



WWF

STRATEGY



# WWF BALTIC ECOREGION PROGRAMME 2022-2027



# An opportunity

**T**he Baltic Sea is one of the planet's largest bodies of brackish water and is almost entirely enclosed by the nine countries surrounding it. It is a unique and fragile environment with a catchment area four times larger than the sea itself and home to around 85 million people. The sea provides food, livelihoods, and an important place for recreation and well-being. As a shared natural and cultural asset, caring for the health of the Baltic Sea also represents a long-term investment in the region's economic future. Opportunities for accelerating sustainable policies and sector specific incentives exist for regional industry to be forerunners in establishing a Sustainable (Blue) Economy.

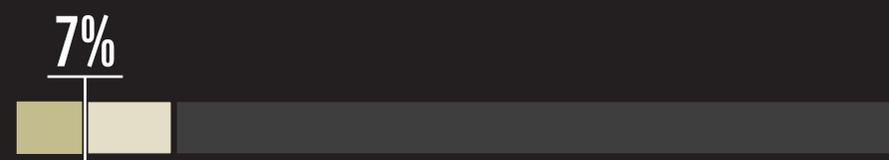
Transformational change is within reach. Nature and biodiversity have risen to the top of the political and corporate agenda like never before, recognising the interdependence of nature, climate and health due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Conservation of Biological Diversity, the EU Green Deal and the revised HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan set the stage for the coming decade to deliver on reversing the state of the Baltic Sea, if the frameworks are adhered to and actually implemented.

# The Challenge

**T**he Baltic Sea is not in a good state. A multitude of pressures affect its sensitive marine ecosystem of unique flora and fauna. Over the past 100 years, the Baltic Sea has degraded dramatically and is one of the world's most environmentally stressed seas. Human pressures have and continue to alter the ecological balance and deplete renewable resources faster than they can regenerate. Driven largely by multiple human pressures on the Baltic Sea environment – eutrophication, pollution and unsustainable fishing are the most severe, the current Baltic economy is greatly under-performing compared to its potential, further amplified by climate change and continued loss of biodiversity. Although frameworks and policies that could transform an ailing Baltic into a thriving sea do exist at the regional level, and improvements have been made, implementation has been sluggish. Policy is saying many of the right things, but policy makers are not yet doing them nor are they being translated into right action on the ground. There is still a lag and disconnect in applying a holistic approach to managing the pressures of human activities within the carrying capacity of the ecosystem.



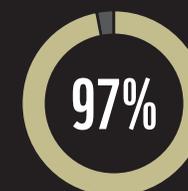
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In the Baltic Sea, only 7% of the marine area is covered by MPAs with a management plan, which accounts for less than half of the designated MPAs in this sea basin (16%)



of the entire Baltic Sea seafloor has been disturbed by human activity.



of the Baltic Sea area is still affected by eutrophication.

# Baltic Ecoregion Programme

**T**he Baltic Ecoregion Programme (BEP) is a regional platform made up of WWF and longstanding environmental organisation partners in each of the nine coastal Baltic countries - Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. Since the early 1990s, we have worked to identify solutions to restore the Baltic Sea to a healthy state. Representing one of the region's largest membership networks, the programme works with public and private sector partners toward ensuring a better future for nature and people.

BEP tackles the challenges and seizes the opportunities by participating actively at EU, regional and national policy levels and in cooperation with local communities and key stakeholders - such as fishermen, farmers, local industries and markets, and other conservation groups – to influence consumer behaviour and manage our shared marine resources in a sustainable way. Our mission is to provide vision, stewardship, leadership, coordination and support for regional delivery and provide an innovative and effective platform for building regional coherence linked to our WWF European and global network conservation goals on Oceans, Freshwater, Food and Finance.



Together possible

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**BY WORKING TOGETHER  
WE MAXIMIZE OUR COLLECTIVE  
IMPACT FOR EFFECTIVE CHANGE.  
LET'S TURN THE TIDE AND LEAVE A BETTER  
BALTIC FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.**

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# VISION 2050

A healthy, productive and resilient Baltic region, sustainably and equitably managed for the well-being of people and nature.

## WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE BY 2030:

- For public and private stakeholders at local, national and regional levels to commit to source-to-sea approaches in water management, sustainable agriculture and safeguarding species and habitats.
- For the Baltic Sea to be 100% managed via a coherent network of transboundary ecosystem-based marine spatial plans representing marine protected areas covering 30% of the sea, with one third of protected area (10% of the sea) being strictly protected.
- For environmental health to be factored into investment decisions by finance actors resulting in shareholders redirecting capital towards companies that value a Sustainable (Blue) Economy.

**T**he vision and strategy of BEP is to provide and support environmental stewardship in the region through tackling source-to-sea pollution and pushing for implementation of a Sustainable (Blue) Economy – an economy that provides social and economic benefits for current and future generations without depleting or degrading the ecosystems on which it depends. The Baltic region has the knowledge and financial capacity to achieve a Sustainable (Blue) Economy but it requires cooperation and more ambitious goals to achieve a circular economy, resulting in greatly reduced negative impact on the Baltic Sea, and robust monitoring and management plans. Our vision will be achieved through the following Theory of Change.

