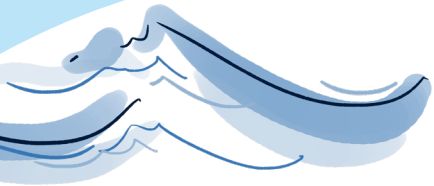
“We love what we know and protect what we love.”

A call to action from youth around the Baltic Sea from the Waves for Change Youth Forum 16-19.6.2025.



During the forum in Vattenriket, Sweden, youth from 6 countries and 10 biosphere reserves around the Baltic Sea gathered to learn about and discuss the current state and future of the Baltic Sea. Organised by Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve, the Waves for Change Youth Forum aimed to gather active youth to hear their voices and form a message to share with individuals, organisations, municipalities and countries.

A cooperation between biosphere reserves around the Baltic Sea, financed by the Swedish Institute.

Common actions for a better future

Based on our visions for a better future we, as the youth from biosphere reserves surrounding the Baltic Sea, formed guidelines for common actions we want to see implemented from individual to local, national and international level. This document expresses the change we want to see to reach a balance between the sea and the communities around it. We list suggestions, recommendations and concrete actions on all three levels that arose from the workshops and discussions during the conference. We challenge everyone from individuals to nations to change their ways to ensure the Baltic Sea with its people has a future.

A better future for the Baltic Sea is formed with these key actions:

- Integrate ocean literacy into education and public awareness to build knowledgebased action.
- Foster behavioral and mindset change through emotional connection and systemic thinking.
- Base all development on scientific knowledge, innovation, and nature-based solutions.
- Protect, restore, and enhance biodiversity and ecosystems in the Baltic Sea region.
- Ensure sustainable, circular, and fair use of Baltic Sea resources.
- Strengthen inclusion, communication, and collaboration across all levels of society.

The next pages follow with more detailed description of the key actions we want to see implemented from everyday life to national and international collaboration.

1. Ocean literacy

“What if ocean literacy was included in national curriculums?”

All action should start with knowledge based on Ocean literacy. Education, with raising and spreading awareness of problems and possible solutions for the Baltic Sea, should be the starting point of a more sustainable future. For this we recommend finding inspiration in already existing knowledge, solutions and expansion to new innovations. We want to see more collaboration, cooperation and networking between schools, universities, municipalities and NGOs to share ideas, good practices and innovations.

We also want access to relevant information for everyone. Scientific information and research should be made open and easy to understand for all. Communication from universities and institutions outside the academic community and other organizations should be lifted to a central role in their work. Open sharing between stakeholders needs to increase.

Individual:

- Share inspiration and knowledge with family, friends etc.
- Educate yourself on biodiversity and support it in your local area by restoring ecosystems in your own garden or land, or participating in local projects of restoration.
- Connect to the ocean. Visit the Baltic Sea and form experiences and new memories.

Local:

- Organize more approachable events: think about diverse target groups and their needs to be able to participate.
- More community gatherings for sharing information and skills: Teach people your knowledge and skills; for example, fixing, sewing clothes, farming food for your own needs or gardening that supports biodiversity.
- Make science more accessible and communicate about it in an understandable manner; use local news outlets to inform and motivate people. Spark their interest in ocean literacy!
- Create more opportunities for networking, collaborations and internships.

National & international:

- We want to see ocean literacy included in national curriculums, so it becomes a basic skill like reading or writing.
- Compulsory ocean literacy training for politicians, policy makers and businesses.
- Share information: Interinstitutional and -governmental cooperation, networking and seminars. Learn from other countries, good practices, local results and research data to prove sustainable practices work and why they are beneficial.
- Collaborations with nature conservation organisations and NGOs.

2. From blue values to sustainable behavior

”What if we cared for the well-being of the Baltic Sea as much as for ourselves?”

The next step is to change our mindsets by including systemic thinking and taking consequences into account. Future perspectives should be central to all planning, decisions and actions. We recommend getting there by learning by doing. Getting practical experience strengthens personal and emotional connection to the ocean and opens new skills to tackle the problems. What we know, we want to protect. Through this connection we can change our mindsets and behaviors towards more ecological ones. We need to deepen our understanding that humans and the ocean are fundamentally interconnected.

Reflecting on our own values, choices and behavior first is rudimental. Even the smallest actions matter. No matter how small, everyone can do something. All actions contribute to the better future for the Baltic Sea we want to see preserved. The youth around the Baltic Sea calls everyone to take part in the shared responsibility to care for our ocean.

Individual:

- Stay curious: first think about your actions and their consequences. What causes harm for the environment? Change your behaviour and mindset to a more sustainable direction.
- Keep trying and trust the process: the results won't necessarily be visible right away. But every action matters!
- Visit the ocean in all seasons and talk with locals, business owners, scientists and share your experiences with your loved ones.

