



On the current status of trans-boundary environmental impact assessment of the Nord Stream gas pipeline

Opinion of the Commission for Nature Conservation of the Estonian Academy of Sciences

Estonian Academy of Sciences received an information letter from the Ministry of the Environment of Estonia informing about the document "Current status of trans-boundary environmental impact assessment of the Nord Stream gas pipeline" and asking to submit an opinion by December 20, 2007.

An expert panel of the Estonian Academy of Sciences and its Commission for Nature Conservation evaluated the current status of the trans-boundary environmental impact assessment of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, based on the two documents that have been made available by Nord Stream.

The documentation presented by the project developers is followed by the statement: "Based on a review of the statements – in particular those related to the pipeline route – Nord Stream decided to launch additional studies along selected sections of the proposed pipeline route. In October 2007, Nord Stream presented the current status of these ongoing route studies to the authorities. It builds on the Project Information Document from November 2006, and shall hence be seen as a supplement hereto."

Concerning the specific aspects of the current status of the environmental impact assessment in the light of these documents, the conclusions of the expert panel were as follows:

1. At this stage, neither the environmental impact of the original route nor any alternative options deviating from the original route can be adequately evaluated because of the missing Terms of Reference of environmental impact assessment and related materials. Therefore detailed comments on specific questions should be postponed until the Terms of Reference of environmental impact assessment is delivered.
2. The list of trans-boundary environmental impact effects must be substantially enlarged, because only small parts of problems concerning trans-boundary environmental impact are identified. Also, the identified problems need further elaboration. In particular, the environmental impact of the de-oxygenation liquid referred to as "test water" in pressure testing has to be revealed and its effects to the water quality and sea life explained, with the evidence of previous experience. The impact to fisheries, benthic organisms and, hazards to populations of mammals must be assessed.
3. It should be noted that pipeline re-routing through the Bornholm Strait (between Sweden and Bornholm Island, route DK-02) may cause Baltic-wide barrier effect for the water exchange and subsequently, drastic changes in the ecosystems of all the Baltic Sea subregions, including the status of fish stocks. The shallow Bornholm Strait is the only passage through which the more saline transformed North Sea waters can spread to the deep layers of the Bornholm Basin, the Gotland Basins and the Gulf