



---

<b>Document title</b>	Protocol of the EG STUR Online meeting 28th/29th of September
<b>Code</b>	2-3
<b>Category</b>	CMNT
<b>Agenda Item</b>	2 – Matters arising from HELCOM work of relevance for the group
<b>Submission date</b>	22.10.2020
<b>Submitted by</b>	EG STUR

---

## Background

The HELCOM Action Plan for the protection and recovery of Baltic sturgeon (Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan (BSSAP)) has been adopted by HELCOM 40-2019 (6-7 of March 2019).

The final version of the Action Plan can be found here:

<https://helcom.fi/media/publications/HELCOM-Sturgeon-Action-Plan-2019-2029.pdf>

Since then the new HELCOM EG STUR working group has been established to contribute to the implementation of the Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan (BSSAP) and to give scientific advice to relevant HELCOM bodies. The Protocol from the last meeting of the EG STUR group (28/29 of September 2020) has been attached to this document.

## Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the Protocol from the EG STUR online meeting 28/29 of September 2020.

Further, the Meeting is invited to discuss and propose ways on how to improve collaboration between scientific institutes responsible for coordination of the project on sturgeon restoration and fisheries organisations as well as the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) in order to:

- Increase compliance with relevant national legislation where Baltic sturgeon (*Acipenser oxirinchus*) is listed as protected species and thus after being by-caught should be released immediately. This measure would significantly improve survival of sturgeons in the coastal waters;
- Ensure improved mutual exchange of information: on the timing and amount of the fish released tagging methods applied, as well as obtaining relevant feedback on the recaptures.
- Consider the specifics of sturgeon migration and habitat use in the development of sustainable fisheries practice (i.e. gear development and employment);
- Consider reporting of bycatch as a mandatory obligation for fisheries to be certified as sustainable (MSC).

---

## Protocol of the EG STUR Online meeting 28th/29th of September via Zoom

**Start time 10:00h, end time: 14:00h**

The Chair, Mr Jörn Gessner, opened the meeting at 10:35h on September 28<sup>th</sup>,2020 due to dysfunctional Zoom meeting access, welcoming all of the EG members and guests (participant list see Attachment 1)

**The Agenda was approved as follows:**

1. Progress reports
2. Guideline Development
3. Joint activities
4. Outreach
5. Next Meetings
6. Miscellaneous
7. Closing of meeting

### **1. Progress reports**

A short activity report for the period since the January meeting was provided. The outcome is to be reported to S&C by Friday, October 2nd.

- Sweden (Dan Calderon)

The activities in Sweden were largely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Field work was not possible and most meetings with the administration and policy level were postponed. The historic archives were searched for additional reference to sturgeon catches in the region. Resulting in frequent reports for Göta Älv and 3 other rivers from the Swedish west coast as well as the east coast. Furthermore, there is an opportunity coming up to house some sturgeons in a pond facility on the previous municipal water supply. The availability and the associated obligations are under verification by now and a decision is expected to become available by the end of the year.

- Denmark (Peter Rask-Möller, Henrik Carl)

In Denmark, no directed and funded program is available to support the activities that focus mainly on the communication with fisheries in an attempt to collect catch reports of rare and exotic species for the Danish Fish Atlas but also to disseminate the upcoming regulations for the Danish fishery in a collaborative approach with WWF Denmark. The work commences for more than 15 years and has yielded in a published version of the data collection. As a side-line of these activities sturgeon catches are registered and entered into the database. The collaborators showed examples of their online database and their Facebook and Instagram work. The Danish colleagues provided examples where Facebook was used as a tool for data acquisition and reiterated that the constant and continuous contact into the fishery sector is key for the provision of data. For further details see: <https://www.facebook.com/Fiskeatlas/>

Or Homepage: <https://fiskeatlas.ku.dk/> with species texts at:  
[https://fiskeatlas.ku.dk/artstekster/Europ\\_isk\\_st\\_r\\_Fiskeatlas.pdf](https://fiskeatlas.ku.dk/artstekster/Europ_isk_st_r_Fiskeatlas.pdf)  
[https://fiskeatlas.ku.dk/artstekster/Vestatlantisk\\_st\\_r\\_Fiskeatlas.pdf](https://fiskeatlas.ku.dk/artstekster/Vestatlantisk_st_r_Fiskeatlas.pdf)

- UK (Steve Colclough)

Covid 19 enabled the rapporteur to commence and widen the work on the recently developed online databases on historic newspapers in an attempt to collect information on sturgeon occurrence in UK waters.

