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<b>Document title</b>	Review of existing HELCOM objectives and development of new objectives
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## Background

The strategic plan for the update of the BSAP includes the step to review and adjust the overall structure the BSAP (activity 2.2) to reflect current work in HELCOM. A review of the existing HELCOM ecological objectives and management objectives is to be carried out by HELCOM Working Groups and Expert Groups as part of this activity. The aim of the review of existing objectives is to ensure that they are up to date and reflect the current topics and approach of addressing environmental status and pressures in HELCOM. It was also agreed by HOD 55-2018 to develop new objectives for marine litter, underwater noise, and loss and disturbance of the seabed. The aim is to prepare initial proposals of new and revised objectives by June 2019 and to finalize and agree on an updated set of objectives by end of 2019

Under the Maritime segment the HELCOM objectives are called 'management objectives' and are related to management measures or aspired target levels of pressure from shipping and offshore installations. To support the development of the updated BSAP, management objectives will also be identified for other pressures (outcome of GEAR 19-2018, para 3.13). Proposals on management objectives for eutrophication, hazardous substances and new topics (marine litter, underwater noise, loss and disturbance of the seabed) were as a first step proposed by the Pressure Working Group followed by further consideration by the Fish Group (loss and disturbance to the seabed from fisheries) and Maritime group (impact from shipping activities).

## Action requested

The Meeting is invited to consider the development of ecological and management objectives related to the loss and disturbance of seabed habitats.

## 1) Review, revision and development of new HELCOM objectives

### 1.1 Background

Development of the first set of ecological objectives was based on work initiated in HELCOM in 2003, further developed through the HELCOM EcoQo project, financed by the EU, and culminating in 2006 with the adoption of a HELCOM Vision, Strategic Goals and Ecological Objectives ([HELCOM 27-2006, para 2.1](#), Figure 1). The Vision describes the overall ambition, whereas Strategic Goals describe the major threats<sup>1</sup> to the Baltic Sea as defined at that time, and Ecological Objectives describe central characteristics of a healthy sea in a generalised way. Through the development and implementation of HELCOM actions and agreements, the goals and objectives are to be met. This also requires the establishment of links to the activities, sources, and societal drivers that are contributing to the current state of the environment.

The ecological objectives were developed with the explicit aim to provide a link to environmental monitoring, assessments, research and management. When they were adopted, development of indicators with associated threshold values and targets was already outlined as a next major step for HELCOM. The HELCOM ecological objectives were thus developed as a “seed” for the next step in the process. In hindsight it can be concluded that the achievement of many of HELCOM ecological objectives can to date be assessed by HELCOM core indicators and associated threshold values. For the Maritime segment, representing shipping and offshore installations, management objectives were formulated.

With regard to the formulation of these objectives, the aim was to communicate HELCOM’s ambition with a wider stakeholder community ranging from scientists and politicians to the general public. The HELCOM ecological objectives thus reflect the aspired state of the environment in broad terms, while it is the HELCOM core indicators and pressure targets that describes good environmental status.

In the current BSAP structure the ecological objectives are described separately under the four strategic goals. The interlinkages between the goals were outlined when the first system was adopted, clarifying that there are many horizontal links between different ecological objectives.

### 1.2 Adjustment to the BSAP structure

The ‘BSAP structure’ refers to the strategic goals and objectives of the Baltic Sea Action Plan. As part of the BSAP update process, HOD 55-2018 considered an adjustment to the BSAP structure with the aim to better reflect the topics that are currently addressed in HELCOM. HOD 55-2018 also requested HELCOM Working Groups to initiate the development of ecological or management objectives for the topics marine litter, underwater noise, and loss and disturbance of the seabed and also endorsed the guidance from GEAR 19-2018 with regard to the planned review of existing HELCOM objectives. The meeting provisionally agreed to maintain the original segments for the updated BSAP with the following preliminary adjustments:

- to address marine litter under the segment on Hazardous substances and to consider changing the name to ‘Hazardous substances and marine litter’<sup>2</sup>;
- to include under the Maritime segment a broader set of sea-based activities, e.g. construction work, dredging, extraction of mineral resources, fishing, and consider changing the name of the segment to ‘Sea-based activities’. The topics underwater noise and loss and disturbance of the seabed are tentatively assigned to this segment.

The detailed content to be covered by the segments is still to be defined and linkages between the segments are being clarified and will be further discussed at HOD 56-2019.

<sup>1</sup> For biodiversity described as loss of biodiversity caused by eutrophication, hazardous substances and maritime activities.

<sup>2</sup> GEAR 20-2019 proposed to only refer to “litter” rather than “marine litter”

## VISION:

A healthy Baltic Sea environment, with diverse biological components functioning in balance, resulting in good environmental/ecological status and supporting a wide range of sustainable human economic and social activities

## GOALS:

Baltic Sea unaffected  
by eutrophication

Baltic Sea undisturbed  
by hazardous substances

Environmentally friendly  
maritime activities

Favourable status of  
Baltic Sea biodiversity

## OBJECTIVES:

- Concentrations of nutrients close to natural levels
- Clear water
- Natural level of algal blooms
- Natural distribution and occurrence of plants and animals
- Natural oxygen levels

- Concentrations of hazardous substances close to natural levels
- All fish are safe to eat
- Healthy wildlife
- Radioactivity at the pre-Chernobyl level

- Enforcement of international regulations – no illegal discharges
- Safe maritime traffic without accidental pollution
- Efficient emergency and response capabilities
- Minimum sewage pollution from ships
- No introductions of alien species from ships
- Minimum air pollution from ships
- Zero discharges from offshore platforms
- Minimum threats from offshore installations

- Natural marine and coastal landscapes
- Thriving and balanced communities of plants and animals
- Viable populations of species

Figure 1. Current HELCOM system with a vision, strategic goals, ecological objectives and management objectives (under Maritime goal).

