



Document title	Outcomes of recent HELCOM meetings of relevance for Fish
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Agenda Item	3 – Matters arising from other HELCOM work of relevance for the Group
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Reference	

Background

The following HELCOM meetings that are relevant for the Fish Group have taken place since the fifth meeting of the Group (FISH 5-2016), which was held on 16-17 November 2016:

- [HOD 51-2016](#), Helsinki, Finland, 14-15 December 2016
- [FISH-PRO II 4-2017](#), Tallinn, Estonia, 13-15 February 2017
- [HELCOM 38-2017](#), Helsinki, Finland, 28 February – 1 March 2017

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note and make use of the information.

Outcome of 16th meeting of HELCOM Heads of Delegation ([HOD 51-2016](#)), Helsinki, Finland, 14-15 December 2016

SOI initiative and Fisheries-Environment cooperation

3.8 The Meeting took note of the outcome of the “Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) Global Dialogue with Regional Seas Organizations and Regional Fisheries Bodies on Accelerating Progress Towards the AICHI Biodiversity Targets” held in Seoul, Korea, on 26-29 September 2016 (document 3-1).

3.9 The Meeting considered in general regional follow-up of global commitments and processes related to closer cooperation between management of fisheries and marine environment, including SDG 14 (document 6-14) and the anticipated role and contribution of HELCOM FISH in this work (see also new HELCOM FISH work plan 2017-2018 in Annex 3 of document 6-14).

3.10 The Meeting took note that the SOI event stressed the need for enhanced cooperation and collaboration at the regional level in the fisheries and environment theme, supported by continual exchange of information and lessons learned, exploring of shared objectives, and addressing issues of common interest.

3.11 The Meeting highlighted that the HELCOM FISH group is in itself a very good example of closer cooperation between management of fisheries and marine environment called for by the SOI event as well as recent global developments within UN General Assembly, FAO, CBD and UNEP.

3.12 The Meeting further stressed that a large number of UN SDG targets (particularly under SDG 14) directly relate to fisheries and highlighted the importance of involvement of national fisheries administrations in SDGs and Aichi Targets implementation in the context of HELCOM work.

3.13 The Meeting recalled that currently no formal regular exchange of information exists between HELCOM groups and the fisheries management work taking place within BALTFISH or the EU-Russia arrangement.

3.14 The Meeting took note that formal arrangement for regular and direct information exchange would enable exploring synergies between activities taking place within the different bodies and remove uncertainties regarding overlap of activities, for the benefit of national work.

3.15 The Meeting supported the plan for closer cooperation between marine environment and fisheries management in the Baltic Sea (document 6-14) and agreed to initiate a process for closer cooperation between HELCOM FISH, BALTFISH and the EU-RU fisheries commission based on the three steps outlined on the cover page of document 6-14. The Meeting agreed that the Chair of HELCOM will initiate communication with BALTFISH and other relevant stakeholders.

3.16 The Meeting noted that HELCOM FISH will consider the issue further based on intersessional developments regarding the cooperation.

3.17 The Meeting took note of the comment by CCB that the success of this proposed closer cooperation depends also on progress within BALTFISH to adopt clear rules of procedure reflecting good governance, including access to decision making meetings for civil society observers or at least providing access to reports containing the decisions made within such meetings.

Matters arising from the HELCOM Groups

6.13 The Meeting took note that Germany can lift the study reservation on the core indicators on ‘Abundance of coastal fish key functional groups’ and ‘Abundance of key coastal fish species’, noting that

the results are to be noted as preliminary since Germany sees the need for further development of the indicators.

6.14 The Meeting took note that Denmark lifted the study reservations on the core indicators 'Zooplankton mean size and total stock', 'Population trends and abundance of seals' as well as on 'Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gear' under the condition that during further development and when considering values, the PBR should be replaced with specific values for by-catch.

6.51 The Meeting adopted the following new Work Plans/Terms of Reference for the working groups and expert groups as contained in Attachments 1-10 of documents 6-9 and 6-9-Add.1:

- Work Plan of FISH 2017-2018 (Attachment 8);
- Work plan for HELCOM Task Force on migratory fish species (FISH-M) 2017-2018 (Attachment 9);

6.52 The Meeting took note that concerning the FISH Group, the work plan will be further polished for the next meeting of the group.

