

Baltic Coast Dialog

Roadmap

Identifying Priority Areas of Future Cooperation Requiring Transnational Conservation and Ecosystem Restoration Efforts



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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Stakeholder Network as a Basis for a Roadmap Development	3
3. Identification of Priority Areas Through Thematic Workshops	4
3.1 Workshop on Blue Restoration	4
3.2 Workshop Fisheries Management in MPAs: Impact and Regulation of Bottom Trawling ..	5
3.3 Workshop Coastal Biodiversity Management: Challenges and Opportunities of Non-indigenous Species in the Baltic Sea.....	6
3.4 Workshop Ecosystem-Based Management and Fisheries	7
4. Conference Sea of Opportunities: Collaborating Towards Effective Protection and Restoration of the Baltic Sea	7
5. The Roadmap	10
6. Conclusion	11

1. Introduction

Outcome Indicator II.1 assesses the extent to which the Baltic Coast Dialog has contributed to the development of a **strategic roadmap** that identifies priority thematic areas for joint, cross-border cooperation regarding conservation and ecosystem restoration in the Baltic Sea region. Within the project, “roadmap” refers to a structured framework, recommendations, and consensus-based action pathways that support long-term, transnational cooperation between environmental authorities, scientists, non-governmental organizations, fisheries representatives, and other key actors.

With this document the project aims to enable a **multi-stakeholder transnational process** that results in shared priorities, coordinated restoration approaches, and actionable guidance. These elements together constitute the foundational building blocks of a roadmap.

2. Stakeholder Network as a Basis for a Roadmap Development

A central achievement of Baltic Coast Dialog is the creation of a broad, cross-sectoral [network](#) involving actors from, but not limited to, **Germany, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden**. This multinational stakeholder landscape includes:

- Environmental and conservation NGOs;
- Fisheries organizations and practitioners;
- Marine and coastal scientists;
- National and regional authorities;
- Tourism and local community representatives;

This international network was created to interactively get in touch with other people and organisations that promote the conservation of the Baltic Sea. The network aims to advocate for the implementation of effective marine and coastal protection, ecosystem restoration measures as well as for sustainable fisheries management in the Baltic Sea. The network platform through LinkedIn promotes dialogue and develops synergies as well as joint perspectives between and within these stakeholder groups to act. Through this networking platform, we believe that sharing ideas and concrete actions that combine challenges and requirements of biodiversity and marine conservation will be of help for everyone.

The network itself forms a core component of the emerging roadmap: it provides the framework within which future cooperation can be continuously shaped, negotiated, and advanced.

3. Identification of Priority Areas Through Thematic Workshops

Throughout the project, a series of facilitated workshops served as structured instruments for identifying shared transnational priorities. Four key themes - **Blue restoration, Fisheries Management in Marine Protected Areas: Impact and Regulation of Bottom Trawling, Invasive species Management and Ecosystem - based management and Fisheries** emerged as pillars of the future cooperation roadmap.

3.1 Workshop on Blue Restoration

Overall and on an international level, participants collaboratively identified geographical, economic, and political conflicts that often hinder joint initiatives in restoring marine and coastal habitats. Bureaucratic obstacles reduce participation and slow project progress. A lack of reliable data and a predominantly top-down approach often overlook local knowledge and limit effective decision-making. Meanwhile, traditional practices like fishing are declining as tourism grows, creating new regional challenges.

Hence, the workshop identified one crucial priority area: to enhance cross-border restoration efforts and collaboration as well as mutual understanding. For this, it is essential to create more exchange formats that facilitate open communication among all relevant stakeholders. Simplifying legislation, for example by exempting restoration measures from the restrictions of protected area regulations and classifying them as “permissible actions,” would streamline approval and planning processes. Discussions also highlighted the need for coordinated restoration methodologies, cross-country monitoring, and harmonization of regulatory frameworks to improve habitat connectivity and ecosystem resilience across the southern and central Baltic Sea. Effective communication channels should be established both with and between stakeholders to ensure transparency and active participation. Additionally, integrating cultural, local ecological, artisanal, and professional knowledge into decision-making processes is crucial for developing sustainable and context-sensitive solutions.

