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<b>Document title</b>	Overview of the status of indicators for assessment of benthic habitats
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<b>Category</b>	CMNT
<b>Agenda Item</b>	3– Progress on indicator and assessment work
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## Background

STATE&CONSERVATION 15-2021 considered the status of indicators to be used in the assessment of benthic habitats in HOLAS III. This document contains the relevant extracts from the outcome of STATE&CONSERVATION 15-2021 concerning benthic habitats.

The indicator template documents have been submitted to HOD 61-2021 to address issues raised at State and Conservation 15-2021 (summary of indicator development presented in [document 5-2 Rev.1 to HOD 61-2021](#)). These documents reflect the indicators undergoing approval processes at HOD 61-2021 related to threshold values/threshold value approaches for HOLAS III (i.e. [document 5-1 Rev.1 to HOD 61-2021](#)).

In addition, the assessment of benthic habitats is addressed separately under [document 3-2](#) to this meeting.

## Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information provided and to consider any possible updates or follow up, in particular related to progress on study reservations or issues pertinent to the HOD 61-2021 approval processes.

## Extracts from the Outcome of STATE&CONSERVATION 15-2021

### *Indicator: Cumulative impact on benthic biotopes*

3J.104 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in [document 3J-23](#), presentation 6.

3J.105 The Meeting took note of appreciation expressed regarding the amount of effort contributed by the leads towards HOLAS III developments, however noted the comments by Denmark and Sweden that towards HOLAS IV further developments will be needed, including for increasing spatial resolution in order to enable the use of the indicator to guide management, especially in coastal areas and to improve data and data management of different pressures such as fisheries and an improvement in the sensitivity score.

3J.106 The Meeting emphasised that in the HOLAS III indicator report gaps and assumptions associated with methodology and the results need to be clearly presented.

3J.107 The Meeting endorsed the change of the indicator name to 'Cumulative impact from physical pressures on benthic biotopes (CumI)'.

3J.108 The Meeting endorsed the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment.

### *Indicator: State of the soft-bottom macrofauna community*

3J.109 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in the corresponding document ([document 3J-24](#), presentation 6).

3J.110 The Meeting invited the Secretariat to issue a targeted supplementary data call for those Contracting Parties that have reported aggregated count/weight values to COMBINE, in particular focussed on HOLAS III data for 2016-2021.

3J.111 The Meeting noted the comment by some Contracting Parties and CCB that it is regrettable that no threshold values for the Bornholm, Arkona and Kattegat basins have been possible to develop.

3J.112 The Meeting took note of the proposal by Germany that should the division of the Bornholm basin proposed for use for the eutrophication indicators be used also for the Soft-bottom macrofauna community indicator it may be possible to still establish a threshold value prior to running the indicator evaluations for HOLAS III.

3J.113 The Meeting agreed to, by 12 November 2021, explore the feasibility of using the HOLAS III subdivision of the Bornholm basin, proposed for the eutrophication assessment, also for the Soft-bottom macrofauna community indicator. The results of this feasibility exercise are to be submitted to HOD 61-2021 with an invitation for CPs to express their views on splitting the Bornholm basin for the Soft-bottom macrofauna community indicator. The document will also include a proposed way forward for development and approval of the proposed threshold value, should the proposal be supported, as follows: threshold values for one of the two divisions of the Bornholm basin to be prepared and submitted for review to CPs by 20 December 2021, and approval at HELCOM 43-2021.

3J.114 The Meeting invited the Secretariat to carry out a technical feasibility exercise related to the assessment unit divisions, supported by the relevant indicator leads, to support the process outlined above and towards HOD 61-2021.

3J.115 The Meeting endorsed the use of the indicator for in HOLAS III.

*Indicator: Condition of benthic habitats*

3J.116 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in the corresponding document ([document 3J-25](#), presentation 6).

3J.117 The Meeting noted the concerns raised by several CPs regarding the current indicator and also the relevance of this indicator to the assessment of overall benthic habitat condition (thus also linked to MSFD D6C5 and processes in EU TG Seabed). The Meeting invited the indicator leads to continue developments towards HOLAS IV, in particular development of localised test cases, but did not support its use in HOLAS III as an indicator.

**Additional information**

The following text is included as an update to HOD 61-2021 ([document 5-2 Rev.1](#)) to follow up on the comments received from State and Conservation 15-2021.

**Annex 4. State of the soft-bottom macrofauna community**

State and Conservation 15-2021 discussed the State of the soft-bottom indicator (document 3J-24), an opportunity to improve the data quality via a targeted data call was identified and a feasibility study related to applying assessment unit divisions from eutrophication work was also requested. In addition, the possibility to develop threshold values and assessments for this indicator for areas where newly endorsed eutrophication-relevant assessment units exist was also endorsed. The indicator was endorsed towards HOLAS 3 (Outcomes paragraphs 3J.109 – 3J.115). The GEAR 25-2021 meeting also considered the feasibility study related to assessment units (document 5-12) and supported testing of these eutrophication derived assessment units in certain indicators where such changes may be supported scientifically (e.g. aspects also associated with eutrophication) to evaluate threshold values (Outcomes currently under final review).

The indicator leads and relevant national experts are currently exploring the possibility to further develop threshold values in the Pomeranian Bay and Bornholm Basin area and if possible, to achieve will submit proposals on 20 December 2021 for endorsement at HELCOM 43-2022, as proposed under State and Conservation 15-2021 (Outcomes paragraphs 3J.113). Any subsequent progress will be provided will be provided by the decision deadlines for State and Conservation 16-2022 and HELCOM 43-2022.