The Discharge of Ship Wastewater into the Baltic Sea Must Stop

The Baltic Sea is one of the most heavily trafficked seas in the world and has served for decades as a dumping ground for maritime traffic. Requiring ships to discharge wastewater at ports is a simple way to improve the condition of the Baltic Sea and reduce eutrophication.

Eutrophication leads to water turbidity, increased growth of harmful blue-green algae, and oxygen depletion in the seabed. Photo: Pasi Relanto

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ban wastewater discharge into the sea across the entire Baltic Sea.

Develop the No Special Fee system and provide information about it.

Ensure the proper functioning of the equipment and strengthen monitoring.

!

Bacterial levels in wastewater are alarming, with up to 69 million fecal bacteria (CFU) found in just 100 milliliters of water.

Up to 2,000 cargo ships navigate the Baltic Sea every day, and many of them discharge wastewater directly into the sea — legally. Black and grey water, meaning sewage as well as dishwashing and laundry wastewater, contain large amounts of harmful substances. As a shallow and low-salinity brackish water basin, the Baltic Sea is particularly sensitive to nutrient loading, which accelerates its eutrophication and threatens its vulnerable ecosystems.

A report by BSAG and Traficom found that, even though discharging wastewater at the ports in the Baltic Sea area is completely free, the amounts discharged at ports are very low compared to the volume of maritime traffic. The report also revealed that the wastewater discharge contains high levels of fecal bacteria, suspended solids, and nutrients. Furthermore, serious deficiencies were found in the wastewater treatment equipment on ships.

Finland is the first country in the Baltic Sea region to completely ban wastewater discharge into its territorial waters. However, achieving the desired impacts requires the ban to cover the entire Baltic Sea. In addition to the discharge ban, it is crucial to ensure the proper functioning of the equipment and monitoring systems. Only then can we guarantee that wastewater is diverted to land instead of the sea and, ideally, utilised as a resource within a circular economy.

BSAG
Baltic Sea Action Group

Contact: Pieta Jarva
+358 50 338 1096
pieta.jarva@bsag.fi

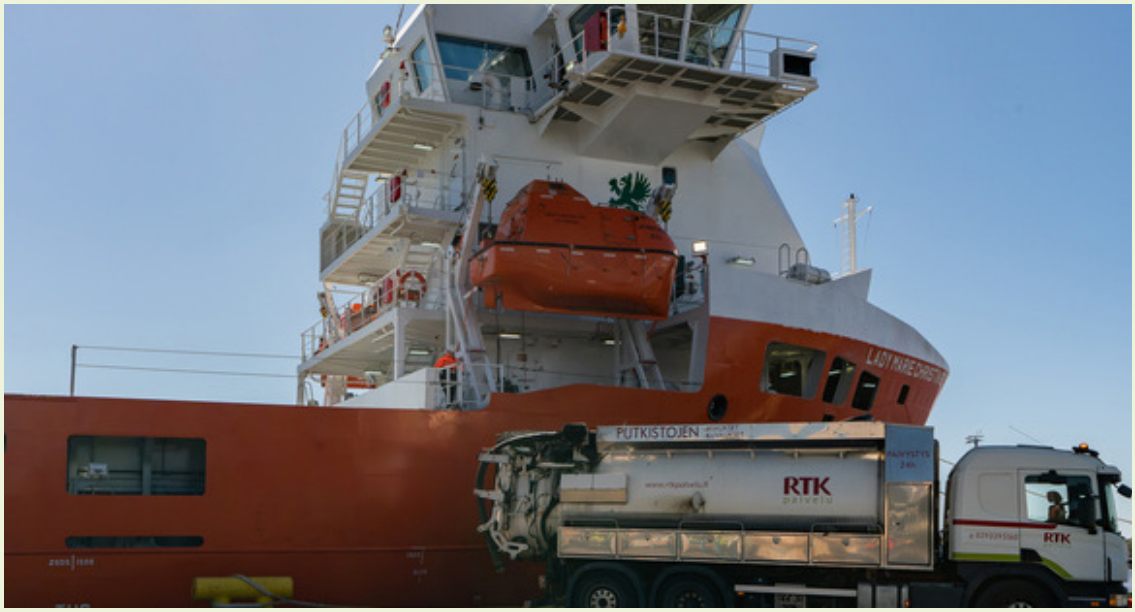
bsag.fi

1. Implement a wastewater discharge ban across the entire Baltic Sea, following Finland's example.

2. Expand the No Special Fee system to include grey water. The No Special Fee system charges ships for the reception, treatment, and disposal of waste generated during normal operations, regardless of whether the waste is delivered to port facilities.

3. Ensure the adoption of the No Special Fee system and provide information about it throughout the Baltic Sea region.

4. Introduce inspections of wastewater processing systems during regular inspections. This requires ships to conduct mandatory sampling during a monitoring period before inspections and the designation of an authority to oversee compliance.



In BSAG's Ship Waste Action initiative, ship-generated waste has successfully been redirected to the Baltic Sea ports for reuse instead of the sea over several years. Photo: Jyrki Saarni

Wastewater report (in Finnish)

https://www.bsag.fi/ajankohtaista/selvitys-tukee-kansallisia-paastokieltoja/

More about Ship Waste Action

https://www.bsag.fi/en/maritime-transport/ship-waste-action-en/