

*Dear reader,*

If you visit a wastewater treatment plant in Mikkeli (Finland) or Elva (Estonia) today, everything may look routine. Water flows in, water flows out. But what you do not see is exactly what we are working on.

Microplastics are tiny plastic particles released from synthetic textiles, tyres, cosmetics and everyday products. PFAS are persistent chemicals used in items such as waterproof clothing, firefighting foams and food packaging. Through washing, wear, and industrial processes, both end up in our wastewater. They are largely invisible, do not easily break down, and pose risks to ecosystems and human health.

In South Savo, treated wastewater from Mikkeli flows into Lake Saimaa, one of Europe's largest freshwater systems, before eventually reaching the Baltic Sea. What we remove, or fail to remove, locally matters far beyond our region.

We are Balt-Plast-Free and BalticPFASResolve, two cross-border projects tackling these pollutants before they reach our shared waters.

In Balt-Plast-Free, Finnish and Estonian professionals work side by side to measure microplastics in an aligned way and test practical removal solutions. At the Mikkeli wastewater treatment plant, in the heart of the Lake Saimaa region, we are piloting filtration of wastewater to prevent microplastics from entering sludge and waterways. In Elva, Estonia, we are testing ultrafiltration of sludge reject water. Estonia is also investing in a mobile laboratory that will continue serving water utilities and educating the public long after the project ends.

Locally in South Savo, this strengthens the Blue Economy expertise we've built around Lake Saimaa and gives utilities practical tools to meet stricter environmental standards, including readiness for the revised Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive.

Similarly, through BalticPFASResolve, we support municipalities in identifying and managing PFAS risks early. Acting now protects drinking water sources, reduces long-term costs, and safeguards both Lake Saimaa and the Baltic Sea.

Why cross-border cooperation? Because pollution does not recognise national borders. The Baltic Sea is shared, and so must be the solutions. Interreg Central Baltic Programme enables regions like South Savo to combine international expertise with concrete local action.

From Central Baltic, we deliver results that protect waters, strengthen local capacity, and prepare our regions for Europe's future environmental standards.

*Sincerely,*

The Balt-Plast-Free and BalticPFASResolve teams



**From  
Central Baltic,  
with results**