In the workshop, seagrass meadows and salt marshes, were given special attention, requiring urgent cross-border restoration efforts

Moreover, participants raised the need for a one-stop-shop for projects and initiatives revolving around the Baltic Sea, which would improve the international collaboration among different stakeholders and working groups. This could be a potential future project or activity leading to a project.

See results of this workshop summarized [here](#)

3.2 Workshop Fisheries Management in MPAs: Impact and Regulation of Bottom Trawling

Stakeholders jointly recognized priorities such as:

For Policy & Environmental Organisations:

- **Legal Action & Enforcement:** Use legal means to stop illegal trawling, enforce existing rules, and push for stricter regulations.
- **Information & Transparency:** Gather data on trawling impacts and make it public.
- **Holistic Governance:** Create a Baltic-wide forum for all stakeholders to collaborate.
- **Public Pressure:** Mobilize public support to influence political will.

For Scientists & Researchers:

- **Data-Driven Research:** Provide strong scientific evidence of the harm of trawling.
- **Improve Assessments:** Develop better models for evaluating fish stocks.
- **Collaborate & Communicate:** Work with stakeholders to translate science into action.

For Industry & Communities:

- **Sustainable Practices:** Adopt eco-friendly fishing methods.
- **Engage & Support:** Participate in discussions and support MPA goals.
- **Diversify & Preserve:** Explore new livelihoods and protect fishing heritage.

See also here the overarching document describing [*transnational objectives and joint recommendations to ban bottom trawling Activities in Natura2000 areas of the Baltic Sea.*](#)

3.3 Workshop Coastal Biodiversity Management: Challenges and Opportunities of Non-indigenous Species in the Baltic Sea

The following topics and common running themes were discussed by all the participants:

For Policymakers & Environmental Organizations:

- Stakeholders agree on the need for coordinated non-indigenous species (NIS) management efforts across countries; due to the specificity of the Baltic Sea, eradication is often not likely.
- Regional cooperation is key to successful management of non-indigenous species.
- Balancing prevention efforts with the reality of ongoing introductions of non-indigenous species remains a challenge.
- Continued efforts and persistence are necessary in addressing NIS challenges

For Scientists & Researchers:

- Shift of focus is needed from “native vs. non-native” species classification to functional ecological roles.
- Advance eDNA and citizen science initiatives to improve data collection.
- Develop interdisciplinary studies comparing regional invasive species dynamics.

For Industry & Local Communities:

- New fund for quick species eradication opened in 2025 for calls to help with invasive species eradication. More information available on [IUCN Save Our Species - Your partner to protect biodiversity](#)
- Encourage sustainable fisheries for invasive species like round goby to reduce their impact while providing economic benefits.
- Improve public education on invasive species and their management.
- Support businesses in adapting processing techniques for new commercial species.

3.4 Workshop Ecosystem-Based Management and Fisheries

For Policymakers & Environmental Organizations:

- Strengthen the enforcement of the Common Fisheries Policy's (CFP's) Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) mandate through legal action (e.g. challenging quota violations).
- Support regional EBFM-pilot projects (e.g. Stockholm Archipelago, see further examples [here](#)) to test co-management approaches.
- Advocate for HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan reforms to align fisheries with biodiversity goals.

For Scientists & Researchers:

- Develop practical EBFM metrics for International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) advice.
- Prioritize studies on climate-resilient fisheries and multispecies interactions.
- Expand fisher participation in data collection (e.g. BalticWaters' fisher surveys).

For Industry & Local Communities:

- Promote alternative livelihoods (e.g. restorative aquaculture like ReCod).
- Improve consumer awareness of sustainable Baltic seafood choices.
- Engage in regional working groups (e.g. HELCOM's EBFM network) to voice concerns.