This work is being developed as an evidence document to influence government. Governmental organizations in the UK still do not accept sturgeons to be native to UK waters but rather consider them vagrant. With the updated database, more than 3470 marine and coastal and 1350 plus freshwater records have now been identified in UK waters between 1700 and 2020, compared to some 600 total records available by the time of the January meeting. The vast majority of the records are pre-1950, but there are a few records right up to the current year. There are an additional 270 plus reports from rivers and coastal waters in Ireland .

From the records several conclusions on the behaviour of the fish can be drawn already. Migration times and patterns have become visible. So have marine aggregation areas where the species were fished. Obviously the UK was inhabited by both species *A. sturio* and *A. oxyrinchus*. In several cases where pictures are available, the species discrimination is to be continued. Recent captures from coastal waters (with both *sturio* and *oxyrinchus* positively identified), reflecting modern European restoration schemes, are appearing in some of the same areas reported much earlier.

The UK Sturgeon Conservation Alliance has been unable to meet fully during Covid but progress has been made. One of the partners in the Alliance, the Blue Marine Foundation, has recently secured funding from Barclays Bank for a £150,000 2 yr project entitled “Setting the precedent for rewilding marine megafauna in UK waters“. The prime aim is to develop a project plan for the Alliance and work closely with international colleagues. The first project meeting is to be held in early October. Blue Marine have hired an employee (Alex Hubberstey) to dig deeper in the past distribution and to prepare a recovery plan for the species. GIS layers of the historic distributions in both the Severn and Tywi rivers are being developed at present. The group offered support in the revision of the draft evidence report as well as in the identification of past or current sightings.

Obviously, irritations among salmon managers and conservationists persist that are afraid of sturgeons in the waters inhabited by salmon could be detrimental for the salmon populations. A concern that occurred in the past in North America (mainly a concern for the fishing gear used) as well as in the Baltic, where in consultations of the HELCOM Habitat group, the question on predation and concurrence was raised as well. The reason for such fears is not easy to understand when considering that salmon and sturgeon in most rivers migrate and reproduce at different times of the year and sturgeon only rarely feed on fish (mainly small benthic species like sandeel and gobids).

The Institute of Fisheries Management has offered to support the work of the Alliance by running an online conference on sturgeon restoration in the UK in fall/winter 2020. Volunteers are invited to provide insight in the current experience.

- Poland (Andrzej Kapusta)

In Poland Inland Fisheries Institute (IRS) and Polish Anglers Union (PZW) are both working on the rearing and release of sturgeons, mainly focusing on Vistula River. IRS was successful for the first time to reproduce F1 sturgeon in captivity in 2020. One female was ovulated and gave a total of 4kg of eggs of which approx. 1000 offspring are still reared in the hatchery in Dgal.

Future broodstock is reared in three facilities (Rutki, Dgal, Grzmieca) with varying success. In Rutki the fish gain 20% of weight per year and more mature fish are expected in the near future.

Recaptures both of fish originating from release as well as from accidental escapement are tracked by an IRS employee. No information on recaptures of Baltic sturgeon was provided this year. A systematic information campaign is lacking in Poland still. Currently, the Polish fishery is largely reduced due to the cod fishing restrictions. As such, the bycatch of sturgeons also declined.

---

Poland has translated the Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan which is to undergo the final edits. It is planned to distribute the plan to the relevant stakeholders in order to improve the knowledge on the species as well as the awareness on the measures to be taken.

- Kaliningrad (Sergey Shibayev)

Information sent by mail after the meeting, due to problems with the acoustic connections.

In Russia, the Kaliningrad region, Kaliningrad State Technical University (KSTU) is providing monitoring of fish stocks in inland waters as part of the state program for estimation of total allowable catches. This research includes also study of ecological state of water-bodies and this information can be used to estimation of environmental capacity for the release of juvenile sturgeon.

There are some facts of occurrence in commercial catches of sturgeons in Curonian lagoon. Sturgeons were also caught during scientific research in river Neman. Obviously, the sturgeon were released in Lithuania few years ago. There is no special project and foundation for study of sturgeon in Russia now.

- Lithuania (Justas Poviliunas, Andrej Pilinkovskij)

Upfront it was brought to notice that changes in the job assignment in the Fisheries Service to the Ministry are underway and that Justas Piviliunas has taken a position in the Agriculture Ministry. Andrej Pilinkovskij will get assigned to different obligations in his new opposition but it is still unclear if he will remain in charge for the sturgeon project.