## LANDSCAPE

**OUR AIM.** Public and private stakeholders at local, national and regional levels commit to source-to-sea approaches in water management, sustainable agriculture and safeguarding species and habitats.

### OUR ACTIONS

- Push to harmonise HELCOM, EU Directives and national policies
- Advocate for integrating landscape and water management into national policies
- Conserve and restore land to enhance biodiversity, reduce nutrient runoff and help mitigate climate change
- Promote nutrient recycling and sustainable practices in food production

### OUR PROJECTS

- > Eat4Change LIFE for sustainable food diets
- > River and wetlands restoration
- > Baltic Sea Farmer of the Year Award

## SUSTAINABLE FINANCE

**OUR AIM.** Environmental health is factored into investment decisions by finance actors resulting in shareholders redirecting capital towards companies that value a Sustainable (Blue) Economy.

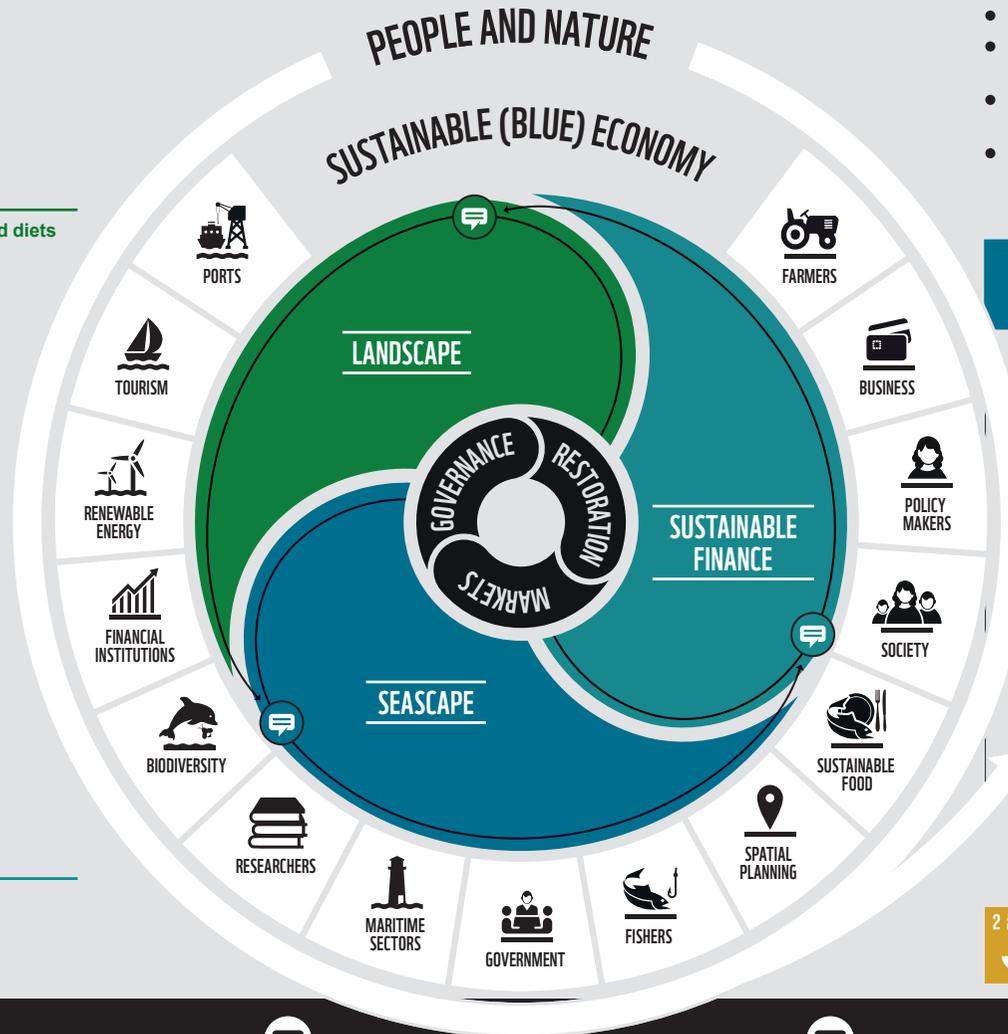
### OUR ACTIONS

- Influence actors to redirect investments towards sustainable economic activities
- Show impacts and risks of ocean decline on multiple asset classes
- Promote investment in nature-based solutions
- Promote adoption of the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles

### OUR PROJECTS

- > Seascape Assessment of Financial Flows in the Baltic
- > Global Value at Risk Study

# Theory of Change



## SEASCAPE

**OUR AIM.** Our overall aim by 2030, is for the Baltic Sea to be 100% managed via a coherent network of transboundary ecosystem-based marine spatial plans representing marine protected areas covering 30% of the sea, with one third of protected area (10% of the sea) being strictly protected.

### OUR ACTIONS

- Monitor enforcement of ecosystem-based marine spatial planning
- Promote and advocate for sustainable ecosystem-based fisheries management
- Act as watchdog for achieving the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan targets
- Conserve and restore the seascape to increase and enhance biodiversity, reduce disrupting biochemical cycles and help mitigate climate change.

### OUR PROJECTS

- > Coastal and marine habitat restoration
- > Sustainable Seafood Guide

DELIVERING TO THE WWF GLOBAL GOALS SO THAT BY 2030...

