



draft Outcome of the Sixth Meeting of the Expert Network on Benthic Habitat Monitoring (EN-BENTHIC 6-2021)

Introduction

01. The Sixth Meeting of the Expert Network on Benthic Habitat Monitoring was held online on 15 June 2021.
02. The Meeting was attended by delegations from Denmark, Estonia, EU, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. The List of Participants is attached as **Annex 1**.
03. The Meeting was chaired by Antonia Nyström-Sandman, Sweden. Laura Kaikkonen, Associate Professional Secretary, HELCOM Secretariat, acted as secretary of the Meeting.

Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the draft agenda

- 1.1 The Meeting adopted the provisional agenda (**document 1-1**).

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

- 2.1 The Meeting took note of ongoing discussions at the EU TG Seabed (outcome) and invited any comments to be provided to TG Seabed via a nominated TG Seabed representative (national or Secretariat).
- 2.2 The Meeting discussed defining the appropriate scale of assessment for benthic habitats (document 2-1).
- 2.3 The Meeting recalled that the scale referred to in the document refers to overall assessment for MSFD reporting and noted that it will be important to specify how the different assessment scales are integrate in HOLAS III and the EU level.
- 2.4 The Meeting noted that the assessment units should be set based on an ecologically relevant scale while also being relevant from a management point-of-view.
- 2.5 The Meeting agreed that from a management perspective, separating the coastal waters from open sea areas is warranted. However, the Meeting acknowledged that the differences in the characteristics of coastal areas are largely accounted for by the broad scale habitat types.
- 2.6 The Meeting in general supported using a nested approach that aggregates the 17 currently used HELCOM sub-units into larger units for EU MSFD reporting.
- 2.7 The Meeting noted that any aggregated units should follow the same borders as the currently used HELCOM units.
- 2.8 The Meeting agreed to discuss appropriate aggregation of the 17 units into larger units intersessionally and invited those EN Benthic participants who are also taking part in discussions in TG Seabed to develop alternative aggregations to be presented to EN Benthic 7-2021 and subsequently to State and Conservation 15-2021 by 7 September 2021.

2.9 The Meeting supported delineating first the criteria for the current HELCOM divisions from an ecological, and more specifically benthic perspective to guide further discussions on the aggregation of the sub-units.

2.10 The Meeting took note that the Water Framework Directive assessment units used for the coastal assessment have not been set based on their ecological relevance and suggested to also look at how the WFD assessment units align with the coastal broad habitat types to identify possible discrepancies.

2.11 The Meeting took note that in the context of work done in ICES WKTRADE on producing advice on the effects of fisheries on seafloor habitats, ICES has formulated a preliminary sub-division for the Baltic Sea from an ecological perspective which may be helpful in comparing different aggregations and noted that the ICES advice will be released on 24 June 2021.

Agenda Item 3 Cumulative impact on benthic biotopes

3.1 The Meeting took note of the status of the 'Cumulative impact on benthic biotopes' indicator as presented by the indicator leads.

3.2 The Meeting took note of the feedback from State and Conservation on the indicator development (document 3-1) and thanked the indicator leads on their work on the indicator.

3.3 The Meeting took note that the indicator report (document 3-2) has not been completely finalized and noted that the discussion on the spatial threshold values is likely not resolved by 7 September in time for submission to State and Conservation and supported using the quality thresholds in the current assessment.

3.4 The Meeting took note that the indicator leads are in the process of incorporating changes to the report based on the received comments and invited the indicator leads to share the comments received from EU and HELCOM on the [EN Benthic workspace](#).

3.5 The Meeting agreed on the content of the CumI indicator report (document 3-2) and invited the indicator leads to share an updated report with any changes to EN Benthic.

3.6 The Meeting recalled that the survey on updating the sensitivity values has been sent out to be filled out by **1 July 2021** by the Contracting Parties (also available [here](#) on the EN Benthic workspace) and noted that the indicator leads will produce a new assessment based on the updated sensitivity scores in July 2021 which will be shared with the Network for consideration before submission to State and Conservation. The Meeting encouraged the Contracting Parties to provide any possible updates to the sensitivity values to the indicator leads (berg@marilim.de) as soon as possible, and not later than 1 July 2021.