Lithuania has completed the first 10 year cycle for the recovery of the Baltic sturgeon this year. A new five year program is planned to start next year.

In the reporting period the Fisheries Service under the Ministry of Agriculture of Republic of Lithuania has reared sturgeons obtained as feeding fry from Germany. Releases were carried out in spring with 1500 fish of last year weighing approx. 500g, being tagged with white T-Bar Anchor tags. Additional releases of 45000 YOY will commence until October.

The most significant drawback on the Lithuanian recovery program is the bycatch of sturgeons in the Russian part of the Curonian Lagoon where fish are caught on a daily basis almost. Releases obviously are not considered in contrast to the Lithuanian fishery. Here an improved cooperation with the Kaliningrad authorities to increase compliance in the regional fishery is urgently required. In order to improve the survival in Lithuanian waters, all commercial inland fishery is planned to be banned for the future. Thus only sport fishing(angling) will be allowed.

- Latvia (Ruta Medne, Santa Purvina)

BIOR has suggested the inclusion of Baltic sturgeon in the state program for supportive release in April 2020. The Ministry has approved the listing and it is suggested to release 5000 individuals annually of 2 months of age. Final approval of the government is still open but should be expected until December and would include security for the production for 4 years. It is considered to be a problem that fisheries are vital to the local economy and as such ways to prevent the fish in the catch are sought and discussed.

In 2019 a new fish farm for the production of fish for release was tendered but the costs for the farm exceed the planned budget by 100%. Therefore, alternative means for the realization of these plans are currently discussed.

- Estonia (Meelis Tambets)

The Estonian recovery programme obtained 50000 fish from Germany in July this year. 20000 larvae were released to Narva River immediately, 10000 fish were used for a rearing trial in a pond and 20000 are

currently reared in a hatchery. The pond rearing trial was not successful. A release of 2000 YOY fish and of 1200 one year old fish is planned for October in Narva River again. The fish of 2019 year class have an average weight of 120 g (maximal weight 500g) all of them will be tagged externally. Thirty of them will be equipped with telemetry transmitters to determine migration pattern and habitat use.

Recaptures were limited. Only five fish were reported as bycatch from coastal waters in Estonia.

- Germany (Gerd-Michael Arndt)

The German restoration attempts currently are supported by two EMFF projects. One project from the Federal State of Brandenburg on rearing and release with the aim to increase fitness for survival and a long anticipated project in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern to renovate the Broodstock facility and hatchery in Born/Darß. The latter project also has a focus on the investigation in the coastal migrations of the fish being released and the impact of as well as communication with the coastal fisheries to increase compliance. The new project team members of both projects (Monika Radomska for the first and Christin Höhne, Janina Fuest and Jan Bethig for the latter project) were present during the meeting.

Gerd- Michael Arndt provided details on the current broodstock maintenance and the results of the 2020 reproduction season stressing the fact that out of eight females only three gave a satisfying result with regard to fertilization and hatch whereas the other fish revealed a decrease in fertilization rate (reaching 0% in the last reproduction in mid-August) and hatch. The reasons for the observed delay in maturation and the poor results are not identified but apart from rearing conditions it is hypothesized that feed composition might contribute to the low reproductive success. This issue will be a major focus of the research in the upcoming years.

Releases in this year comprised all size groups from feeding fry (375000) over 2 g juveniles (38.000) and 9000 yearlings (20-40 g) to 600 1,5 kg on year olds, released in coastal waters in May. A total of 1100 fish were tagged already this year using yellow T-bar Anchor tags.

Reports on catches were presented, revealing a reporting rate of 0,1% in untagged and a rate of up to 20% in tagged fish. It is considered alarming that catch reports from marine waters are almost neglectable, indicating that survival of fish on the outmigration seems to be minimal. The reporting fidelity at least in German, Danish and Swedish fisheries is high and the low number of reports must be taken as an indicator for the minimal abundance.

