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The information below related to a Workshop on the assessment of commercial fish has been edited post-STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020 to reflect the comments received. Major changes are provided below in red text.

Background

A brief overview of the progress and ongoing work related to HELCOM indicators, following up on the topic specific work plans developed under the 'Future work on HELCOM indicators' process was prepared for State and Conservation 13-2020. The document below contains extracts related to indicator or assessment work related to fish, covering two main aspects: 1) progress and ongoing work on indicators, and 2) HELCOM regional workshop on commercial fish assessment.

The full documents are available through the STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020 meeting site (documents [4J.4](#) and [4J-12](#), respectively).

The draft Terms of Reference (ToR) and plan for a regional workshop on commercial fish assessments was presented to State and Conservation 13-2020 ([document 4J-12](#)). STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020 agreed to extend the nominations period till 27 November to allow for joint considerations between national representatives in State and Conservation and Fish Working Groups when providing nominations ([Outcomes paragraph 4J-90](#)). Additional comments were received during the meeting and a commenting period till 21 October was provided ([Outcomes paragraphs 4J.85-89](#) A draft ToRs and plan were provided to State and Conservation 13-2020 and a post-meeting commenting period agreed (STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020, [Outcomes paragraphs 4J.85-90](#)). The comments received from State and Conservation 13-2020 have now been incorporated in this document.

Nominations for the groups/workshops should be submitted to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) **by Friday 27 November** to initiate planning and preparatory work. Currently there have been nominations from two Contracting Parties for this Workshop, so further nomination are encouraged.

This document specifically addresses the draft plan and ToRs for a HELCOM Workshop on the topic of Commercial Fish. It provides a draft proposal for how to achieve good input to HOLAS III via a Workshop, including provisional timelines and Terms of Reference (ToRs).

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- take note of the information provided; and
- provide national nominations for the commercial fish workshop, in cooperation with national State and Conservation representatives by 27 November 2020 to owen.rowe@helcom.fi.

Update related to HELCOM indicator and assessment work related to fish

Progress and ongoing work on indicators

The recent brief summary report on progress related to HELCOM indicator work provided to State and Conservation 13-2020 ([document 4J-4 Rev.1](#)) included the following text related to fish indicators. Any comments received during [State and Conservation 13-2020](#) will be reflected in the meeting outcome that will be available in the meeting site shortly after the conclusion of the meeting (i.e. after 9 October).

Text related to fish indicator work, extracted from State and Conservation 13-2020 [document 4J-4 Rev.1](#).

The work plan for fish considered separate aspects such as commercial fish, coastal fish, demersal fish, pelagic fish and migratory fish. These separate aspects are covered by a number of different processes.

Work on coastal fish is being carried out within Fish Pro III where work is underway to improve the existing assessment by applying the Ecological Assessment from Time Series (EATS-concept – this term has been updated with a new name "Analyses of structural changes in ecological time series (ASCETS)", <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2020.106469>) approach and where possible replace the weaker trend-based approach. Data for areas that were less well covered in HOLAS II is also being explored to see if the trend-based approach can be applied to those areas as an initial assessment also. Work related to size structure (L90) for a suite of key species (e.g. perch, pikeperch) in some of the areas is also part of the overall target, though work on this aspect is currently secondary to the main focus of improving the indicators already used in HOLAS II (spatial coverage, data quality and methodology aspects).

Fish Pro III extensively discussed the HOLAS III timelines, deadlines related to indicator work and the details of the development work during the Fish Pro III 2-2020 meeting (see agenda items 3 and 4 outcomes) and have planned the work ahead to achieve the plans set out in the indicator work plan.

Migratory fish will be addressed with a similar assessment as that carried out in HOLAS II.

Commercial fish, a category that covers demersal and pelagic fish in the Baltic Sea will be addressed through a designated workshop. This would rely on data already available through ICES and requires a regional workshop to define how best to utilise the existing data to apply appropriate assessments that are ecologically and policy relevant. A proposal for this workshop is also provided to State and Conservation in a separate document and aims to address the issues highlighted in the indicator work plan for fish.

Work related to making a species list with relevance to categorization and monitoring will take place under the separate sections and be combined at a later stage.

The topic of non-commercial fish is addressed in the current draft proposal for the MSFD 2020 project application (HELCOM BLUES). The current draft aims to address fish species not covered by full ICES analytical assessment and a few species that are not considered commercial (e.g. sticklebacks) and apply similar approaches to those used for coastal fish to provide an improved ecological assessment. The work outlined in that application would aim to support already existing aspects identified in the indicator work plan and ensure a stronger assessment of fish by HOLAS III.

HELCOM regional workshop on commercial fish assessment

State and Conservation 12-2020 discussed the potential need for additional structures to support work in newly identified themes that have no direct Expert Group coverage within the existing HELCOM structures (State and Conservation 12-2020, [Outcome paragraph 4J.61-2](#)). The outcome of State and Conservation 12-2020 was presented to the HOD 58-2020 ([Document 5-14](#)) and the proposals made were endorsed (HOD 58-2020, [Outcome paragraph 5.17-21](#)).

This discussion included building towards an improved structure and approach for the assessment of commercial fish towards and by HOLAS III, taking the form initially of a regional HELOCM workshop on the topic of commercial fish.

