

A Baltic Leadership Programme on PFAS ("PFASeout")

Concept Note for Participants

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I. Background

EUSBSR and PA Hazards

The European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) is the framework through which the EU Commission and its Baltic Sea-bordering Member States cooperate to address common challenges under three broad objectives: to save the sea, increase prosperity, and connect the region. Through the EUSBSR Action Plan, these broad objectives are pursued through 13 policy and cross-cutting areas of cooperation coordinated by Member States. Policy Area Hazards (PA Hazards) is coordinated by Sweden through the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket, NV).

Swedish Institute and Baltic Leadership Programme

The Swedish Institute (SI) is a public agency mandated to promote interest and trust in Sweden around the world. SI's Baltic Leadership Programme (BLP) tailor-makes training programmes to promote the implementation of the EUSBSR and to support thematic networks. BLPs aim to offer a unique combination of theory and practice, with a focus on dynamic leadership and capacity building.

Per- and poly fluoroalkyl substances – PFAS

Per- and poly fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) is the collective name for over 3000 industrially produced, highly fluorinated chemicals. They are used in many products such as firefighting foams, impregnating agents (e.g. for water-proofing, packaging) and ski waxes. PFAS can be hazardous to human health and the environment due to their toxic, bio-accumulative and highly persistent nature. Knowledge and data as to origins, pathways, accumulation and impacts of PFAS around the Baltic Sea is variable, often sparse, and mostly incomparable. The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission, or Helcom) has begun work on a comprehensive regional report on PFAS including a mapping of literature, policy instruments and data; data analysis; and the tracking of sources, pathways and impacts. Helcom has enlisted PA Hazards to contribute to this report.

Besides long-distance transport of PFAS and contamination of the Baltic Sea via deposition from air, there is evidence showing that local sources (e.g. fire-fighting foams used at airports or training sites) will first contaminate the local environment, but later contribute to contamination of the Baltic Sea. In the local environment, wells and thus the drinking water may be contaminated, with subsequent exposure of humans. More information on local contamination will increase the possibility to protect consumers but also to fulfill requirements according to the EU Water Framework Directive and the Drinking Water Directive.

Proposal for a BLP on PFAS by EUSBSR PA Hazards

In spring 2018, PA Hazards' international Steering Group considered the need for further work on PFAS in the Baltic Sea region. A PFAS Reference Group (RG) of relevant PFAS research and policy actors was initiated in June 2018 to assess the challenges, gaps, and opportunities for cooperation on PFAS in the Baltic Sea region.

At the first meeting of the PFAS RG in September 2018, the idea of a Baltic Leadership Programme (BLP) was introduced by SI. The RG considered whether a BLP focused on highly fluorinated substances is an appropriate and interesting topic on which to gather a set of relevant actors from around the Baltic Sea. At a second meeting in November 2018, the RG further considered the aims and objectives, scope, audience and outcomes of an eventual BLP on PFAS.

Considering the actors and processes just described, and notably the outcomes of the work of the PFAS RG, this concept paper outlines a proposed design for a Baltic Leadership Programme on PFAS.

II. Aim and impact

A BLP on PFAS will aim to raise awareness and knowledge of PFAS sources, uses, accumulation and impacts in the Baltic Sea region by engaging relevant public sector actors from different levels of government in countries around the Baltic Sea.

The immediate (2019-2020) objective is to raise knowledge among policy actors, with a medium-term objective (2020-2030) of improving PFAS data collection, regulation and public-private sector collaboration on uses in products and release to the environment. The long-term objective (2025+) of the BLP is to significantly decrease the release of PFAS into the environment of the Baltic Sea catchment area. The vision for what a PFAS BLP should achieve is captured in the Programme's working title, *PFASeout*.

III. Context

Knowledge, data, and action to address PFAS in the environment is variable in the Baltic Sea region. A 2017 study by the Swedish EPA, *PFAS in the Baltic Sea Region: Inventory of awareness, actions and strategies related to highly fluorinated substances, PFAS, including PFOS¹*, found that while some countries around the Baltic Sea monitor contaminated sites, soil and groundwater for PFAS contamination and restrict their use in products such as firefighting foams, in others there is no action, policy or conversation around PFAS. There is thus opportunity and demand for the sharing of awareness, knowledge, challenges, and solutions in the Baltic Sea region.