6.97 The Meeting considered document 6-13 submitted by CCB on the status of the Baltic cod stocks and took note of the comment by CCB that if no action is implemented on the Baltic cod the stock may face collapse. CCB also reminded of the BSAP 2017, HELCOM Recommendation 37/2 and the actions therein, and recommended to update the HELCOM Red list categorization of cod based on its current status, to consider cod status as part of the HOLAS II work and MSFD assessments to be reported in 2018. CCB also highlighted the need to establish new or extend existing MPAs to safeguard threatened species, including the cod stocks in Kattegatt, in the Danish Straits and Belt Sea as well as in the Baltic Proper.

6.98 The Meeting took note of the EU competences on cod, and comments by Poland and the EU that the proposals for recent TAC decisions on Baltic cod stocks were in line with the scientific advice and the EU recalled that a number of associated measures should over time alleviate concerns regarding overfishing.

6.99 The Meeting took note that Denmark does not agree to the information in document 6-13 submitted by CCB.

6.100 The Meeting took note that Germany shares the concern of CCB from the biodiversity point of view and supports the efforts to take further steps on Baltic Sea cod.

6.101 The Meeting agreed that the threat status of cod should be considered as part of the upcoming work to revise the HELCOM Red List according to the existing timeplans.

6.102 The Meeting recalled the decision to strengthen the cooperation and partnerships on sustainable fisheries (cf. para 3.15 above) to be initiated by the HELCOM Chair, creating prospects for strengthened regional dialogue on Baltic Sea cod.

HELCOM institutional and organisational matters

7.7 The Meeting took note that the Contracting Parties have been asked to provide their comments by 21 January 2017 to the application for observer status to HELCOM by Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) distributed via e-mail to HODs on 28 November 2016 and by Baltic Sea States Sub-Regional Cooperation (BSSSC) distributed via e-mail to HODs on 11 December 2016 and noted that the decision regarding the observer status of these organizations will be made by HELCOM 38-2017.

4th Meeting of the continuation of the project on Baltic-wide assessment of coastal fish communities in support of ecosystem-based management (FISH-PRO II 4-2017), Tallinn, Estonia, 13-15 February 2017

3.5 The Meeting discussed the use of biodiversity-related and commercial fish indicators in the integrated biodiversity assessment and recommended that these indicators should be integrated separately, (i.e. coastal fish in coastal areas and commercial fish in the open sea assessment units) since the D1 and D3 indicators are based on different assessment approaches and scales.

3.6 The Meeting discussed the inclusion of coastal fish and pressures in the HOLAS II report, and was of the view that salinity gradients and climate should be included and noted that these will be mentioned in the introduction and in the spatial assessment of cumulative pressures.

3.14 The Meeting discussed the task of updating the core indicator reports, and regretted that most Contracting Parties have no resources to participate in the work. The Meeting welcomed the offer of Sweden to update the core indicator reports...

3.15 The Meeting noted that Polish data will not be included in the core indicators at this stage, since their data cannot be applied to the present assessment methodology due to lack of sufficient time series.

3.16 The Meeting noted that the core indicators will be updated again in spring 2018 for the second version of the HOLAS II, with data for the assessment period 2011-2016, and agreed to revisit this topic during the next FISH-PRO II meeting in 2018.

Thematic assessment on coastal fish

3.17 The Meeting considered the latest version of the thematic assessment of coastal fish as presented by Mr. Jens Olsson, Project Manager (document 3-4), noting that it consists largely of information contained in the core indicator reports. The Meeting discussed the draft assessment and provided ... feedback, comments and suggestions.

3.18 The Meeting noted that the HOLAS II report will include information on pressures and recommended measures and hence that it would be valuable that the coastal fish thematic assessment include information for coastal fish management and links to pressures.

