



## Press release

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## Winning the war on invasive species

The Helsinki and OSPAR Commissions have jointly taken initiatives to safeguard the marine environment from invasive species in the Baltic Sea and the North-East Atlantic. Both regional organisations have put in place voluntary guidelines for the shipping industry that requests vessels entering the waters concerned to exchange all their ballast tanks at least 200 nautical miles from the nearest land in water at least 200 metres deep. The General Guidance on the Voluntary Interim application of the D1 Ballast Water Exchange Standard was agreed by all 20 Contracting Parties, together with the European Community, and entered into force on 1 April 2008. The shipping industry was consulted throughout its development and received this guidance positively.

Loading of ballast water is an essential part of a ship's operation. Globally in excess of 10 billion tons of ballast water, containing thousands of different non-indigenous organisms, is carried in ships every year. The vast majority of these species will not survive the journey, however, the species that do survive may establish themselves in a new environment if the biological and physical conditions are favourable. This can result in detrimental ecological effects in discharge areas, as introduced species can aggressively compete for food and habitat with endangered native species, and introduced viruses and bacteria can cause disease in local populations.

The International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments (2004) stipulates that all ships carrying ballast water must install a treatment system by 2016. At the fifty-eighth session of the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) of the International Maritime Organisation, 6 – 10 October 2008, Secretary-General Efthimios Mitropoulos confirmed that 16 Parties (representing 14.24% of the world's merchant shipping tonnage) have now ratified this Convention. As 30 states, representing 35% of the world merchant shipping tonnage have to ratify the Convention the Convention is still far from being in force. In the meantime regional interim measures will help to reduce the environmental risks going out from ballast water.

In another pragmatic move OSPAR will now focus on how to reduce the risk of invasive species being moved around the region in ballast water and will focus on aligning their Regional Ballast Water Management Strategy with similar ones in the Baltic and the Mediterranean. These measures may help to reduce risk in the short-term but the best long-term prospect is for Governments to ratify the Ballast Water Management Convention and, as far as possible, for the shipping industry to make sure its ballast water does not contain unwanted 'hitch-hikers'.



*Mnemiopsis leidyi* (in the central Baltic Sea in January 2008).

Source: Jan-Erik Bruun, FIMR (Finnish Institute of Marine Research).

The General Guidance on the Voluntary Interim application of the D1 Ballast Water Exchange Standard has been published in IMO Circular BWM.2/Circ.14, 28 August 2008 ([http://www.imo.org/Environment/mainframe.asp?topic\\_id=548](http://www.imo.org/Environment/mainframe.asp?topic_id=548)) and is available for download on the HELCOM website ([www.helcom.fi](http://www.helcom.fi)) and OSPAR website ([www.ospar.org](http://www.ospar.org)).

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#### Note for editors

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, usually referred to as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), is an intergovernmental organisation of the nine Baltic Sea coastal countries - Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden - and the European Community working to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution and to ensure safety of navigation in the region. HELCOM is the governing body of the "Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area," more usually known as the Helsinki Convention.

The OSPAR Commission was set up by the 1992 OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, which unified and up-dated the 1972 Oslo and 1974 Paris Conventions. It brings together the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, together with the European Community.