- Determination of parallel activities by other groups **all EG members**

**It became clearly visible from the reports that joint actions should be taken in the field of reproduction and rearing, trying to improve the output of the reproductions, minimizing losses in the rearing process and providing fit fish for release.**

**Furthermore, the collaboration must be largely enhanced and the effort has to be intensified in fisheries supervision and communication, trying to increase compliance and thus survival of sturgeons in the coastal waters. Also the flow of information on the timing and amount of the fish released as well as the feedback on the recaptures must be improved.**

## 2. Guideline development

***Ex situ* Guideline including Broodstock rearing, reproduction, rearing and release**  
Responsible: Jörn, Gerd-Michael & Thomas Friedrich (BOKU)

The draft outline of the planned text comprises the following topics:

1. Broodstock composition
2. Broodstock rearing (facility options and design, water sources, handling, densities, feeding, sampling)
3. Reproduction (plan, pre-maturation, assessment methods, induction, obtaining gametes, fertilization, incubation)
4. Rearing for release (facility options and design, water sources, handling, densities, feeding, sampling)
5. Fitness (criteria, assessments, improvement, effects)
6. Marking (methods, pros and cons, techniques, alternatives)
7. Release (site choice, acclimatization, release practices)
8. Data acquisition, storage and access (Gerd-Michael to provide suggestions for structure and hosting as agreed in January)

### **Current state**

Prior to the meeting a draft recommendation was circulated and revised (T.F.). Assessment of the existing handbooks (Conte 1998, Mohler 2001, Hochleithner 2005, Chebanov 2011) was undertaken and the common basis of the contents was identified.

For the addition of new, recent improvements and insights a detailed literature study is required that will be completed at the end of this year. The conceptualization of targets and the identification of open questions is underway. The compilation of the text for a draft to be circulated will take until March/May next year.

### **Habitat assessment**

Responsible: Meelis Tambets, Przemek Nawrocki, Andrzej Kapusta, Andrej Pilinkowski, Ladislav Pekarik, Don Calderon

In Estonia an outline for a universal habitat assessment for big rivers is currently developed. The outline will have to be specified to match the requirement of the sturgeon with regard to the habitat types and the size of river utilized.

The discussion focused on the determination of relevant/important habitat types of which any are undocumented for sturgeon. It was suggested by several EG members that historic and recent catch reports should be used a) to identify areas of concentration which could then serve as a model to develop the criteria for marine habitats and b) to determine overlap, indicating which habitats were modified during the last 100 years to a degree that they might require restoration to serve as sturgeon habitats again. The same procedure plus the utilization of telemetry results and recapture data is suggested to be used for the early life phase habitats.

### **Population assessment**

Responsible: Justas Poviliunas, Radu Suci, Eric Rochard,

Review: Steve

- Current state?

### **Target groups and contents**

Since in the past discussions, several questions concerning the addressees of the so called Guidelines and the format of the texts were raised. The Chairman put the decision for the format and contents up for discussion. It was mutually agreed in the discussion that the guideline should be targeted at the practitioners and should be helpful to harmonize the approaches to the work that is carried out. As such the Guideline will have the characteristics of a manual and should provide details on methods, materials, setup and implementation of activities.

It was widely considered that the Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan already includes Recommendations for best practice and to some degree serves as a guideline for the policy and administration level already. The

participants felt that the need for technical guidance and harmonization was an overriding motif for the manuals to be produced.

### **Means of completion of the guidelines:**

The group agreed that the guideline should be developed internally in the EG STUR with a first draft to be produced that is to be revised by mail exchange and afterwards the document is to be discussed with external experts.

### **Deadlines and milestones need to be identified during the meeting.**

## **3. Joint activities**

### **3.1 Broodstock development**

Prepare an inventory of the fish present and merge the information in a joint database, including the genetic characterization (D, PL, LV, LT partially completed). This will expand with increasing numbers of mature fish to the development of a joint breeding plan. (Details to be verified: Involvement and role of IRS under new director, follow up for IGB geneticist Klaus Kohlmann, future involvement of Ievgen Lebeda, University of Southern Bohemia. Joint assessments of the performance of the ex situ stocks (growth, maturation, reproduction) will be agreed upon and carried out jointly.

To establish a joint database, Gerd-Michael Arndt volunteered for his institute to host the database and he will provide suggestions for the data acquisition, the structure and the access (to be attached).

### **3.2 Improvement of rearing practice**

In analogy to the joint planning and assessment of broodstock the same procedure of consultations, joint planning and data analysis is agreed upon between all partners that have their own release programs. It is suggested to have 1-2 meetings per year (online) to facilitate the planning and exchange of results (growth, mortality, fitness).

In the frame of these consultations it is foreseen to set up joint experimental approaches to for instance verify fitness, and develop improved release techniques (testing of O<sub>2</sub> vs air, day vs night release etc).

