

Finnish Strategies for Reduction and Control of Effluents to the Marine Environment: Examples from Agriculture, Municipalities and Industry

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Intensive national water protection measures launched already in the early 1970s have brought significant reductions in water pollution. Increasingly efficient wastewater treatment has resulted in improved water quality in some coastal and inland water areas affected by industrial and urban discharges. Most of the Finnish inland waters are in good or very good condition. However, the overall condition of rivers gives cause of concern, the main problem being non-point source pollution.

The extensive blue-green algal blooms in inland waters and the Baltic Sea in summer 1997 were an indication that eutrophication, caused by continuous nutrient discharges and the release of nutrients accumulated in bottom sediments, is spreading. The Gulf of Finland is the most polluted sea area of the Baltic Sea.

The Council of State Resolution on Water Protection Targets for the Year 2005, issued on March 1998, sets out the overall and polluter-specific targets concerning the reduction of nutrient discharges causing eutrophication. The Resolution also called for a complementary action programme setting out the concrete measures necessary for achieving the targets and their timing. The Water Protection Action Programme for the Year 2005, adopted by the Ministry of the Environment on March 2000, includes also a distinguished agri-environmental programme, the so-called Horizontal Rural Development Plan for 2000-2006.

The political declaration of the present Council of State by Finland expected that a special action programme will be prepared for restoration of the ecological balance of the Baltic Sea and to decrease the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea, especially of the Gulf of Finland, and of inland waters as well as the bio-accumulation of hazardous substances. The basic elements of the programme ought to be the implementation of the above-mentioned national programmes and plan, the 1992 Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea as well as recommendations and political decisions of the Helsinki Commission, the appropriate legislation of the European Union and the Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region.

The special working group set up by the Ministry of the Environment on February 2000 prepared a background report containing newest scientific knowledge about the state of the Baltic Sea and facts affecting on it, the present national and international commitments by Finland to and their effects on the protection of coastal waters and the Baltic Sea. The Finnish Protection Programme on the Baltic Sea was finalized and delivered to the Minister of the Environment on 19 June 2001. The final adoption of the Council of State is expected during the fall 2001.

This Programme includes not only protection measures against eutrophication from land- and sea-based sources of pollution but also measures for reduction of risks caused by hazardous substances, of environmental impacts of the use of the Baltic Sea, for conservation and increase of marine biological diversity, for increase of public environmental awareness as well as for improvement of scientific knowledge of the protection of the Baltic Sea. The Programme as such represents the newest strategy in protection of marine environment and is at the same time the Finnish implementation of the decisions of the Helsinki Commission as well as for the 1995 Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities of UNEP.