

MORE INFORMATION, LESS DISCHARGES TO THE BALTIC SEA (MILD)

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BSAP-2021-151

Report prepared 12.12.2022

Executive summary of the project

Every day, there are over 2000 cargo ships sailing in the Baltic Sea, and about 25'000 crew members onboard these ships. Present regulations in the Baltic Sea area allow ships to discharge grey waters, ground food waste and treated black waters into the sea. International regulations on Annex IV (affecting sewage discharges) are tightening in 2019-2023. However, this will apply only to passenger ships. No new regulation on Annex IV is foreseen for cargo ships, nor on grey waters or food waste for any type of ships.

All discharges, either from cargo ships or passenger vessels, are detrimental to the marine environment. Sewage, grey water and food waste contain nutrients, suspended solids, bacteria, chemical residues, micro plastics and other substances. Although there are larger sources of nutrients to the sea, the discharges from shipping place an additional burden to the marine environment which could be avoided. The effects on marine environment are estimated to be largest in areas which already suffer of eutrophication. According to Raudsepp et al. (2019) "The shipping contribution is about 0.3% of the total phosphorus and 1.25–3.3% of the total nitrogen input to the Baltic Sea, but their impact to the different biogeochemical variables is up to 10%."

Foundation for a Living Baltic Sea (Baltic Sea Action Group, BSAG) arranged a survey of cargo ships calling in Finnish ports in 2020. Survey covered 12 busiest cargo ports in Finland. The main results of the survey were surprising:

- two thirds of cargo ships reported they discharged grey waters, treated black waters or food waste into the sea
- almost one third of the ships reported they were not aware of No Special Fee – system, a HELCOM incentive encouraging ships to leave all waste at ports.

The essence of No Special Fee – system is that port charge from ships a waste fee which ships pay irrespective if they leave any waste at ports or not. Under No Special Fee -system the compulsory waste fee must cover certain waste types:

- Oily waste from machinery spaces (under MARPOL Annex I)
- Sewage (under MARPOL Annex IV)
- Garbage, domestic waste, food waste, plastics etc (under Annex V).

Grey water is not regulated by MARPOL, meaning it does not fall under No Special Fee requirements. However, if grey water is mixed with sewage, the mixture is treated as sewage. The mixture of grey water and sewage can be discharged at ports under compulsory waste fee.

According to HELCOM Recommendation 28E/10 "The waste management fee imposed on a ship should be independent of the volume of the wastes delivered to the port reception facilities." This means the waste fee should cover for example sewage, the mixture of sewage and grey water, and food waste accrued enroute to the port.

The survey arranged by BSAG revealed that almost one third of the ships were not aware of No Special Fee – system. This implies that the HELCOM recommendation is not known well enough. If the ships presume that they need to pay for all waste discharged into port reception facilities, they are tempted to discharge waste into the sea

enroute. On the other hand, ports collect compulsory waste fees from all ships, also from ships which do not leave any waste at ports.

In order to minimize discharges into the sea and to encourage ships to discharge waste at ports, BSAG together with the Finnish maritime cluster organized an information campaign. The outcome “Baltic Sea Waste Fee Info” is a concise information package, listing present regulations and principles of No Special Fee. For ships and shipping companies it is vital to know what the compulsory waste fee covers at ports. Also, it is important to know which waste types ships need to pay extra for. Also, “Baltic Sea Waste Fee Info” contains a recommendation to bring all waste to ports, especially waste types which can be legally discharged into the sea (sewage, grey water, food waste).

The information package was prepared in good cooperation with the Finnish maritime cluster, sharing the same concern for responsible shipping and the marine environment. “Baltic Sea Waste Fee Info” is delivered via ports’ web pages and direct messages from ships’ agents (shipbrokers) to ships heading to Finnish ports. It is also included in “Master’s Guide” which Fintraffic (Vessel Traffic Services) distributes to ships sailing in Finnish territorial waters. “Baltic Sea Waste Fee Info” has proven to be a handy tool for all parties involved. Ports appreciate a general information package, including a link to port’s web pages and pricing list. Ships and shipping companies receive concise information on waste fees and regulations in the Baltic Sea. Ships’ agents can make use of the links to rules and regulations when providing information to ships sailing in the Baltic Sea.

The objective of the MILD project was to increase awareness, recognize problems in the chain from ships to waste treatment ashore, define best practices, collect data, and support regulatory work at HELCOM and at national level. In particular, the MILD project intended to scale the approach of “Baltic Sea Waste Fee Info” to other Baltic Sea countries. In order to mitigate the environmental burden of shipping and minimize the nutrient discharges into the sea, all ships sailing in the Baltic Sea need to be well informed and aware of the regulations and practises in the Baltic Sea. This applies especially to deepsea vessels arriving from ports outside the Baltic Sea, which make upto one third of the tonnage. These ships are normally chartered for larger cargoes volumes, meaning they are bigger is size and their discharges to the sea are larger, too.