The meeting of the first day was closed 14:04h on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and commenced 10:05 on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

### **3.3 Timely information about releases**

In an attempt to disseminate the information about releases in the coastal fisheries and to the teams collecting the info on recaptures, it was suggested by Henrik Carl that dates and amounts as well as locations of releases are provided to the group. This could be either by mail (info could be used also for the Instagram account of EG STUR).

### **3.3 Purchase of *Acipenser oxyrinchus* juveniles from Acadian Sturgeon**

As discussed at the January meeting it is agreed upon to arrange imports of F1 fish from Saint John River (Acadian sturgeon) on an annual basis to expand the future broodstock. Transfers of different organizations should coordinate their orders to ensure a time lapse between deliveries of batches > 10d, increasing the number of parents that the offspring derive from. Exchange between partners should comprise a minimum of 50 individuals for broodstock development.

It is suggested to rather purchase fish of 2-5cm than fertilized eggs, considering the problems faced with regard to hatch and survival by Polish Anglers Union.

### **3.4 Identification of origins by isotope signatures**

Current state of knowledge was presented and the versatility of the methods was demonstrated. For standardization, water samples from the catchment of release are required, as well as samples from hatchery fish in summer (N=10) per farm. The analysis of stable isotopes requires a high degree of expertise, results take between 5 to 10 working days. IGB currently has no free capacity for the Isotope analysis (State: August 20). As an alternative, commercial labs are available but costs are rather high. The price for analysis remains expensive (100 to 400 €), increasing with the number of isotopes (D/H, O/O, N/N, C/C, S/S). Project funding would be required to cover the costs to set the baseline (>10 samples per river basin) and to subsequently pay for the analysis of recapture samples. For the commercial labs the main restriction is that the bony structures used for the analysis would have to undergo laser ablation since other samples would only give information on the last 3 months of exposition.

### **3.6 Assessment of presence/absence in situ**

It was noted several times during the meeting that fisheries reports are not to be considered a reliable sources of information (see communication) since the reporting is deliberate and therefore can be extremely patchy. As such, there is a lot of uncertainty on the distribution of the species at sea and about returning adults.

Suggested additional assessment methods to verify presence/absence include directed fishery, an attempt to track the movement of fish through (inner-)coastal waters by telemetry or to employ eDNA samples to determine presence/ absence. This technique might be difficult to conduct in marine habitats due to the low number of fish compared to the volume of water. Alternatively, the approach could be used to verify spawning migration and eventually natural reproduction in the rivers. It is suggested to run a first trial in Odra River jointly between PL and D. For this purpose samples should be taken near potential spawning sites (Warta, Drawa, Odra) between May and July before or upstream of the first release locations.

Details are to be negotiated in the fall meeting of the group. Gerd is providing contact to a lab they are working with on the differentiation of Coregonids by eDNA, also IZW (Dr Ludwig) is to be consulted on the issue due to previous experiences. Peter provides information (articles?) about their approach on rare species in Denmark.

## **4. Outreach**

Aims of awareness-raising comprise increased involvement of different sectors, facilitate their support through improved information and understanding, as well as to facilitate Citizen Science.

It became evident in the previous discussions that outreach has the most vital importance for the acquisition of information concerning the range of sturgeons following release. It is essential to build up a trust basis and to be able to exchange views on the releases and the impact of the fisheries with the sector, which would be a step towards increased awareness and compliance.

The discussion on the communication issue indicated that the impact of fishery on the fish released in general is considered significant from the studies and experiences gathered in the range countries so far. While fisheries intensity in inner coastal waters is considered a main issue in Germany, Poland and Lithuania/Kaliningrad, the role of recreational fisheries with commercial gear is considered a significant impact in coastal waters of the Western Baltic and the Danish Seas. The recreational fishery in all range states is subjected to gear restrictions (mainly number of nets or the length of a fleet) but no limits on soak time, standards for maintaining the nets, satellite tracking etc. apply. Since the catch of the recreational fishery is not subjected to a mandatory reporting, the income derived from this fishery is not underlying taxation since the fishermen are not allowed to sell the catch, the societal value is close to zero (apart from the cost that are incurred for licenses, gear and the boat). Furthermore, in most countries recreational fisheries landings are not included in the catch quota, and are not included in bycatch monitoring. As such the sector potentially

---

can cause major impacts to biodiversity and fish stock integrity. Here the rules should be improved to ensure that catches are reported immediately and regularly while bycatch is released alive and timely.

