



Outcome of the 8th Meeting of the Expert Network on Benthic Habitats Monitoring

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Outcome of the 8th Meeting of the Expert Network on Benthic Habitats Monitoring

Introduction

- 0.1 In accordance with the [Outcome](#) of EN BENTHIC 7-2021 (para 6.2), the Eighth Meeting of the Expert Network on Benthic Habitat Monitoring was held online on 30 November 2021.
- 0.2 The Meeting was attended by delegations from Denmark, the European Union, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Poland and Sweden. The List of Participants is contained as **Annex 1**.
03. The Meeting was chaired by Antonia Nyström-Sandman, Sweden. Laura Kaikkonen, Project Researcher, Florent Nicolas, Associate Professional Secretary and Owen Rowe, Project Manager from the HELCOM Secretariat, acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

- 1.1 The Meeting adopted the agenda as contained in **document 1-1**.
- 1.2 The Meeting recalled the election of Chair under Agenda Item 4.

Agenda Item 2 Information from the Chair, Secretariat and Contracting Parties

- 2.1 The Meeting took note of the information on the adoption of the updated [Baltic Sea Action Plan](#) (BSAP) by the last HELCOM 2021 Ministerial Meeting, held in Lübeck on 20 October 2021. The Meeting also took note of the information on the upcoming update of the HELCOM Explorer to track progress of the updated BSAP implementation.
- 2.2 The Meeting took note of the upcoming information package which will be send to the relevant HELCOM contacts, containing communication materials on the updated BSAP.
- 2.3 The Meeting took note of the updates from the EU Technical Group on seabed habitats and sea floor integrity (TG Seabed) (**document 2-1**). The Meeting also took note of the next TG Seabed meeting which will be held on 1-2 December 2021 and noted that threshold value setting and MSFD Article 8 guidance are two topics for which the ongoing work will focus.

Agenda Item 3 Progress on indicator assessment work

- 3.1 The Meeting took note of the information on the outcomes of the review of benthic indicators by STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 (**document 3-1**). STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 endorsed the indicators “Cumulative impact on benthic biotopes” and the proposed name change to “Cumulative impact from physical pressures on benthic biotopes (CumI)”.
- 3.2 The Meeting took note that the indicator “State of the soft-bottom macrofauna community” was also endorsed by STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 but that spatial coverage had not been increased (i.e. new threshold values) and that further work on this indicator is ongoing, in particular related to areas where assessment unit divisions have been proposed for eutrophication assessment.
- 3.3 The Meeting discussed the proposal from Germany at STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 on exploring potential threshold values for the Bornholm Basin/Pomeranian Bay area, based on assessment unit division related eutrophication parameters. The Meeting took note of the information that the application to the potential for new assessment units to be applied for all indicators was discussed during GEAR 25-2021, but the application of these new eutrophication-related divisions (Bornholm/Pomeranian and Gulf of Finland) will only apply for eutrophication indicators in HOLAS III and that testing these for other selected indicators was considered relevant with a longer-term review also considered needed. Relevant experts held a sub-group meeting to further plan the process and will provide an update on progress as soon as it is available.

3.4 The Meeting also took note that the indicator “Condition of benthic habitats” was not supported as indicator for HOLAS 3, noting the key links to the ongoing work under TG Seabed, but that further testing and development towards HOLAS 4, where possible and relevant, were considered valuable.

3.5 The Meeting took note of the additional information included as an update to HOD 61-2021 (cf. [document 5-2 Rev.1](#) submitted to HOD 61-2021) to follow up on the comments received from STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021.

3.6 The Meeting noted the [document 5-5](#) submitted to HOD 61-2021 which includes in its Annex 1 the latest timeline for work planned under the HOLAS 3 Assessment Phase.

Assessment of benthic habitats

3.7 The Meeting took note of the information that STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 considered the proposed approach for assessing the state of benthic habitats in HOLAS 3 (cf. [document 3J-26](#) submitted to that meeting) and noted that, as agreed a key contributor meeting was held in November 2021 to further elaborate approach for the assessment (**document 3-2**).

3.8 The Meeting took note of the latest information based on the key contributor meeting which was submitted to HOD 61-2021 (**document 3-2**).