A draft ToRs and plan for such as workshop were drafted and are presented to State and Conservation 13-2020 ([document 4J-12](#)). State and Conservation 13-2020 agreed to extend the nominations period till 27 November to allow for joint considerations between national representatives in State and Conservation and FISH Working Groups when providing nominations ([Outcomes paragraph 4J-90](#)). Additional comments were received during the meeting and a commenting period till 21 October was provided ([Outcomes paragraphs 4J.85-89](#)). A revised version of the workshop draft ToRs will be provided to the meeting once the all comments received post-State and Conservation 13-2020 have been included. This will take place in advance of the meeting INF deadline.

The text bellow is a copy of the document provided to State and Conservation 13-2020 in [document 4J-12](#).

HELCOM Workshop on Commercial Fish

Draft Terms of Reference HELCOM Workshop on Status Assessment of Commercial Fish (HELCOM ComFish WS 1-2021)

The HELCOM Workshop on Commercial Fish (HELCOM ComFish WS 1-2021) will be a single event to bring together regional experts on the topic and synthesise information into a solid plan ahead, the ultimate goal of the process being an improved and functional assessment of commercial fish for the Third Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III).

In addition to nominations from HELCOM Contracting Parties the Secretariat will contact ICES to directly invite participation in the Workshop and preparatory work and thereby ensure that relevant experts and knowledge are incorporated. The 'commercial fish' to be addressed under this process will be aligned to meet the needs, under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), for HELCOM Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States.

This Workshop will also establish plans for intersessional work required to achieve the improved assessment and, should the participants deem it necessary, will have the option to propose to State and Conservation that further Workshops would be valuable to achieve the planned work.

Validity of ToRs

Single event Workshop planned for March 2021 (Period of validity for the overall work: Autumn 2020 – autumn 2023). **The period of overall work reflects the need for intersessional work to implement the strategy defined at this Workshop.**

This Workshop will be a single event and any extension of the work or further meetings or Workshops will be carried out via discussion with, and decisions made by State and Conservation.

Main aims and focus of the group:

- 1) Review the topic specific work plan generated in the Second HELCOM Indicator Workshop ([Fish work plan](#))
- 2) Devise and review a list of species of **relevance** in the Baltic Sea – **including review of ICES recommendations and national species lists,**
- 3) Review policy requirements for an assessment of commercial fish,
- 4) Review the data available through ICES,
- 5) Devise a full assessment of commercial fish (including in ecological terms) to provide **an improved status** assessment in HOLAS III,

6) Identify if the proposed assessment would have financial implications (e.g. new data needs such as collecting, processing and analyzing) and sources for these resource requirements.

7) Establish valid indicators/assessment approaches that can be viable long-term components of HELCOM assessments.

The work in HELCOM on indicators and assessments needs to be driven by the best available scientific knowledge and should also consider aspects that may influence the design or application of assessment, including: the need for comparable and harmonized regional assessments, potential sub-regional variation, data availability and ecologically relevant assessments of status. These factors are key in the development of a solid assessment, and confidence evaluation, that offers the broadest and most inclusive regional coverage possible.

Organization of work

A core team, including Chair(s) for the workshop, will be identified to plan the agenda and preparatory work for the workshop.

The Workshop will be guided by the State and Conservation Working Group. Information flow to State and Conservation is a key factor after the workshop to maintain information flow, discuss future developments and gain approval on the proposed work ahead towards HOLAS III. Where relevant national or regional projects may also offer relevant input to the Workshop and work ahead. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the workshop. The indicator coordinator (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) and the Professional Secretary responsible for State and Conservation (Jannica.Haldin@helcom.fi) will act as contact points to support the preparation and running of the Workshop.

Reporting

The Chair(s) of the workshop will report back to the State and Conservation WG on the activities of the workshop. For State and Conservation WG this will take the form of an agenda item at WG meetings.

Membership

Nominations for the core team to plan the workshop will be provide by the CPs.

Nominations for the workshop will be provided by the CPs. Where possible the Workshop will be formed of experts already active in HELCOM processes. Additional nominations are anticipated where Experts have knowledge on the assessment of commercial stocks and experience with ICES stock assessment processes for the relevant Baltic Sea stock.

Nominations should be submitted to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) by **Friday 27 November** 2020.

Provisional time plan and proposed workflow

Step 1: Nominations to populate the WS – 27 November 2020

Nominations of national Experts will be made by State and Conservation Contacts to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) by **Friday 27 November, 2020**.

The Secretariat will directly invite ICES to participate in the preparatory work and the Workshop.

Step 2: Identify preparatory work required – by 15 January 2021

Known preparatory work includes: 1) Identify a core team to plan the agenda and preparatory work, 2) Prepare a list of species including those listed as priority species for assessment or monitoring under relevant policy documents, 3) Summary of data available through ICES, 4) Summary of existing assessment approaches applied or previously developed/discussed (under HELCOM and ICES).

Devise a plan for the preparatory work to be available in advance of the Workshop.

Step 3: Workshop – March 2021

The following topics will be addressed at the Workshop:

- Aims of Workshop (short introduction)
- What was used in HOLAS II.
- HOLAS III and indicator development deadlines (short introduction)
- Topic specific indicator work plan (short introduction)
- Policy requirements, e.g. BSAP, MSFD D1 and D3 (short introduction)
- Species lists (presentation and discussion)
- Data availability through ICES (overview)
- Define plan ahead for HOLAS III
 - What will be done for HOALS III, what is needed for the assessment
 - What indicators make an overall assessment
 - **Define and document the** threshold values **to** be applied in selected indicators, **including approval via State and Conservation and ta HOD.**
 - How is ecological status assessed by the proposed indicators
 - What will be the required work ahead to achieve the assessment at HOLAS III and who will take it forward
- Outcome to be provided to State and Conservation (circa April 2021).