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It's okay to pay to protect the marine environment

Federal Environment Agency: Citizens willing to pay more for a clean Baltic Sea

There is still too much algae growth in the Baltic Sea. This can be quite detrimental to its water quality, which is all the more reason why the people in the Baltic Sea littoral states are prepared to pay for its protection. Respondents in a study said they would be willing to spend roughly four billion euros to improve the ecological condition of the Baltic Sea. According to a new study carried out by the international research network BalticSTERN, the public is well aware of how significant an intact Baltic Sea is for their own environment. The Baltic Sea suffers from excessively high accumulation of nutrients, is often murky and afflicted by algal bloom and has insufficient levels of oxygen. Germans, for example, are prepared to pay an additional 27.40 euros per person and year for a healthy marine ecosystem. "We can send the message to policymakers that there is great public support for efforts to improve the condition of the Baltic Sea. We will have to pay dearly in the future if we don't act today", says Jochen Flasbarth, President of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA).

Although the inputs of nitrogen and phosphorus to the Baltic Sea in Germany have declined significantly, the eutrophication which these substances cause nevertheless has a detrimental effect on its water quality. Eutrophication makes water become murky and results in high algae count, which reduces the oxygen content and increases nitrogen content. A study by the international research network BalticSTERN finds that, on average, one in every two people has experienced the effects of eutrophication in the Baltic Sea region.

The study proves that many people are concerned about the state of the Baltic Sea, by which they mean the entire area and not merely the region in which they live. Respondents rated the protection of the marine environment as high priority, claiming they would pay an additional 27.40 euros per person and year for measures to combat eutrophication. These measures might include stricter requirements imposed on farmers as well as the introduction of phosphate-free dishwasher detergent and more restrictive emission standards for emissions from shipping.

Through extrapolation, the segment of the population in Germany aged 18 and older (68.3 million) believes a healthy Baltic Sea is worth paying an annual 1.87 billion euros. This is associated with a high sense of recreational value attributed to the Baltic Sea. 83 per cent of the 1,500 respondents

polled in Germany indicated they had visited the Baltic Sea at least once, and most listed beach stays or hiking as their leisure pastimes.

There is general agreement in all nine littoral states that the marine environment of the Baltic Sea must be improved. More than half of all respondents would be willing to provide financial support to the 2007 Baltic Sea Action Plan. The average willingness to pay varies among the individual states, from about 4 euros in Latvia to roughly 110 euros in Sweden. This gap is narrowed after adjustment for differences in income levels.

The will to improve the condition of the Baltic Sea has prompted the members of the Helsinki Commission, or HELCOM, to draft an action plan. This commission has members from the nine littoral states of the Baltic Sea and from the European Union. To find out the extent of potential public support for this action plan, the research network BalticSTERN polled a total of 10,500 people in the nine states. The study presented respondents with two scenarios: the first was the condition of the Baltic Sea in 2050 if no measures are implemented; the second reflected implementation of an action plan. The respondents then indicated whether and how much they would be prepared to pay for improvement measures.

Further information and links:

BalticSTERN is a research network of partners from all the Baltic Sea littoral states. It develops ecological and economic models which are combined to describe the costs and benefits of improvement measures. The results of the present analysis of public willingness to pay will be fed into a cost-benefit analysis that is to be published in autumn 2012.

The study *Benefits of meeting the Baltic Sea nutrient reduction targets - combining ecological modelling and contingent valuation in the nine littoral states* is available here:

www.mtt.fi/dp/DP2012_1.pdf

The UBA background paper on marine litter titled *Abfälle im Meer - ein gravierendes ökologisches, ökonomisches und ästhetisches Problem* (in German) is here:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien-e/3900.html>

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