4. Conference Sea of Opportunities: Collaborating Towards Effective Protection and Restoration of the Baltic Sea

Overarching Take-Away Messages:

- **Marine and coastal restoration must be treated as an integrated land-sea challenge**

Speakers repeatedly emphasized that the Baltic Sea's ecological crisis is inseparable from pressures originating on land (agriculture, nutrient run-off, coastal development). Restoration efforts must therefore link river basins, coastlines, and marine habitats.

➤ **Transboundary cooperation is essential — no country can solve the issues alone**

Whether discussing eutrophication, invasive species, sediment management, or fisheries, every presentation highlighted that the Baltic Sea's problems are regional and require shared data, harmonized regulation, and joint planning.

➤ **Strong political will and coherent governance remain key bottlenecks**

Despite many technical solutions being known, restoration and conservation measures are stalled due to:

- fragmented responsibilities,
- insufficient enforcement,
- inconsistent implementation across nations,
- conflicts between political priorities and ecological needs.

➤ **Ecosystem restoration offers both ecological and socio-economic opportunities**

Speakers showed that restoration improves biodiversity and benefits local communities through:

- coastal protection,
- climate resilience,
- fisheries recovery,
- tourism and recreation,
- nature-based economic opportunities.

➤ **Successful restoration is participatory**

Meaningful engagement of:

- local communities and municipalities,
- fishers,
- conservation groups,
- scientists.

These interest groups identified as a central success factor. Projects fail when stakeholders feel excluded.

➤ **Marine restoration must be climate-smart**

Sea-level rise, warming waters, altered species interactions, and marine heatwaves require restoration strategies that anticipate future conditions, not past baselines.

➤ **Knowledge gaps remain a major barrier**

Key gaps include:

- CO₂-sequestration quantification in marine habitats,
- impacts of bottom trawling on reefs,
- sediment dynamics for seagrass recovery,
- socio-economic valuation of marine ecosystem services.

➤ **Urgent need for standardized methodologies**

Across many topics, participants called for:

- common restoration standards,
- CO₂ accounting methods for blue carbon,
- harmonized monitoring protocols,
- mapping tools for identifying priority areas.

Key Lessons for Future Baltic Sea Cooperation:

- Start local, think regional
 - Local pilot projects must be embedded in a Baltic-wide strategy for maximum impact.
- Build long-term stakeholder trust
 - Relationships and communication are as important as technical solutions.
- Combine ecological and socio-economic perspectives
 - Restoration must deliver benefits for biodiversity and communities.
- Use science to fill knowledge gaps, but don't wait for perfect data
- Adaptive management is essential.
- Prioritize the most critical and feasible restoration sites
 - Especially where multiple ecosystem services (CO₂, biodiversity, nutrient retention) overlap.

5. The Roadmap

Across all four thematic workshops - Blue Restoration, Fisheries Management in MPAs, Non-Indigenous Species Management, and Ecosystem-Based Management and Fisheries - a clear running theme emerged: the Baltic Sea requires a coordinated, science-based, and truly transboundary approach to restoration and conservation, supported by shared data, harmonized governance, and active stakeholder participation. Despite their different areas of focus, all the workshops agreed on the need to identify and structure priority areas where joint action between the countries of the Baltic Sea region is indispensable. Throughout the facilitated discussions, participants collectively highlighted ecosystem types, governance gaps, operational needs, and policy bottlenecks that can only be addressed through regional cooperation.