One clear need is to make what limited information is available on PFAS broadly accessible. To this end, the PFAS RG identified several relevant studies on the Baltic Sea region that are currently only available in Swedish. More generally, Sweden is active in providing information, data collection and analysis, so it fits well within Sweden's and SI's interest and mandate to make available "state of the art" information. Having (parts of) these studies translated and potentially adjusted to the needs of the BLP and included as BLP course material is proposed (see more under about pre-study below).

Target skills, tools, networks

The BLP on PFAS will aim to develop the following:

- A network of public officials from around the Baltic Sea working at different levels of government (national, municipal, state/provincial/regional) with a mandate and interest in working with chemicals in the environment. This transnational, public sector network is expected to grow roots in each national context, reaching not only to relevant levels of administration but also to other stakeholder groups including industry (producers) and consumers of PFAS and PFAS-containing products. (See also "Target group" below.)

¹ <http://www.swedishepa.se/upload/miljoarbete-i-samhallet/internationellt-miljoarbete/multilateralt/ostersjoregionen/PFAS-BSR-October-2017-FINAL.pdf>

- A common understanding of the knowledge and gaps, challenges and options for monitoring and regulating PFAS. Ideally this will result in a desire for coordinated action to address PFAS through awareness, research, data collection and sharing.
- A package of current information in the form of articles and reports relevant to the Baltic Sea region that will be used foremost as training material during the BLP, and secondarily be available to BLP participants in their future work with PFAS and which can be shared with stakeholders beyond those participating in the BLP.

Pre-study

In 2017, PA Hazards commissioned the above-mentioned study, *PFAS in the Baltic Sea Region: Inventory of awareness, actions and strategies related to highly fluorinated substances, PFAS, including PFOS*. This study inventories national strategies and data on firefighting foams, groundwater and drinking water, and contaminated soil in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and serves as a pre-study to a BLP on PFAS. Methodologically, research was conducted through sending a questionnaire to relevant authorities and ministries in each of these countries, and through follow-up correspondence.

Monitoring data and its reliability

Lack of consistent and comparable data, as well as knowledge of where to best collect this data, is a challenge central to the BLP PFAS notion and design. Addressing this challenge through regional cooperation is a key focus of the proposed BLP on PFAS. A plausible outcome of collaborations established through the BLP is improved guidance on comparable data collection and assessment and joint-work to this end.

IV. Role of PA Hazards in the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Within the EUSBSR environmental objective, Save the Sea, PA Hazards strives to reduce the use and impacts of hazardous substances. This is pursued through PA Hazard's flagship research projects and platforms, engagement with relevant policy processes (namely Helcom), facilitating interaction of relevant actors and knowledge to address PA Hazards' priority issues (pharmaceuticals, plastics and marine litter, waste treatment, dumped munitions, antifouling, PFAS), collaboration with other Policy Areas, and communicating our work so as to inform and encourage science-policy dialogue. A BLP on PFAS will further contribute to the aims of PA Hazard's aspiring flagship process on a non-toxic environment.

The work of PA Hazards is guided by an international Steering Group, comprised of national experts from relevant public bodies (environment ministries, environmental protection and chemicals agencies) from all countries around the Baltic.

The BLP PFAS Reference Group (PFAS RG) consists of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Swedish Chemicals Agency, the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, Finish Environment Institute, the Swedish Institute and HELCOM.

V. Relevance for EUSBSR

PA Hazards and its objects

Within the EUSBSR objective "Save the Sea" fall several sub-objectives, including "clear water in the sea", "rich and healthy wildlife", and "better cooperation". A pan-Baltic collaboration on PFAS through a BLP will broadly address these three sub-objectives. Increased knowledge in the public sector will in the medium-to-long run result in better guidelines for data collection, stronger and more effective regulation and its implementation, phase-out in cases where it is unnecessary, and responsible PFAS substitution where appropriate. The effort should ultimately significantly lower release of PFAS in the Baltic Sea catchment area.

Synergy with other EUSBSR and Policy Areas

A BLP on PFAS has clear synergies with several other EUSBSR Policy Areas including PA Health (health impacts and uncertainties) and PA Safe (marine pollution).