Local:

- Launch campaigns for sustainable projects and awareness, such as beach clean-ups, workshops, open theme days or challenges that are practical, informative and easy to participate in.
- Invite others to work with you. Schools, universities, NGOs can contribute to educating people.
- Lift success stories and learning sites.

National & international:

Future perspectives and consequences to the Baltic Sea should have a central role in politics, development and businesses. Include the perspective of consequences in planning and decision-making and see how your decisions and actions affect the Baltic Sea.

3. Development based on science

”What if we had multifunctional solutions based on science and nature as well as sustainably developed urban areas that supported the Baltic Sea?”

Research and multifunctionality lead to innovation and sustainable solutions. We need scientific knowledge to better understand the multifaceted problems the Baltic Sea faces and how to tackle them while maintaining balance in water, on land and in our societies. By combining knowledge from different academic fields, local and traditional knowledge as well as what we can learn from nature, we can find multifunctional solutions that solve problems on many levels.

We want to see nature-based solutions and innovations through biomimicry, that will be used in coastal and urban areas surrounding the Baltic Sea. What happens on the surrounding land will reflect in the ocean. Due to climate change we face new problems. We want resilient and multifunctional town planning, that takes changing and extreme weather conditions into consideration. We want to see future urban areas planned and developed based on both green and blue values.

Individual:

- Change of mindset: Whenever possible, use public transportation, reflect on consumption, water usage and recycling. How sustainable are your everyday actions?
- Use your voice and demand more sustainable policies, infrastructure and choices from your municipality or the state.

Local:

- Green city planning: green areas and environmental compensation for the new land areas used for urban construction. We want green walls and roofs and broader biodiversity in urban areas.
- Functional and cheaper public transportation that also connects rural areas to cities. We want innovative blending of private transportation and public transportation, such as offering cheaper bus or train tickets to people who leave their cars outside the city and switch to public transportation when entering cities and central areas.

National & international:

- Funding for science and especially for collaboration across institutions and fields of expertise.
- Incentives to use recycled and sustainable materials and/or choices in developing and building urban areas or homes.
- Compulsory solar panels for new buildings as well as other greener options for power.
- Resilient cities and urban planning: buildings that withstand extreme weather conditions, such as floods, rain and heat. Find solutions for this especially in biomimicry and nature-based solutions.

4. Biodiversity and restoration

”What if biodiversity in the Baltic Sea was thriving?”

Biodiversity in the ocean and on land cannot decrease any longer. We want to see healthy, thriving habitats and coastal areas that support life under the surface. Ecosystems between land, the water cycle and the ocean need to be studied and seen as an interactive, holistic system. We also need to reflect on how humans interact with this system and fix all unsustainable ways of coexisting.

We want to see immediate action on restoring and creating new habitats in the Baltic Sea. This means habitats underwater as well as on land by the coast, such as wetlands. More of the Baltic Sea needs to be protected and restricted in commercial and recreational use.

Individual:

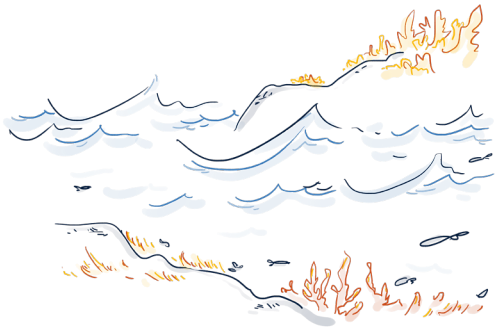
- Participate in citizen science or local restoration projects, like volunteer groups making wetlands.
- As a landowner, be informed and seek out knowledge on how to maintain and increase biodiversity on your land or water area.
- Use invasive species as a food source or participate disposing them.

Local:

- Restore habitats: we want more structural plates to harbor and develop underwater areas, new eelgrass meadows planted and corridors cut in reeds for fish to spawn.
- Slow down waterways and stop run-off of nutrients to the sea.
- Create opportunities for more meandering, grazing and other nature-based solutions to take care of coastal areas.
- Information and collaboration: Communicate on the problems and how to fix them. Involve school classes and collaborate with biosphere reserves and universities on education and participation. Involve youth and young adults in citizen science projects.

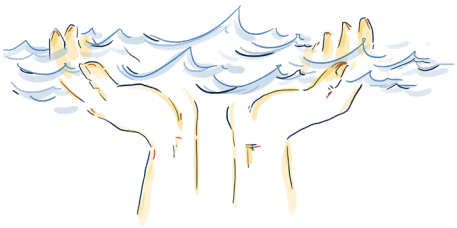
National & international:

- Create sustainable water cycles that do not leak nutrients to the sea. We want to see clever ways for reusing water and sustainable use of fresh water.
- We want to see more funding for science, cooperation with other countries and international projects to understand and fix problems in the whole area of the Baltic Sea.



