



marine protected areas
in the Eastern Baltic Sea



Nature Management Plan for Marine Protected Area “Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga”

Summary

The Nature Management Plan for the Marine Protected Area “Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga” was developed in 2008-2009 within the EU LIFE-Nature Programme funded project “Marine Protected Areas in the Eastern Baltic Sea” (LIFE05NAT/LV/000100).

The development of the Plan was lead by the Baltic Environmental Forum-Latvia in cooperation with Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology, Latvian Fish Resources Agency and the Marine and Inland Waters Administration of the State Environmental Service.

The Marine Protected Area “Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga” is located in the South-Western territorial sea of Latvia at the coastline of Dundaga, Roja, and Engure Counties, as well as Jūrmala City. Its area is 132,173 ha.

The aim of designating the MPA is protection of EU importance habitats (reefs) that occupy 19,252 ha, as well as bird species with populations which numbers reach internationally important area criteria (divers *Gavia sp.*, velvet scoter *Melanitta fusca*, long-tailed duck *Clangula hyemalis* and little gull *Larus minutus*).

Within the Plan, a threat assessment was carried out on the bases of main influencing factors: coastal hydrotechnical constructions, by-catch of birds and mammals, direct disturbance from human activities, dredging and dumping activities, water pollution, invasive species, commercial fishery, oil spills, extraction of mineral resources and potential wind park building. The assessment let to conclude that no significant influence is observed on the habitats and species of the MPA at present, nevertheless it may increase in future inline with increased sea use for different purposes

The long-term goal for the protection of the MPA: to ensure favourable conservation status for bird species (divers *Gavia sp.*, velvet scoter *Melanitta fusca*, long-tailed duck *Clangula hyemalis* and little gull *Larus minutus*) and reef habitats, for which protection the area have been designated, by maintaining natural distribution range and ecological functions, in parallel facilitating sustainable development on management of the area and balancing nature conservation and socioeconomic interests.

The Nature Management Plan sets eight short-term goals with implementation in 10 years:

1. To ensure maintenance of EU importance habitat - reefs – in an area of 22,268 ha and preservation of their ecological functions at the present level.
2. To ensure maintenance of the present proportion (above 1% of the biogeographic population) or its increase for EU importance bird species - divers *Gavia sp.*,

velvet scoter *Melanitta fusca*, long-tailed duck *Clangula hyemalis* and little gull *Larus minutus*.

3. To ensure development and implementation of efficient monitoring and reporting system.
4. To ensure regular administration and control in the MPA.
5. To facilitate development of sustainable tourism in the Marine Protected Area and ensure infrastructure according to the goals of MPA management.
6. To conserve cultural heritage of the territory.
7. To facilitate the raising of public awareness on natural and cultural heritage assets of the Marine Protected Area.
8. To develop/improve laws and regulations to promote conservation of nature assets in the MPA.

As it is not necessary or practically not possible to carry out direct management activities for species and habitats, the management activities developed during the preparation of the Management Plan are mainly related to administration and control of MPAs, scientific research, regular monitoring, improvement of legal base and public awareness and education.

A functional zoning is developed for the MPA that foresees three zones: nature reserve zone, nature park zone and neutral zone. The aim and prohibited/regulated activities are included in the proposal for the individual Regulations on Nature Conservation and Management, which is a part of the Plan.

The Nature Management Plan has been developed according to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 686 "On the Contents and Development Procedure of Nature Management Plans of Specially Protected Nature Areas" (adopted on 9 October 2007). The development of the Plan started with an informative meeting on 29 February 2008. Four Supervisory Group meetings were organised: on 27 May 2008, 31 October 2008, 9 March 2009, and 19 May 2009. Public hearing meeting was held on 15 June 2009. After the public hearing, the management plans were sent for commenting to Dundaga, Roja and Engure County Councils, as well as Jūrmala City Council. Due to significant objection by Dundaga and Engure County Councils against delineated borders of the MPA, an enlarged Supervisory Group meeting was organised in the Ministry of the Environment on 25 September 2009. The participants agreed that bird species and habitat experts will check, whether it is possible to change the borders of the MPA. According to the statement by Latvian Ornithological Society, the changes of the borders were not justifiable.

According to the National legal procedure, the Management Plan was submitted to the Nature Protection Board on 6 November 2009, which after verification of the Plan submitted it to the Ministry of the Environment on 11 December 2009.