VI. Relevance for SI's Strategy

The Swedish Institute's Strategy for cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region 2016 – 2020 aims to promote sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region and to support stability in the Swedish neighbourhood. A BLP on PFAS will promote knowledge and skills, as well as a network of experts in positions to address the challenge of PFAS in the Baltic Sea environment.

VII. Participant Group

The BLP on PFAS aims specifically at participation by public (government) professionals at the national (relevant departments and ministries) and sub-national (municipal, regional) levels in all countries around the Baltic Sea. Transnational, city and regional networks may also participate.

Ideally participants are in a position to inform and influence policy formation, data collection protocol, or work with chemical producers or manufacturers who use PFAS. They should have professional or academic background in science, public policy, law or other related area.

The BLP on PFAS aims to attract participants from at least two levels of government in each of the eight EU member state countries in the EUSBSR and Russia. This should result in approximately 20-25 participants.

Participation will be through nominations. As a first step, candidate participants will be identified by PA Hazards Steering Group, the PFAS RG, and HELCOM. Secondly, candidates will submit an expression of interest. As a third and final step, PFAS RG decides on the BLP participants.

VIII. Indicators/ outputs

Relation to the goals of the BLP

The SI BLP is designed to promote EUSBSR implementation and to support thematic networks. The proposed BLP on PFAS clearly contributes to the EUSBSR "Save the Sea" goal through thematic collaboration with all Baltic Sea countries.

New skills

Participants in the PFAS BLP will already have some familiarity with PFAS – some scientific knowledge and some policy/regulatory experience. Through the programme, new skills will be promoted by bringing together science (assessing knowledge and articulating knowledge gaps and needs), and the policy instruments needed to address these gaps.

The training package built into the second module (see "IX. Scope of the BLP") will ensure that all participants have a basic common knowledge of the current state of PFAS science and policy in the region.

Promotion of sustainability, cross-sectorial connection and broad inclusion of actors

As described below, the final module of the BLP will result in a plan forward to collectively address common challenges. While it is BLP participants and their joint work which will determine which challenges they address and how, solutions will inevitably include a collaboration with a broader set of actors including policy processes (e.e. revision of the

EUSBSR Action Plan and through Helcom); research; government colleagues; PFAS producers, intermediaries and end-users.

IX. Scope of the BLP

Programme meetings, duration, location

The architecture of a BLP on PFAS is as follows.

Module 1 – 18 September 2019

Kick-off meeting online, ca. 2 hours, using SI's online platform. The BLP concept and the format of the BLP on PFAS will be introduced by SI, PA Hazards and partner Helcom. Participants will get to know each other through the online system and the facilitate meeting.

Module 2 – 15-17 October 2019

A 3-day face-to-face meeting in Stockholm. A 1-to-1.5 day curriculum on PFAS (generally) and in the Baltic Sea environment (specifically) will be commissioned for this meeting and presented through interactive expert lectures to which participants will be invited to contribute their own expertise and national examples. A final facilitated session will allow participants to explore what PFAS issues they want to and can answer in their national/ sub-national contexts, and what actions they might be able to take through their position and networks. Ideally a common set of questions or challenges will be identified on which participants will work independently in lead up to the third module.

Module 3 – 15 November 2019

Online meeting, 2-3 hours, using SI's online platform. Participants will present their work to date and each come with a challenge or obstacle encountered. Some time will be dedicated to collectively finding solutions. The identified challenges will be input to Module 4, where participants will select the challenges they want to address (collectively and with their networks) and plan future collaboration.

Module 4 – 3-5 December 2019

A 3-day face- to-face meeting, ideally in a country where PFAS is more problematic and/or not highly prioritized, thus also serving an awareness-raising function. The final module will allow participants to start to plan – together or in self-identified sub-groups. Without predetermining what the result will be, this could for example be identifying research/ data needs, identifying best practices and findings ways to replicate these good examples, designing an awareness campaign and identifying the relevant actors to involve as partners and audience, etc.). The facilitator together with PA Hazards with Helcom may lead off this final Module with a presentation of options identified during the course of the BLP; these options can be used as inspiration.