**100%**  
of the Baltic Sea is EB MSP

**10%**  
EU land and oceans strictly protected

**30%**  
of EU lands and oceans protected by 2030

**50%**  
consumers make more sustainable diet choices

SUPPORTING TO DELIVER SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:



## COMMUNICATIONS

Engage, inspire and inform audiences through web stories, reports and social media campaigns.

Provide a central forum for coordinating activities across relevant policy areas at local, national and regional levels.

Share knowledge and ideas with partners, the public and policy makers.

# THEORY OF CHANGE

## PEOPLE, NATURE AND A SUSTAINABLE (BLUE) ECONOMY

Everything is connected, from economies to ecosystems, from industry to biodiversity. The global economy is embedded within the biosphere and it depends on nature. Nature is comprised of biodiversity originating from both land and sea. The more diverse it is, the more productive, resilient and adaptable it will be when facing shocks and risks – just like a financial portfolio.

A thriving planet that can support a sustainable economy is only possible if a balance is reached between nature's supply levels and people's demands. A sustainable economy can enable society to obtain value from nature, while respecting the long-term capacity of the ecosystem to regenerate and endure human activities through the implementation of sustainable practices.

BEP advocates taking a holistic approach to tackling the major threats to the Baltic Sea, by addressing institutional failures. For example, when governments pay people more to exploit nature than to protect it and finance prioritising unsustainable economic activities over long-term investment in the region's economic future. By addressing the drivers (finance, governance, and markets) that negatively impact biodiversity, reduce nature's resilience and weaken ecosystem services, we aim to change how we think, act and consume.

In short, the strategy looks to manage human demands on nature while keeping within planetary boundaries via adoption and implementation of ecosystem-based management approaches. This will be carried out in several ways: by working towards increasing nature's supply levels through conservation and restoration projects; decreasing unsustainable demands on nature by shifting consumer choices towards sustainable products and shifting financial actors to support long-term value creation that benefits the environment and society. Overall, the BEP strategy seeks to integrate governance, restoration, and sustainable market chains across the region. Doing so will allow biodiversity to recover and ecosystem services to be sustained. All of which contributes towards enhancing nature and human well-being. The following sections will go into greater detail about how this will be delivered.

## THREE PILLARS APPROACH

In this strategy, BEP's activities target three principal approaches to deliver on the thematic goals which reflect the strategic key drivers of environmental problems:

- 1) GOVERNANCE:** tackling the governance system of the Baltic Sea through the development and implementation of policy
- 2) MARKETS:** transforming market change towards sustainable production and consumption and
- 3) RESTORATION:** scaling up solutions in the field to conserve and restore key habitats in both landscape and seascape.

All three approaches recognise the need to leverage financial actors to invest in sustainable economic activities and companies that value nature in order to create and support a sustainable economy.



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## INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION

Communication outreach is central to BEP in building the knowledge and understanding of stakeholders about the challenges and solutions we face as a region. By showcasing the impact of our work and shared learning via our regional exchange platform, our communication efforts will make our vision of "a healthy, diverse and resilient Baltic region" tangible. Compelling stories on our social media channels and webpage aim to reach a wide audience and inspire and engage them.

## ENABLING CONDITIONS

- Baltic Ecoregion Programme partnerships
- Strong regional leadership
- Investments available
- Business driving change
- Accessible blue funds
- Strong EU policy
- Consistent collaboration
- Alignment to SDG goals
- Shared data & mapping
- Coherent spatial plans
- Strong civil society engagement
- Effective communication
- Knowledge platforms
- Inclusive & transparent processes



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SUPPORTING TO DELIVER TO THESE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:



30%

of agriculture in Baltic catchment integrates sustainable landscape and water management