3.9 The Meeting took note of a series of Targeted Assessment Methodology Workshops to be held in spring 2022 during which details should be finalized, with the endorsement of the final approach to take place at STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2022 (**Presentation 1**). The purpose of this workshop on benthic habitats is to finalise the assessment approach and all details for its application in HOLAS III.

3.10 The Meeting took note of the suggestion highlighted in the **document 3-2** on exploring the correlation or linkage between the results of the state of the soft-bottom macrofauna community indicator and the outputs of the Cuml indicator towards HOLAS 3 (i.e. if reduced status coincides with areas of high pressure/impact intensity). The Meeting noted the offer from Finland and Germany on the possibility to explore such evaluations in the near future and the ongoing discussions related to data to facilitate this work.

Agenda Item 4 Election of Chair and workplan for 2022-2024

4.1 The Meeting took note that the Terms of Reference have been approved by STATE & CONSERVATION Working Group (**document 4-2**).

4.2 The Meeting reviewed the work plan contained in [attachment 1](#) to this Outcome.

4.3 The Meeting discussed the proposed habitat mapping workshop and highlighted that in order to organize a meaningful workshop, further expertise on GIS and geology, in addition to benthic ecology and habitat mapping are needed.

4.4 The Meeting recalled that the decision to host the workshop stems from a proposal by Finland in 2018 and was further supported by STATE & CONSERVATION Working Group.

4.5 The Meeting proposed to revisit the aims of the workshop and agreed to request a clarification from STATE & CONSERVATION Working Group on what would be required from the workshop to support HELCOM work.

4.6 The Meeting highlighted the need to discuss and agree on levels of details of habitats to be included in assessments to have a common approach for the Baltic Sea.

4.7 The Meeting agreed to remove all tasks from the workplan related to EN BENTHIC producing their own habitat maps. The Meeting agreed that the Expert Network’s focus being rather on the validation and interpretation of existing or future mapping products from e.g. EMODnet (EUSeaMap) than to generate such maps.

4.8 The Meeting took note of the interest in the Red List process from Denmark as Denmark informed that they hope to have a strong involvement in the coming process and would like to clarify what

data is already reported so they focus national efforts on missing information. Denmark will contact key data, Biodiversity database and Red List contacts from the Secretariat.

4.9 The Meeting agreed to consider the current work plan (cf. **attachment 1**) as a working document and agreed to review this document on a regular basis to ensure that is properly up to date.

4.10 The Meeting unanimously supported the continuation of Antonia Nyström Sandman, Sweden, as Chair for EN BENTHIC.

Agenda Item 5 Any other business and next meeting

5.1 The Meeting discussed potential topics to be included in the upcoming workshop on benthic habitats planned for Spring 2022 depending of HOD 61-2021 approval (cf. para 3.9). The Meeting agreed to consider the following topics for the provisional agenda:

- 1) the appropriate map layer to apply for HOLAS III (e.g. EUSeaMap) and the relevance of ensuring that the selected map layer is also harmonised if used in other processes (e.g. SPIA or other indicators),
- 2) the final assessment structure and approach for HOLAS III, based on document 3-2 to this meeting,
- 3) appropriate level of habitat evaluation detail (e.g. if assessment should be applied at the habitat level or at an aggregated level) and subsequent integration and aggregation if required (e.g. if applied at fine scale habitat level and then aggregated to broad scale habitat type), and
- 4) the scale of assessment linked to this to allow appropriate assessment and also aggregation to assessment scale applied in other processes (e.g. under the EU).

5.2 The Meeting invited the Secretariat to find a suitable date in 2022, preferably after week 11, in line with all the other workshops, and ideally before the deadline for submitting documents to STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2022.

Agenda Item 6 Outcome of the Meeting

6.1 The Outcome of the Meeting was adopted via correspondence. The Outcome of the Meeting together with the documents and presentation considered by the Meeting are publicly available on the [Meeting Site](#) on the HELCOM Meeting Portal.

Annex 1 List of participants to EN BENTHIC 8-2021

Representing	Name	Organization	E-mail
Chair			
Chair (Sweden)	Antonia Nyström Sandman	AquaBiota Water Research	antonia.sandman@aquabiota.se
Contracting Parties			
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