Overall, it was considered a very important aim of the communications activities with fisheries organizations but also on supranational level (HELCOM Fish, RACs) to work for a rebalancing needed to make sea and coastal fisheries management more sustainable. It's a challenge that gill-nets and traps are per-se considered as sustainable gears (compared to trawl) in the fisheries sector, but without proper regulations e.g. maximum fishing time per fishing event, temporal closures for certain gear, bag-limits, and catch reporting, these methods can be very harmful especially in coastal nursery areas with many juvenile fish. The problem with high mortality in gill-nets and traps seems to increase in the western Baltic due to a high abundance of crabs and round goby, killing caught fish in the gears before they can be released.

One further aspect to be considered was showcased by the experience in the UK where the recreational sea angling (RSA) is increasingly involved in the management issue since the socio-economic value of the sector was at least as large as the commercial sector and for certain species, much larger. Therefore, 2010 saw new legislation benefitting RSA to some extent. The current Fisheries Bill positively includes RSA in marine fisheries management and provides access to funding streams to see growth. Anglers are increasingly becoming more engaged in the management processes and are particularly valuable in both marine environmental education and informal surveillance of fisheries regulation compliance. Anglers have helped make enforcement costs minimal in inshore protected areas.

Latvia is a good example for the potential role of communication in the development and implementation of protection measures in the fishery since subsistence fishery plays a major role in rural areas being crucial for the provision of food to the communities. Restrictions and protection measures therefore should be planned and implemented in consultation with the fishery to ensure the protection targets and the fishery purpose can be met.

Based upon the experience in the restoration projects so far, the communication measures have to focus on the fisheries sector as the target audience. The messages vary considerably between fisheries depending upon intensity and conflict potential. As such the messages to be conveyed range from "Release the catch", "Change the fishing method", "Avoid to harvest in aggregation areas", "Please provide information (detailed and true)", to an outline of the legal situation and the impacts the activity have on the restoration of a population. Most interesting for the fishermen of course is the question "What do I gain from it?" and that largely depends upon the motivation of the counterpart.

Nevertheless it is vital in different areas to also, include the navigation sector as well as agencies involved in hydro-development. The German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation has just published a guideline for the evaluation of hydropower projects with regard to their impact on the fish communities (BfN Skripten 561 in German only) which is designed to serve in the evaluation process of applications for new facilities and refurbishments. Experience shows that especially for the fisheries sector but also for parts of the navigation sector face to face contacts are indispensable. Trust building is an essential part of the communication strategy and that also requires a long term involvement.

On the other hand, coastal communities, the administration and policy level, as well as the general public are not to be neglected as communication targets to seek support for the recovery measures required. Several examples of practical experiences for Citizen Science were shared among the group. Among which were case examples on the involvement of local population in research (coastal fish surveys, angler involvement in tagging activities, fisheries information provision on rare species distribution, etc.). Today in England fisheries

is regulated by the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCA) and the Marine Management Organization (MMO). The IFCAs were set up in 2011 with a broader mandate than their predecessor bodies, to include both recreational sea angling and marine conservation, as well as commercial fishing. As a result of a consultation process a number of IFCAs have either banned trawling and all netting in the estuaries or banning trawling and introduced significant net restrictions in the inner parts on estuaries.

Increasing concerns also are raised by the presence and distribution of exotic sturgeons in the different range states. Here, an exchange of the experiences is suggested mainly to allow UK to benefit from the evidence of the adverse impact of alien species presence. So far, however, none of the exotic sturgeons has been observed to reproduce in the HELCOM area yet. In other areas, translocations have been proven successful though.

#### **4.1 Visibility and involvement of EG STUR**

In order to increase the visibility of the EG STUR, the participation in or presence at meetings of HELCOM Fish, ICES WGDIAD, as well as contacts to the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) and the outreach to DG ENV and DG MARE were discussed. HELCOM Fish, BSAC and indirectly DG ENV are reached through the Vice Chair of FISH, Katarzyna Kaminska. In ICES WGDIAD, Jörn Gessner will take over the role as contact. In addition, the existing outreach of WWF CEE into DG ENV will be verified for availability for additional lobbying.