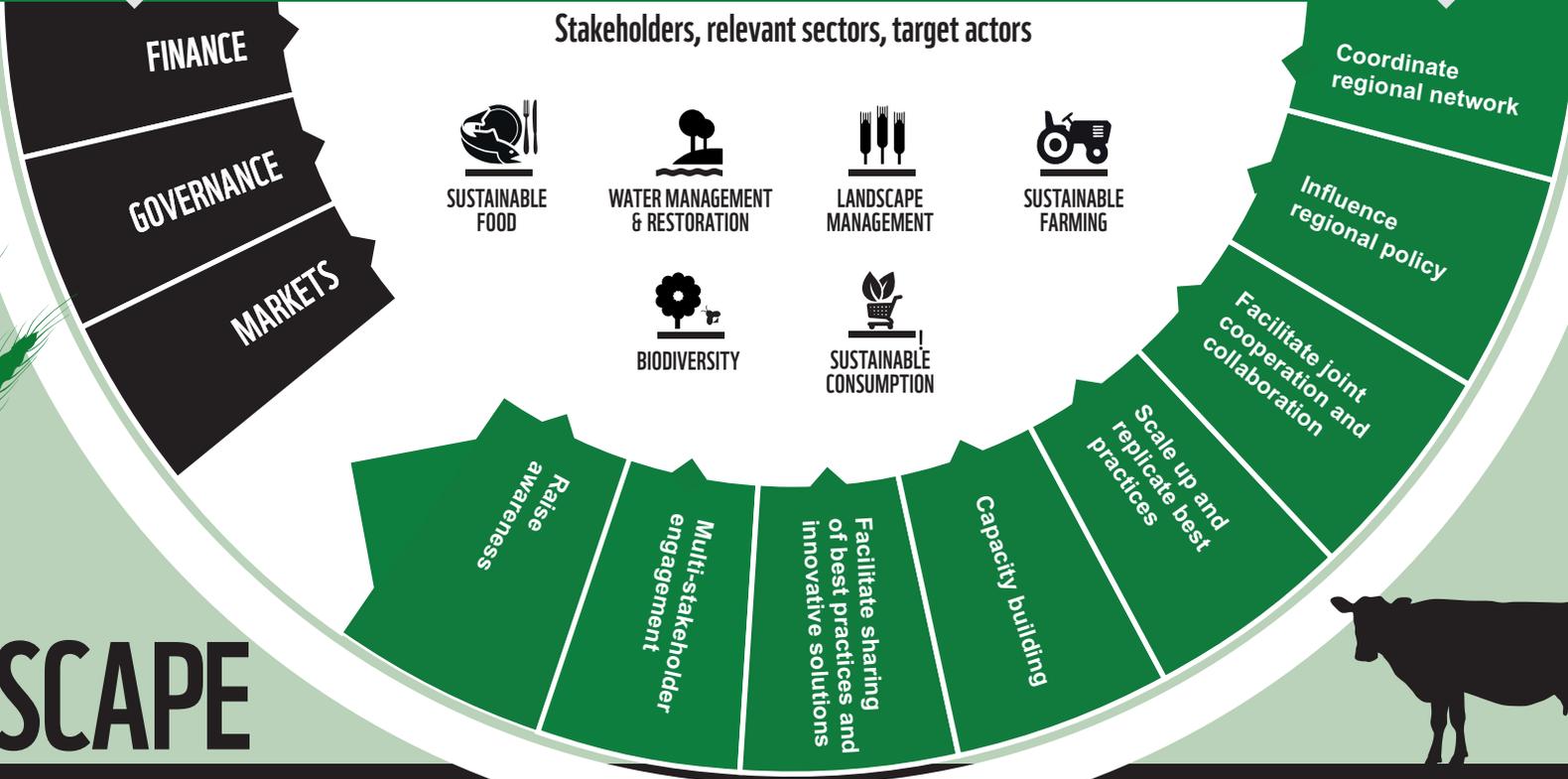
**BALTIC ECOREGION PROGRAMME AIM**

Public and private stakeholders at local, national and regional levels commit to source-to-sea approaches in water management, sustainable agriculture and safeguarding species and habitats.

DRIVERS

OUR ROLES

Stakeholders, relevant sectors, target actors



LANDSCAPE

OUR ACTIONS

Push to harmonise HELCOM, EU Directives and national policies

Advocate for integrating landscape and water management into national policies

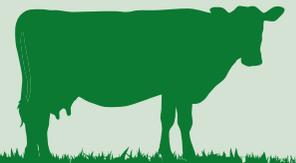
Promote nutrient recycling and sustainable practices in food production

Conserve and restore land to enhance biodiversity, reduce nutrient runoff and help mitigate climate change

# LANDSCAPE



Our overall aim by 2030, is for public and private stakeholders at local, national and regional levels to commit to source-to-sea approaches in water management, sustainable agriculture and safeguarding species and habitats.



## SOURCE-TO-SEA PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

**T**he catchment area extends to four times the size of the Baltic Sea itself, making it extra critical to be mindful of our activities on land. Much of the pollution in the Baltic Sea is land-based which is the reason to advance a source-to-sea approach in tackling some of the main impacts of land pollution. Today, our population is using the Earth's natural resources at a faster rate than the resources can regenerate.

In order to safeguard our survival, we have to redesign agriculture, and rethink our consumption, to make both sustainable. In cooperation with the scientific community, civil society, companies and decision-makers, BEP is applying wider landscape solutions to promote sustainable water management, healthy river systems and to tackle nutrient loading from agriculture to safeguard species and habitats.

Addressing nutrient runoff in such a large catchment area over several countries is a challenge. Agricultural activities – which account for nearly half of all nitrogen and phosphorus input – continue to be a major source of nutrient loading to the Baltic Sea. BEP provides a regional voice in raising issues and stimulating dialogue across relevant levels and sectors to harmonise national ambitions in meeting the nutrient reduction targets of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and adaptation of relevant EU policy into national implementation.