These recurring elements formed the backbone of the emerging roadmap. Specifically, all workshops pointed to the necessity of:

- **Shared identification of priority habitats and pressure hotspots** (e.g., seagrass meadows, salt marshes, trawling-sensitive MPAs, high-risk NIS-introduction zones).
- **Harmonized methods for restoration and monitoring**, including CO₂ accounting for blue carbon, tracking invasive species, and coordinated stock assessments.
- **Aligned governance frameworks**, especially where national regulations differ or responsibilities are fragmented (e.g., fisheries enforcement in Marine Protected Areas, rapid response for invasive species, regional EBFM implementation).
- **Cross-border stakeholder participation**, ensuring that fishers, local communities, environmental NGOs, scientists, and administrations work with shared information and common objectives.
- **Climate-smart, adaptive management**, acknowledging that sea-level rise, warming waters, and biodiversity shifts require planning that anticipates future scenarios.

Taken together, the four workshops functioned as structured mechanisms for identifying where cooperation is most urgently needed, which actors must be involved, and which areas should form the basis for future Baltic-wide restoration and conservation efforts.

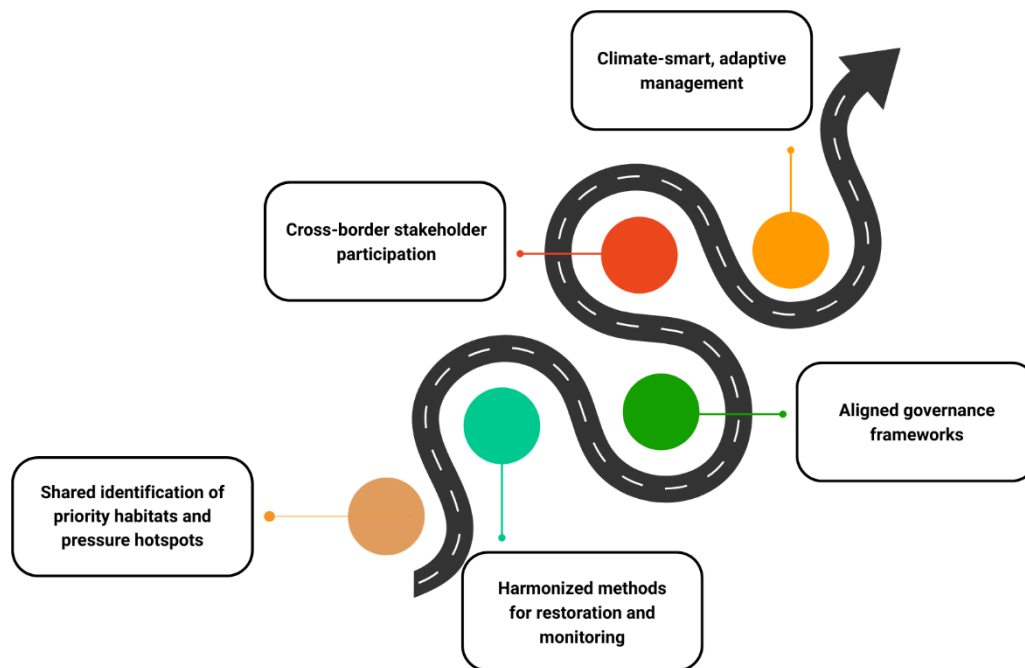


Fig. 1 – Backbone of the emerging roadmap

6. Conclusion

Throughout the project, the four thematic regional workshops successfully identified several transnational priority areas requiring future joint action in conservation and ecosystem restoration. The workshops produced a common understanding of where coordinated measures are essential - ranging from key habitat types (e.g., seagrass meadows, salt marshes, reefs), to governance challenges (e.g., fisheries management in MPAs, rapid response to invasive species), to systemic needs such as harmonized monitoring, shared data platforms, and cross-sector stakeholder engagement.

Collectively, these insights constitute the basis for the emerging roadmap. These priority areas of future cooperation, the actors required, and the specific ecological or governance challenges can only be addressed through joint Baltic Sea regional collaboration. The process demonstrates that the region now shares a clearer, science-based, and stakeholder-supported vision of where cooperative restoration and conservation efforts must focus the coming years.

See find all results and presentations of the workshops [here](#).