

## The Life of a Leisure Boat

**Date:** Tuesday, 29 April 2025

**Theme:** Sustainable Maritime Infrastructure

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### Summary

The session explored the full life cycle of leisure boats, from production and active use to end-of-life, through the lens of sustainability, tourism, innovation, and governance. Experts from across the Baltic Sea region shared perspectives on manufacturing trends, environmental impacts, policy developments, and tourism strategies, helping participants reflect on current practices and future solutions for sustainable recreational boating.

The session opened with **Łukasz Szyca**, Vice President at [the Polish Chamber of Marine Industry and Water Sports \(POLBOAT\)](#), who provided insights into the boating industry in Poland. Łukasz emphasised that while sustainability is gaining traction, in practice it remains a low priority. While electric propulsion is increasingly discussed, adoption remains minimal (around 1%) due to technical, infrastructural, and economic hurdles. Marinas are not yet equipped to support large-scale electric charging, and traditional diesel propulsion is still more cost-effective. Retrofitting older vessels is also limited, as many boats are decades old, modified across multiple service stations, and not always suited for modern technologies. Łukasz concluded by stressing that better initial boat design could reduce fuel consumption and support sustainability goals over a vessel's long lifespan.

Next, **Josephine Rubia**, Analyst Marine Environment at [the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management \(SwAM\)](#), addressed the environmental and regulatory dimensions of phasing out carburetted two-stroke engines in leisure boats, with a focus on Sweden. Her presentation focused on national-level responses to the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive Measure 41, including ongoing legal reviews that explore outright bans, restrictions in ecologically sensitive areas, or incentives for alternative fuels like alkylate petrol. Josephine illustrated these challenges through a case study involving the retrofitting of a 1976 sailboat with an electric inboard motor. She reflected on the life cycle assessment (LCA) implications of such retrofits, comparing emissions, energy use, and resource consumption of traditional combustion engines versus electric alternatives. It raised questions about sustainability trade-offs, particularly whether extending the l

ifespan of existing combustion engines might sometimes outweigh the benefits of early electrification.

**Gunilla Rosenqvist**, Project Leader at [Blue Centre Gotland \(Uppsala University\)](#), brought attention to the ecological impacts of boating, particularly the underrecognized role of vessels in spreading invasive species. She called for a mindset shift: since boating occurs in nature, it must be practised with nature in mind. Her recommendations ranged from concrete actions, such as avoiding anchoring in eelgrass areas, responsibly disposing of waste, and washing boats and gear in water-friendly ways, to broader awareness-raising about how even small boats can transport invasive organisms. Gunilla's insights served as a reminder that individual behaviour and boating culture are critical components of sustainability, alongside technology and policy.

**Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło**, EUSBSR Policy Area Tourism Coordinator and Director of International Cooperation at [Pomorskie Tourist Board](#), focused on the tourism potential and governance frameworks surrounding leisure boating in regions like Pomorskie. Despite its 1,000+ marinas, cultural heritage, and scenic coastal offerings, the region faces several limitations: a short tourism season, relatively low visibility compared to Mediterranean destinations, and the ecological vulnerability of the Baltic Sea. Magda highlighted successful cross-border initiatives such as [South Coast Baltic](#) and [BaltSusBoating 2030](#), which promote marina development, sustainability, and regional branding. She also emphasised the Pomorskie Region's 2030 strategy, which integrates green tourism, climate action, and cultural preservation. Through examples like eco-certified marinas and heritage boatbuilding, Magda illustrated how coordinated governance and EU-funded cooperation are laying the groundwork for sustainable coastal tourism.

**Philip Easthill**, Secretary General of [the European Boating Industry](#), concluded the presentation round with a comprehensive view on sustainability in recreational boating, urging a lifecycle approach. Boats often remain in use for 40–50 years, meaning that their environmental impact extends far beyond the point of sale. Philip introduced the [LCA: Blue Boat Horizon](#) project, which is developing assessment tools to evaluate the full environmental footprint of leisure boats, from raw material extraction through manufacturing and use, to dismantling and disposal. He also presented a [Roadmap on the implementation of the circular economy for end-of-life recreational boats](#), suggesting, for example, partnerships with the wind energy and automotive sectors to develop scalable recycling solutions for composite boat materials. Achieving sustainability in the boating sector, he concluded, requires systemic innovation, from design to disposal, not just cleaner engines.

Moderated by **Jane Ihrfors**, Expert in Marine Geology at [the Swedish Environmental Research Institute \(IVL\)](#), the discussion continued in groups where participants reflected on the barriers and opportunities presented and explored actionable steps toward more sustainable boating practices across the Baltic Sea Region. Key points included the need to extend producer responsibility and improve end-of-life solutions for boats. Participants proposed an EU-wide standardised boat registry to reduce abandoned vessels and discussed potential regulations to encourage material reuse in boatbuilding. Suggestions also included dedicated funding for companies involved in boat recycling and retrofitting. Concerns were raised about the use of toxic substances in boating, with calls for EU-level regulation of composite material treatment and greater supply chain accountability. New sustainable business models were explored, and participants emphasized the importance of incorporating environmental education into boating licenses and including environmental information on sea charts.