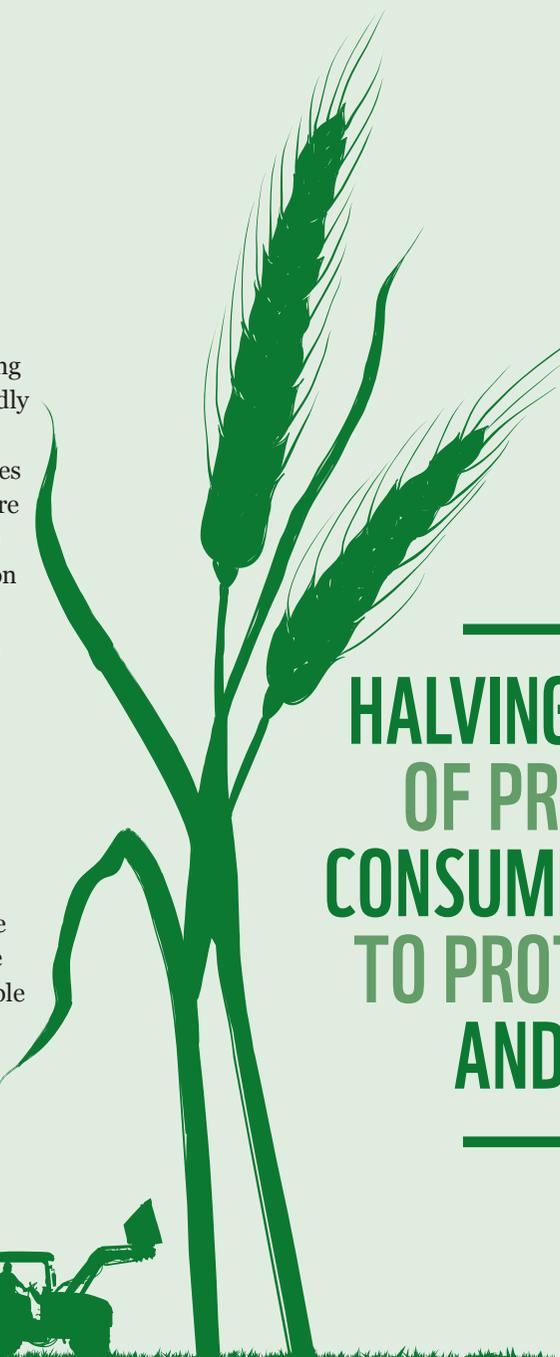
BEP advocates for national strategic plans of the Common Agriculture Policy to be translated into actions supporting sustainable agriculture and water management with financial incentives for farmers to reduce their negative impacts. The main agri-environmental measures that farmers can apply are those that improve soil health, increase water retention in the landscape and ensure sustainable nutrient management. The long standing BEP project Baltic Sea Farmer of the Year Award shares inspirational examples of farmers already leading the way in applying methods in keeping nutrients and water on land, utilizing fertilizers more effectively and reducing runoff. These will continue to be scaled and replicated to protect and restore critical habitats, improve soil health and water quality – in addition to supplying concrete examples for policy change.

Much of the landscape across the Baltic Sea has been transformed to make space for agriculture. Intensification of agriculture has led to the replacement of traditional mosaic pattern of fields, meadows and wetland with large monotonous fields, leading to a decline in the biodiversity of these landscapes and natural water filtration systems. The predicted rise in temperature and rainfall as a result of climate change will increase runoff into the sea from these altered landscapes. To counteract the negative impacts of the ongoing intensification of farming in the Baltic countries, BEP will work with the farming sector to continue to develop economically effective and environmentally friendly methods to restore lost grasslands and wetlands across the catchment.

The finance sector also has an important role to play by investing in companies that value nature and the long-term health of ecosystems. Restoration projects are set to bolster species biodiversity and in coastal areas help migratory fish species to return to their spawning habitats further upstream. BEP will focus primarily on river and wetland restoration projects that help critical fish species, and that will naturally filter land nutrient runoff to bring back general good ecosystem health.

A key driver of nature loss is humanity's footprint of production and consumption, i.e. the impact of our production, consumption and related socioeconomic activities on nature and nature's ability to sustain us. This requires a collective movement to shift the way we consume and produce towards improved nutrient recycling, applying circular economic models and sustainable practices in food production.

Through its multi-stakeholder dialogue initiatives BEP aims to shift the market chain to apply sustainable production practices in collaboration with the farming sector. In parallel, educational campaigns promoting behaviour change in diet choices will promote consumer awareness of the importance of sustainable food production and provide guidance to reduce their consumer footprint. Ongoing projects, such as EAT4Change help Baltic citizens choose products and foods that help to reduce emissions and nutrient loads – by eating less and better protein. Dietary and production changes are not only better for human health but also benefit the climate, natural habitats, biodiversity and the environment as a whole.