### 1.3 Process

The review of existing objectives and development of new objectives will be carried out through an iterative process in such way that the review is initiated by one Working Group, while other Groups will have the possibility to comment the proposals of relevance for the mandate of their work. The review has been initiated at spring meetings 2019 and will continue in autumn 2019 with the aim of presenting final proposals for endorsement by HOD in December 2019. So far the following Groups have initiated the task related to the following HELCOM objectives:

#### Pressure 10-2019:

- review of existing ecological objectives for eutrophication and hazardous substances
- proposals on new ecological objectives for marine litter, underwater noise and loss and disturbance to the seabed
- proposals on management objectives for all of the above topics

#### State & Conservation 10-2019:

- review of existing ecological objectives for biodiversity
- proposals on management objectives for biodiversity
- further elaboration of the initial ideas from Pressure 10-2019. State & Conservation 10-2019 did however not have time to consider objectives of loss and disturbance to the seabed.

The following Working Groups will also be actively involved in the review and development of objectives.

- Fish Group (loss and disturbance to the seabed from fisheries)

- Maritime group (objectives related to impacts from shipping activities, non-indigenous species)
- Response (existing objective related to emergency and response capabilities)

#### 1.4 Guidance for the review and revision of HELCOM objectives

The guidance given to the Groups is based on the outcome of GEAR 19-2018 and further elaborations by the Chairs of the Working Groups and the Secretariat (Pressure 10-2019, [document DS2](#), State&Conservation 10-2019, [document 8J-6](#)). The guidance is the following:

##### *General guidance*

The objectives should be:

- linked to HELCOM assessments i.e. achievement should be possible to follow-up through HELCOM assessments,
- easy to communicate to the wider community,
- not too many.

##### *Ecological objectives*

- should reflect the desired state of the environment and be of aspirational character,
- should be possible to follow-up by use of indicators and associated threshold values,
- with regard to new topics (marine litter, underwater noise, loss and disturbance to seabed) the ecological objectives should focus on the state elements of these topics or on their impacts on the environment e.g. on the concentration, amounts or extent of litter/noise/disturbance to seabeds, or properties of the ecosystem that should be maintained or not harmed.

With regard to indicators and thresholds values it can be noted that there are several indicators under development to assess the state of benthic communities and habitats although only the listed core indicator is operational:

- State of the soft-bottom macrofauna community (core)
- Cumulative impacts on benthic biotopes (pre-core)
- Condition of benthic habitats (pre-core)

##### *Management objectives*

- management objectives describe the desired effect of or aspirational targets of management measures,
- follow-up of management objectives should in principle be done using indicators and associated pressure targets or in the case of biodiversity by targets for conservation and protection.

With regard to indicators and targets it can be noted that there is no existing indicator related to reducing loss and disturbance to the seabed. Further development of such targets is however founded in HELCOM 2018 Ministerial Declaration: *“WE AGREE to do regional work on developing threshold values for the adverse effects of anthropogenic physical disturbance and, based on the best available scientific information in close coordination with other relevant fora, if needed to achieve GES, to develop the necessary regionally coordinated quantitative targets for the reduction of physical disturbance caused by human activities and habitat loss”*.

The outcome of the discussions is presented in Working Papers from the respective meeting ([Pressure 10-2019, DS WP.1](#), State&Conservation 10-2019, 8J, WP.1 – Attachment 1). The discussions have been held in groups during the Working Group meetings with the guidance to provide initial ideas and noting that the objectives will also be discussed at autumn meetings 2019. Objectives related to ‘Loss and disturbance to seabed habitats’ as proposed by Pressure 10-2019 are presented in Annex 1 to this document, with a reflection by the Secretariat on how the proposals meet the guidance.

## Annex 1 Proposals from Pressure 10-2019 on Loss and disturbance to seabed habitats.

Objectives related to loss and disturbance to seabed habitats were meant to be further elaborated by State&Conservation 10-2019 but the task was omitted due to time constraints. Here the proposals from Pressure 10-2019 are listed with proposed further guidance added by the Secretariat.

### Ecological objectives

- Healthy seabed habitats
- Maintaining natural seabed conditions

*Proposed guidance: At Pressure 10-2019 the difficulty to distinguish ecological objectives for 'benthic habitats' (as part of the biodiversity segment) from for 'loss and disturbance to seabed habitats' was mentioned and some participants felt that the above proposals are more related to state of seabed habitats. Note that the ecological objective on 'loss and disturbance to seabed habitats' is tentatively to be placed under a BSAP segment on sea-based activities.*

### Management objectives:

- Sustainable use of sea beds
- Minimise areas affected by (anthropogenically induced) hypoxia
- Methods for ecological sustainable mineral extraction
- Encourage sustainable fishery practices. *Proposed guidance: objectives should be affirmative i.e. avoid using words like 'encourage'*
- Restoration of seagrass beds. *Proposed guidance: this is rather an action, thus not suitable as management objectives*
- Remediation of fibre banks. *Proposed guidance: this is rather an action, thus not suitable as management objectives*
- Maritime spatial planning. *Proposed guidance: this is a tool, thus not suitable as management objective unless further developed.*