

EN

E-003696/2025

Answer given by Ms Roswall
on behalf of the European Commission
(9.12.2025)

The Baltic Sea would generally benefit from stricter rules on wastewater discharges from ships. The measures adopted by Finland¹ on discharges of sewage and grey waters as well as those from ships equipped with scrubbers are a step in that direction. Strengthening the current rules holds for all coastal Baltic States and in all EU seas where global rules apply².

According to the evaluation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive³, all EU marine waters have not achieved by 2020 the objective of ‘good environmental status’ including for contaminants. Stricter and more coherent measures on ship discharges, would better address contaminants and enhance compliance with EU’s marine and water laws⁴ in line with the EU’s Zero Pollution ambition⁵, the Ocean Pact⁶ and the Water Resilience Strategy⁷. However, to maintain the maritime sector's competitiveness, it is crucial to ensure that national rules are harmonised and agreed upon within regional sea conventions and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

At Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) level, similar developments are taking place. In 2013 coastal states designated the Baltic Sea as an IMO special area for sewage from passenger ships with stricter treatment requirements applying in stages. HELCOM plans to extend such rules to more ship and discharge types⁸.

The Commission remains committed to contribute to regional⁹ and IMO actions to bolster marine protection from ship’s discharges or losses, for instance of plastic pellets¹⁰.

¹ Prohibitions on treated sewage discharges from passenger ships already apply in the Baltic Sea. Finland extended this prohibition to cargo ships from 1 July 2025 and to greywaters from all ships from 2030 as well as banned, like Sweden and Denmark, discharges from scrubbers installed onboard ships sailing in territorial waters in stages from 2025.

² For more information on action on waste waters at the global level of the International Maritime Organisation Commission’s reply to written question E-001184/25.

³ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/document/659eea3a-8a00-410e-bc2f-f94baf210c9b_en.

⁴ Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1), the Environmental Quality Standards Directive (2008/105/EC, OJ L 348, 24.12.2008, p. 84), the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC, OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19) and Good Environmental Status Decision (Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848, OJ L 125, 18.5.2017, p. 43–74).

⁵ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan_en.

⁶ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/european-ocean-pact_en.

⁷ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/environment/water-resilience-strategy_en.

⁸ HELCOM is planning to enhance regional prohibition of discharges of sewage, grey waters and scrubber’s discharge waters in the future (<https://helcom.fi/baltic-sea-action-plan>, Action S14, S15 and S22).

⁹ In June 2025, OSPAR parties, including the Commission, agreed to prohibit EGCS discharges in internal waters and port areas of the North-East Atlantic by 2027 for open loop systems and by 2029 for closed loop systems. OSPAR further issued a recommendation for prohibition in territorial seas with the same timeline.

¹⁰ Regulation (EU) 2025/2365 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 November 2025 on preventing plastic pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution, OJ L, 2025/2365, 26.11.2025 includes provisions imposing obligations on actors involved in the transport of pellets by sea in freight containers in line with IMO guidelines.