**HALVING THE FOOTPRINT  
OF PRODUCTION AND  
CONSUMPTION IS CRITICAL  
TO PROTECTING NATURE  
AND OURSELVES.**



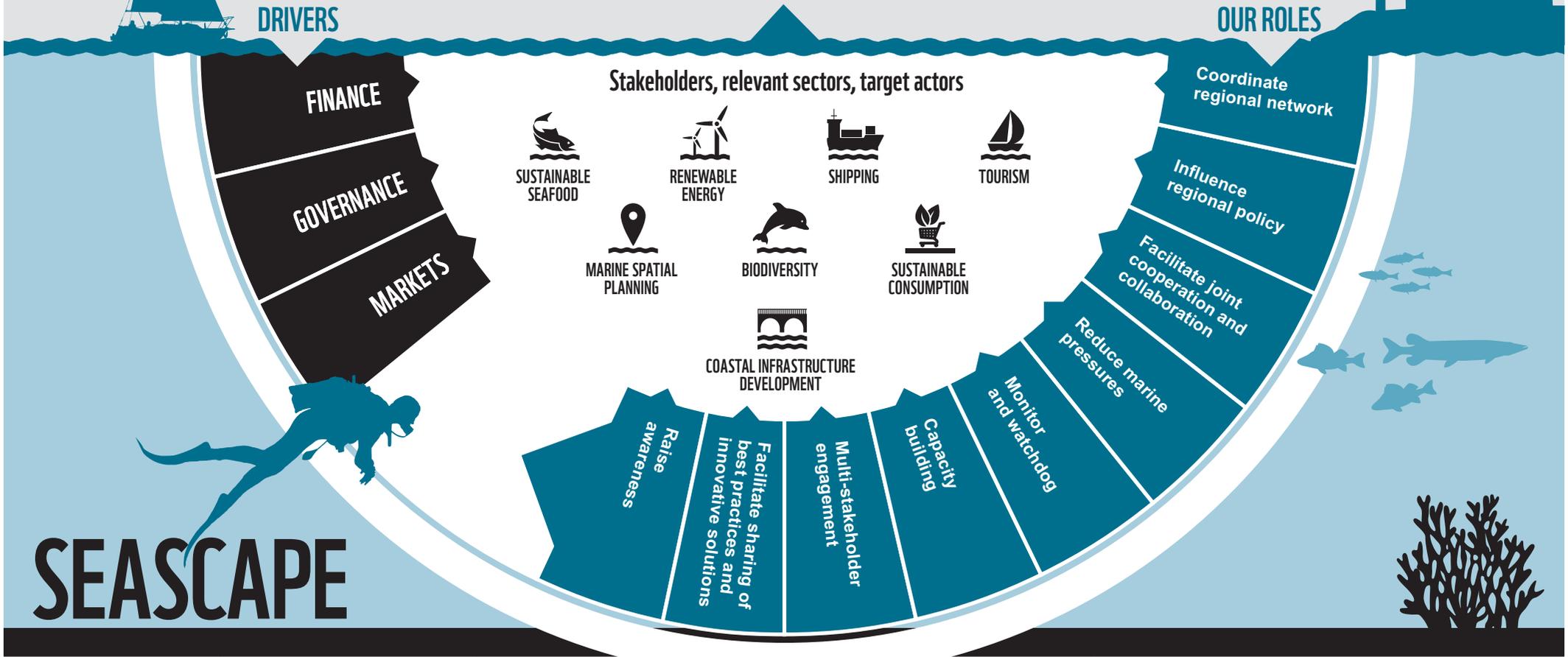
SUPPORTING TO DELIVER THESE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:



**100%**  
of the Baltic Sea is  
ecosystem-based managed

**BALTIC ECOREGION PROGRAMME AIM**

Our overall aim by 2030, is for the Baltic Sea to be 100% managed via a coherent network of transboundary ecosystem-based marine spatial plans representing marine protected areas covering 30% of the sea, with one third of protected area (10% of the sea) being strictly protected.



**OUR ACTIONS**

Monitor enforcement of ecosystem-based marine spatial planning	Promote and advocate for sustainable ecosystem-based fisheries management	Act as watchdog for achieving the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan targets	Conserve and restore the seascape to increase and enhance biodiversity, reduce disrupting biochemical cycles and help mitigate climate change
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# SEASCAPE



Our overall aim by 2030, is for the Baltic Sea to be 100% managed via a coherent network of transboundary ecosystem-based marine spatial plans representing marine protected areas covering 30% of the sea, with one third of protected area (10% of the sea) being strictly protected.

For centuries, people have looked to the oceans for an inexhaustible supply of food, as a useful transport route, and a convenient dumping ground. However, human activity has pushed the oceans to their limits. Overfished, polluted, taken for granted, carelessly abused and destroyed, and much more fragile and complex than we once thought, the ocean is fast deteriorating, threatening not only marine habitats and species, but also our own health, way of life, and security.

Like many of the world's seascapes, the Baltic Sea is multi-functional. Sectors including fisheries, shipping and renewable energy compete for the 404,354 km<sup>2</sup> of sea area with nature and communities. Current ocean resource governance and management structures are falling short in safeguarding natural resources. A central challenge is the need for legal structures capable of providing both stability and a high degree of flexibility and responsiveness to changes both in natural ecosystems and in our understanding of those systems, as well as the human behaviour that affects those systems. Humans must be seen and treated as part of the ecosystem, and both ecosystem and human interactions need to be managed.

To tackle the challenges we face in the region, BEP will principally focus on influencing and strengthening reforms of key policies and governance such as the HELCOM BSAP and EU Marine directives, supporting the implementation of the plan of measures of the MSFD, as well as redirecting harmful subsidies. Ensuring too that MSPs apply an ecosystem-based approach that will contribute to the achievement of Good Environmental Status. Paramount to reaching these goals will be pushing all national Baltic states to create by 2030 a coherent network of Marine Protected Areas covering 30% of the sea of which 10% are strictly protected from direct harmful human activities.



BEP will support the WWF Ocean Practice and WWF EPO in providing input to the CFP to improve synergies between fisheries and environmental legislation, while lobbying the EU and MS to establish proper tools to achieve the long-term objectives of sustainable fisheries management and getting private sector to help progress integrated and ecosystem-based resource management. We will focus primarily on getting policy to ban destructive fishing gear from at least 10% of MPAs and other sensitive areas, improve catch transparency, and enforcement of the fisheries control regulation. BEP will work towards securing three protected marine areas in the Baltic region to ensure effective management of sustainably managed fish stocks.

