

Planning the Future for Swedish and Finnish Seas



For the first time, the future of an offshore sea area has been planned comprehensively in Sweden and Finland. This was done in the Plan Bothnia pilot initiative focusing on the Bothnian Sea, north of Åland. It has considered the future of a wide variety of issues such as maritime traffic, fisheries, wind power, economy, cultural heritage, nature protection and marine ecosystems together, instead of individually.

A pioneering feature is that the planning has been carried out jointly by a large number of participants and institutions from both countries. The initiative, coordinated by [HELCOM](#), has released its key publication, [Planning the Bothnian Sea \(Plan Bothnia 2013\)](#), which is available free in electronic format. The release has been made in anticipation of a legislative proposal on planning at sea by the EU Commission, expected for March 2013,

followed by the adoption of new Swedish legislation. With the initiative, the two countries have advance-tested approaches which will likely be called for by such new legislation.

The publication describes the joint Swedish-Finnish Plan Bothnia pilot plan for the Bothnian Sea and includes analyses of the different characteristics, uses and future developments in the region. A separate [poster map](#) doubles as a summary.

Practical Example

Planning the Bothnian Sea gives a practical example that the joint planning of shared sea areas is possible, even if the legally binding decisions are done at the national level. The publication also highlights the fact that joint forms of planning at sea are necessary due to the interconnectedness of marine ecosystems; the international nature of marine activities; and the scale of the offshore wind power developments.

Targeted for Wind Power

The publication demonstrates that nearly all shallow offshore areas or banks in the Bothnian Sea are targeted for wind power installations. Offshore banks and shallow areas have high ecological values as underwater environments and they also support a rich stock of herring. The mining activities in the northern parts of Sweden and Finland is growing which can also increase the ship traffic in the region, though this may be set off by the opening of the northeast passage in the Arctic ocean.

Further, *Planning the Bothnian Sea* illustrates that the needed democratic anchoring of offshore plans requires special attention to the presentation of the underlying information. This will enable politicians and citizens to form opinions about the offshore areas and their planning.

The importance of the sea as a source of identity and cultural inspiration is also underlined. These factors should not be forgotten in the future-oriented planning exercises, commonly focusing only on scientific, technical and economic aspects.