3.7 The Meeting discussed updating the sensitivity scores underpinning the CumI assessment and how to deal with discrepancies in survey responses if sensitivity scores for the same BHTs in adjacent countries are very different. The Meeting acknowledged that any such discrepancies will become apparent when the survey responses have been received and may be dealt with intersessionally or within EN-BENTHIC if necessary.

3.8 The Meeting discussed using the approach developed in CumI in national assessment to allow inclusion of confidential, high resolution data in the assessment and supported that the approach could be applied in a similar manner as done for BHTs in CumI, using national data and potentially more specific sensitivity values. The indicators leads encouraged the Meeting carry out such assessments and document the results in a suitable way so it can be included as an Appendix to the indicator report.

3.9 The Meeting supported using a more data-driven approach in HOLAS IV as also highlighted by State&Conservation.

3.10 The Meeting discussed the format in which the indicator assessment script should be published and took note that testing the indicator implementation in R is ongoing.

Agenda Item 4 Progress on other indicator and assessment work

- 4.1 The Meeting took note of the status of the 'Condition of the benthic habitats indicator' and the feedback from State and Conservation (document 4-1) and noted that the proposal from the CARAMBHA project has not been developed further since EN BENTHIC 5-2021. The Meeting acknowledged that the condition of benthic habitats indicator is strongly linked to the overall assessment of benthic habitats, presented for discussion in document 4-2.
- 4.2 The Meeting discussed whether the condition of benthic habitats should be considered as an indicator as it is mostly related to the overall assessment of benthic habitats. The Meeting recalled that any changes to the indicator status should be sent to State and Conservation for approval.
- 4.3 The Meeting took note of the status of the 'State of the soft-bottom macrofauna community' indicator and took note that the indicator leads are in the process of setting threshold values for the missing assessment units.
- 4.4 The Meeting noted that with the inclusion of new data from the ICES combine database, the aim is to increase the number of assessment units in time for HOLAS III.
- 4.5 The Meeting took note of the proposal for a general approach on the assessment of benthic habitats (document 4-2) as presented by the Secretariat.
- 4.6 The Meeting noted a suggestion to use biological data as a starting point in the assessment and to fill the gaps with the Cuml in areas where data are missing.
- 4.7 The Meeting supported the proposed assessment principle, acknowledging that the details and organization of the procedure needs refinement. The Meeting recalled that the concept had been discussed in the context of producing test assessments and noted that Sweden is planning such work as a part of their national assessment.
- 4.8 The Meeting took note that the Chair of EN Benthic is drafting a similar proposal to TG Seabed with regard to the MSFD Article 8 and welcomed the offer by chair to use such work to formulate a proposal to be submitted to State and Conservation 15-2021 with support from the Secretariat.
- 4.9 The Meeting acknowledged that producing the test assessments via national efforts may be the most efficient way forward, recalling that the concept should be agreed upon by EN Benthic.

Agenda Item 5 Any other business and next meeting

- 5.1 The Meeting agreed to hold the next meeting at the end of August 2021 and invited the Secretariat to circulate a doodle poll to schedule the next meeting.

Agenda Item 6 Outcome of the Meeting

- 6.1 The Outcome of the Meeting will be adopted via correspondence. The Outcome of the Meeting, together with the documents and presentations considered by the Meeting will be made available on the [meeting site](#) in the HELCOM Meeting Portal.

Annex 1. List of participants

Representing	Name	Organization	E-mail
Chair			
Chair	Antonia Nyström Sandman	AquaBiota Water Research	antonia.sandman@aquabiota.se
Contracting Parties			
Denmark	Grete Elisabeth Dinesen	National Institute of Aquatic Resources, Technical University of Denmark (DTU Aqua)	gdi@aqua.dtu.dk
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