BEP plans to contribute to restoring the Good Environmental Status of the sea and improve marine ecosystem resilience. For example, by creating five spawning/nursery areas for fish and restoring several sea grass beds in the Gulf of Finland and archipelago of Sweden, and in German waters restore boulder reef structures, and in Denmark restore stone reefs. At the same time, we will keep focusing on the importance of a joined-up source-to-sea approach by involving land stakeholders in water catchment restoration projects important for migratory fish.

This will lead us in turn to also work with the private sector to get market chains and producers to apply responsible corporate policy measures to source sustainably caught/harvested seafood. Additionally, BEP will continue to drive the fishing industry to reduce their impact on overfishing and use of destructive gear, while improving uptake of traceability methods to guarantee sustainable consumer products. Via our Sustainable Seafood Guide and public outreach campaigns we will encourage consumers to seek sustainable seafood products in the region thus driving a 25% increase in sustainable seafood products onto the market. Together with fishermen, governments, regional councils and market players in the seafood industry, we work to change the trend in overfishing and overconsumption of seafood. For our work to have greater impact we will work with finance actors to drive investments towards sustainable economic activities and companies that value nature and healthy ecosystems.



SUPPORTING TO DELIVER THESE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:



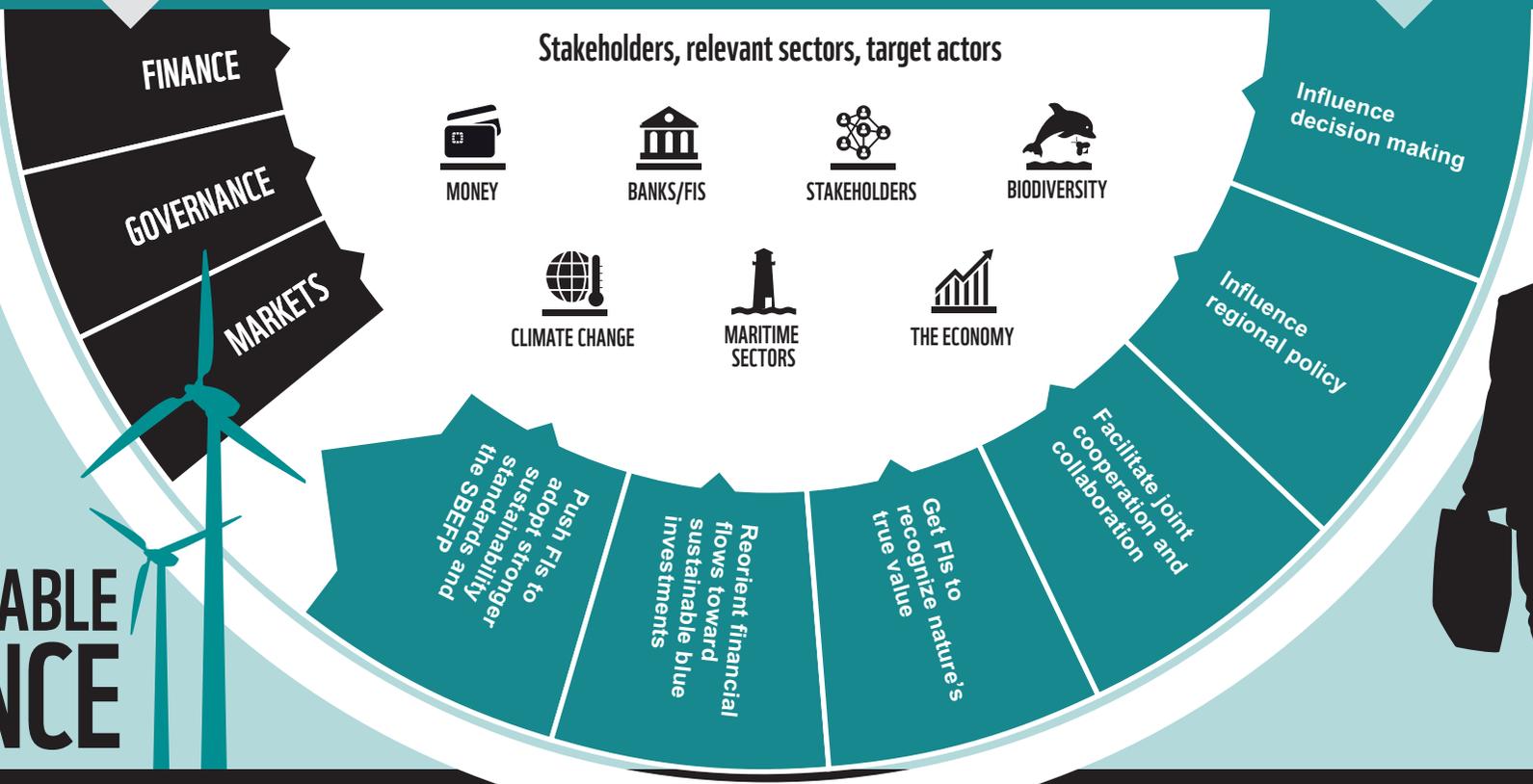
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DRIVERS

OUR ROLES

Stakeholders, relevant sectors, target actors



SUSTAINABLE FINANCE

OUR ACTIONS

Influence actors to redirect investments towards sustainable economic activities

Show impacts and risks of ocean decline on multiple asset classes

Promote investment in nature-based solutions

Promote adoption of the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles

# SUSTAINABLE FINANCE

Our overall aim by 2030, is for environmental health to be factored into investment decisions by finance actors resulting in shareholders redirecting capital towards companies that value a Sustainable (Blue) Economy.

