-alternative. Many alternatives were considered in the refinement of the individual project criteria formulations. These alternatives have to some extent been considered because - inter alia - of their alleged environmental impacts.

1.2.4 Measures for monitoring of the Programme impact

Environmental monitoring of the programme will take place on two levels on a current basis throughout the Programme implementation period:

- at project application level
- at project implementation level

The procedure for a downstream assessment of project applications will cater for the monitoring at project application level.

A number of indicators for monitoring the programmes' environmental impacts have been developed and adopted in the programme.

The Operational Programme provides for the establishment of a Monitoring Committee.

[The Environmental Statement was approved by the Managing Authority of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 based on a mandate provided by the Joint Programming Committee of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 on 14 November 2007.]