5. Sustainable use

”What if it was more desirable to choose what is good for the Baltic Sea?”



Resources and ecosystem services in the Baltic Sea are not infinite. We need to shift towards a circular economy that does not overuse resources from the ocean or land areas. Sustainable use should be a focus for all commercial and recreational use of the Baltic Sea to keep the balance between use and regeneration of natural resources. The Baltic Sea region needs more legislation to prevent ecological catastrophes and support sustainable development of communities, businesses and culture in the region.

To achieve these goals we want to see lower taxes implemented for sustainable choices, such as materials and ways of using ecosystem services provided by the Baltic Sea. By funding and choosing local and small-scale businesses and taxing globally we can support regional livelihoods and increase more conscious choices. We also demand accountability from businesses around the region and on an international level. We want greenwashing and environmentally harmful business models, like fast fashion, banned. We challenge everyone to find better alternatives.

Individual:

- Make conscious choices to buy locally produced food or products.
- Boycott companies that harm the sea and support sustainable choices. Demand change from unsustainable businesses.
- Share information and spread awareness within your own networks.

Local:

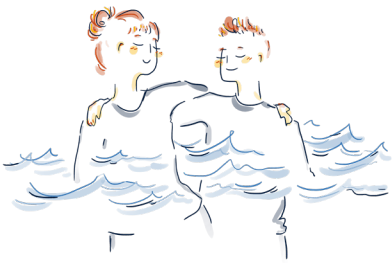
- Don't collaborate with businesses that hurt the environment.
- Buying a lot of food? Go local! Use your local businesses and restaurants for conferences, school food, parties, etc.
- Educate people about locally based products; for example organize day tours to local farms or fisheries. Promote local and sustainable choices to tourists.
- Create and implement environmental projects together with locals.

National & international:

- Lower taxes for sustainable choices and materials.
- Ban greenwashing and enforce open reporting of how business models affect the Baltic Sea.
- Ban discharge of bilge water and septic tanks into the sea and create legislation to enforce this.
- New legislation for businesses to compensate communities for the loss of aesthetic and cultural values in their surroundings.
- Programmes for local businesses and produce: create economic initiatives for local businesses as well as support to promote and communicate about them.
- Laws on onsite purification of the most harmful substances to lessen the impact of a potential leak.
- Exchange experiences and compare situations on the most effective solutions and then implement them internationally.

6. Inclusion and collaboration

”What if everyone was heard and included while creating new policies, developing areas and planning projects?”



The youth around the Baltic Sea want to be included in planning, decision making and communication of new policies, planning of projects and development of the region. The Baltic Sea with its problems will be inherited by us, so we want to be heard and included in shaping a better future for humans as well as nature. We want to see more interactive and open communication, as well as more opportunities to come together from different positions to truly be able to discuss, collaborate and take action.

For these goals we want to see more funding for inclusive projects that are open to diverse target groups, such as local communities and youth. Collaboration between schools, universities, NGOs, municipalities and locals will open new possibilities for untapped knowledge, resources and creativity. Projects and research done together will increase a sense of agency and knowledge of the current state of the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea needs everyone from all walks of life to tackle the multifaceted problems of today.

Individual:

- Practice active listening as much as talking about the Baltic Sea.
- Communities need to share more and compete less about resources, information and skills. Help your neighbors and create a system for sharing resources that works for you and your social circles.
- Get to know the biosphere reserves in your state or in the Baltic Sea region. If possible, participate in events, seminars and projects. Volunteer to help out in their work or share about biosphere reserves in your own networks.

Local:

- We need more forums for getting people to come together – create possibilities for youth to participate.
- Communication between different groups and institutions: share positive and sustainable examples and practices, as well as inform openly about current planning, projects or opportunities to participate.
- Organisations should work with different stakeholders to increase collaboration and raise the voices of e.g. scientists and youths in lobbying.
- Create more opportunities for citizen science and collaboration between local communities, NGOs and academic institutions.

National & international:

- Allocate funding for citizen science and intersectional projects that include multiple groups and institutions.
- Use biosphere areas as a tool to activate and bring together locals and institutions for true collaboration. We need more biosphere reserves around the world.
- National and international networks: we need funding for active youth to participate and be heard in meetings and conferences.

Knowledge-based action, together

We call upon everyone to reflect, change ways and act for our shared environment and future.

We need to better understand how closely our lives are tied to the ocean and as individuals and societies make necessary changes all the way from the grassroots to the systematic level. The youth from the Baltic Sea region is eager to see and participate in the collaboration and necessary actions to ensure the balance between the Baltic Sea and us humans. These actions needs to start today, together.

Sincerely,

The youth from biosphere reserves surrounding the Baltic Sea