The ocean economy, which is estimated to be worth US\$24 trillion<sup>1</sup>, is rife with opportunities for investment. However, unsustainable commercial activities are eroding the ocean's natural capital base. Marine sectors such as shipping, tourism, aquaculture, and offshore renewable energy are forecast to double, quadruple or in some cases grow by ten times their current size by 2030. Coupled with economic activities on land – from sources such as agriculture, industry, sewage and waste – maritime activities contribute to the environmental decline of the Baltic Sea.

The development of a Sustainable (Blue) Economy rests in the hands of both public and private finance actors who play a crucial role in influencing sustainable outcomes by supporting the transition from exploiting nature to restoring nature. The transition to a sustainable economy offers considerable investment opportunities present in frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, and the EU Green Deal for Nature. These investors, while exposed to the myriad of risks along the value chain if business-as-usual is maintained, are well-positioned to capture value from the opportunities that a sustainable economy presents. By agreeing to lend, insure and invest only in businesses that manage their impacts on nature and ecosystems, investors and financial institutions can redefine their investment criteria and incentivize the development of solutions such as clean technologies, renewable energy, and circular material flows – all essential components of a sustainable (blue) economic system.

Through collaborations, research and advocacy, BEP aims to integrate environmental and ocean health metrics into mainstream investing and lending. Failure to integrate environmental factors into decision making puts the capital of financial institutions, as well as their fiduciary duty, at risk. BEP will continue to build the case as to why it is important to understand the material impacts of the environment on business via its research projects (e.g. Global Value at Risk Study and the Seascape Assessment of Financial Flows and Actors in the Baltic region). BEP will push for the uptake of the Sustainable Blue Economy Principles and Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles. Research funded by BEP will highlight the impacts and risks of ocean decline on multiple asset classes by providing a clear indication to investors of where risks lie within each marine sector and the environmental impacts of their decision making. We will also support the shift to a low-carbon economy in several ways: by identifying nature-based solution project opportunities for finance; by influencing actors to invest in developing technologies to achieve zero emissions; and by contributing to creating a science-based EU taxonomy. The sea presents a material risk for banks, investors, asset managers, investment consultants and insurers if business continues as usual. Together we must act to turn the tide on how to finance a sustainable (ocean) recovery.

<sup>1</sup>Revising the Oceans Economy: The Case for Action—2015 | Publications | WWF (worldwildlife.org)



# FUND RAISING

Our overall aim is to increase and widen the core funding of the BEP Secretariat through public and private funds and seek joint grants with wider WWF regional networks.

Securing resources necessary to deliver on the six-year strategy requires the partnership to work through external funding sources. Staff capacity, commitment and larger programme funding remain a priority and a challenge. A concerted effort to reduce BEP dependency on a principal financier will include mapping out the priority goals to be linked to strategic funding opportunities together with national office fundraisers. As a first step, BEP Secretariat will appeal to major donors and EU funding institutions on a joint grant application directed to restoration in one of our thematic scapes (landscape, seascape). BEP partners can work to build fundraising as a key delivery tool in national office strategies to profile the regional network as a leverage mechanism for regional learning and sharing. The secretariat will continue to explore links with other WWF regional programmes to deliver broader leverage and results on common conservation themes. This is also appealing to major donors and EU funding institutions, particularly since much of the policy dominating the Baltic is EU-wide and thus needs to be addressed by a wider consortium of WWF EU national offices to leverage change and results on land and at sea.

# ACRONYMS

**BEP/** Baltic Ecoregion Programme

**BSAP/** Baltic Sea Action Plan

**CAP/** Common Agricultural Policy

**CFP/** Common Fisheries Policy

**EB/** Ecosystem-based

**EU/** European Union

**FIs/** Financial Institutions

**HELCOM/** The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission  
– also known as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)

**MPA/** Marine Protected Area

**MS/** Member States

**MSFD/** Marine Strategy Framework Directive

**SBEFP/** Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles

**WWF EPO/** WWF European Policy Office

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**EDITORIAL AND PRODUCTION/** Brandline, Hannah Griffiths  
Berggren, Otilia Thoreson, Valerie de Liedekerke, Vivi Mellegård

**AUTHORS/** Hannah Griffiths Berggren, Otilia Thoreson,  
Valerie de Liedekerke, Vivi Mellegård

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**OUR MISSION IS TO STOP  
DEGRADATION OF THE PLANET'S  
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND  
TO BUILD A FUTURE IN WHICH HUMANS  
LIVE IN HARMONY WITH NATURE.**



Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

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For more information:

Ottilia Thoreson  
Programme Director  
WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme  
[ottilia.thoreson@wwf.se](mailto:ottilia.thoreson@wwf.se)