#### **4.2 Website**

HELCOM Secretariat has set up a website for EG STUR which was shared in the group. In order to increase visibility of EG STUR and the Baltic sturgeon recovery activities is suggested to a) improve the appearance of the website by pictures and additional contents. In order to do so, the members to the EG are kindly asked to provide information to be included such as pictures from the range countries on historic catches, field work. It was also agreed to include short progress reports on the website (Kata and Jörn to discuss the format with Jannica Haldin), also it was agreed to provide contact addresses of national focal points and local experts on the HELCOM Website

Links to social media channels of project groups on sturgeon, to national projects, to the Bern Convention project group, which is currently established, are to be provided on the website.

#### **4.3 Other tools for communication**

**Social media (Instagram, and linked Facebook account)** were set up and the current state was reported by Monika Radomska. She repeated her claim that EG members or their collaborators urgently should provide materials to feed the account with news and views of the regional recovery actions. This is a vital element to keep the account lively and interesting!

Also, the exchange of information in cooperation with other accounts in the range countries, focusing on conservation and restoration issues is to be facilitated in order to reach an overarching distribution. Therefore, all participants are urgently requested to send pictures and short explanatory texts to Monika Radomska **once per month!**

#### **4.4 Verify existing options for a fish ID App**

In addition to the direct information provided on catches, sightings and casualties washed ashore, the question on the availability and utilization of a smartphone app with the potential to identify sturgeon species, collect pictures and geo-data, date, and eventually the name of the person identifying the fish was

discussed. It was stated that the popularity of Apps is on the decline due to the extreme diversity and the lack of benefit.

Peter recommended a look at the “I Naturalist” app that also identifies fishes and that might be a good object to use since it expands its scope regularly and it can be taught to identify new species routinely. Even though it is available in English only it provides a good platform with potential to be adapted to the needs of the group.

Feedback on the experience with testing the app is highly appreciated by the Chair.

## **5. Next meetings of the EG**

The meeting at Grüne Woche in January in Berlin, Germany **will not take place due to Covid restrictions, the suggestion by Polish Fish Farmers Association is to participate in PolAqua, 26-28 June 2021 in Gdansk**. The host organization suggested to provide free accommodation and provisions as well as a separate venue facility.

The suggestion was gladly accepted by the group. Jörn will inform the planning committee of Pol Aqua on the outcome.

Furthermore, the Chair will send out an invitation for an online meeting on the discussion of results of the 2020 reproduction and rearing experience e, broodstock development etc. by mid-October.

The group is invited to review the work plan (table) in AP to decide on the priorities for action for the upcoming period 2021 – 2022. The review and prioritization will be shared before the upcoming meeting to be discussed at the online meeting.

## **6. Miscellaneous items**

Information on a river school, aiming at restoration strategies for flowing waters, to take place October 24-26<sup>th</sup> 2020 in Drawa National Park and online was shared. Registration is mandatory until September 30<sup>th</sup>. Detailed information is available through the chair.

**Secondly, the fact that the International Symposium on sturgeons (ISS9) to be held in Chengduhua, China in October 2021 is postponed to 2022 due to Corona restrictions was brought to notice. For details see [www.wwscs.info/news](http://www.wwscs.info/news).**

## **7. Closing of meeting**

The meeting was closed 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020 at 13:30h.

## Attachment 1

## List of participants

Nr.	Country	Name	Status	28.9.20	29.9.20
1	S	Dan Calderon	Member	+	+
2	S	Johan Högesö	Member	-	-
3	DK	Henrik Carl	Member	+	-
4	DK	Peter Rask Möller	Member	+	+
5	GB	Steve Colclough	Member	+	+
6	D	Gerd Michael Arndt	Member	+	+
7	D	Christin Höhne	Guest	+	+
8	D	Janina Fuest	Guest	+	+
9	D	Jörn Gessner	Member, Chair	+	+
10	D	Monika Radomska	Member	+	+
11	PL	Katarzyna Kaminska	Member	+	+
12	PL	Andrzej Kapusta	Member	+	+
13	PL	Michal Skora	Member	+	-
14	PL	Przemek Nawrocki	Observer	-	-
15	PL	Alicja Pawelec	Observer	+	+
16	GUS	Sergey Shibayev	Member	+	-
17	LT	Justas Poviiunas	Member	-	-
18	LT	Andrej Pilinkovskij	Member	+	-
19	LV	Ruta Medne	Member	+	+
20	LV	Santa Purvina	Member	+	+
21	EE	Meelis Tambets	Member	+	+
22	AUT	Thomas Friedrich	Guest	-	-