3.19 The Meeting discussed the procedure to finalize the assessment, noting that it should contribute to the HOLAS II report and therefore should be submitted at the latest to STATE&CONSERVATION 8-2018 (Spring 2018) and FISH 8-2018 for endorsement and to HOD 54-2017 (June 2018) for adoption. The Meeting agreed on the following tasks and schedule for updating the thematic assessment:

- Updated draft assessment to be circulated to Contracting Parties by 31 October 2017
- Contracting Parties to review the updated draft assessment until 30 November 2017
- Updated draft assessment to be reviewed and endorsed by FISH-PRO II 5-2018
- Final draft to be submitted to State & Conservation and FISH group meetings for endorsement and to HOD for approval in spring/summer 2018

3.20 The Meeting welcomed the offer of Denmark to assist Sweden with the further drafting of the report. The Meeting regretted the lack of resources in the other countries to support the implementation of the project work.

3.21 The Meeting discussed the contributions of the project to the HOLAS II, acknowledging that the main contributions of the project are the updating of the core indicators (which will be used also in the quantitative integrated assessment) and the thematic assessment report on coastal fish (which will provide qualitative information for the HOLAS report, including recommendations on measures).

3.22 The Meeting encouraged all Contracting Parties, also those countries not present at the meeting (i.e. Germany and Russia) to participate in the finalization of the third thematic assessment of coastal fish for the HOLAS II and the continued work to develop and operationalize HELCOM core indicators for coastal fish.

HELCOM core indicators' data-arrangement development through BalticBOOST

3.23 The Meeting took note of the development of a coastal fish indicator database (COOL) within the framework of the BalticBOOST project (Baltic Sea project to boost regional coherence of marine strategies through improved data flow, assessments, and knowledge base for development of measures (2015-2016)). The Meeting welcomed the presentation of the contents of the database (<http://bio.helcom.fi/coastalfish>) as presented by the Project Manager Jens Olsson, Sweden.

3.26 The Meeting noted that the database will be used for compiling the data which will be used for updating the core indicators 'Abundance of key coastal fish species' and 'Abundance of key coastal fish functional groups' and agreed that Contracting Parties should use the database for reporting their 2016 data.

Future development of core indicators

3.27 The Meeting discussed the updating frequency of the core indicators in the future and felt that it would be good to report the data annually to the COOL database and carry out the assessment (updating of the core indicator report) every three years, i.e. twice per MSFD assessment cycle (one intermediate and one complete assessment)

3.28 The Meeting discussed the operationalization of the updating of the indicators, noting that some automation of graphs and maps already occurs on the web-based version of the core indicator and that the development of the COOL database is another step forward. The Meeting discussed and supported, in principle, the idea of having core indicator reports with embedded R-scripts that can automatically update graphs and figures in the text based on the data in the database. Nevertheless, the Meeting acknowledged that it would make sense to implement such technical arrangement only once the assessment methodology has been further developed to better include the relevant data. The Meeting also noted that the applicability of automated actions is also limited by the technical restrictions of the COOL database and the HELCOM website.

3.29 The Meeting discussed the need to further develop the existing core indicators, pointing out that it would be relevant to include also a spatial approach to the assessment (in addition to the current temporal assessment approach) to increase the amount of information that can be used in future assessments. The Meeting acknowledged that such an expansion would enable the inclusion of areas with shorter time series, such as data from Poland. The Meeting acknowledged that there are limited resources for doing this development work at present, due to ongoing reporting requirements for HOLAS II, but agreed to strive towards further expanding the assessment, initially testing with Polish data and Nordic nets, and noted that this would ideally be achieved by a separate project.

Size related indicators

3.30 The Meeting recalled that FISH-PRO II 3-2016 considered potential size-related indicators for coastal fish, including indicators on population size/age structure and length and age at maturation and concluded that it would be important to develop indicators that only respond to the effects of fisheries on the coastal fish stocks. FISH-PRO II 3-2016 was also of the opinion that more research is needed before agreeing on the use of possible size related indicators.

3.31 The Meeting took note of information on new analyses for size related indicators developed in Sweden as presented by Mr. Örjan Östman, Sweden (presentation 4).

3.32 The Meeting felt that it is relevant to continue work to develop size related indicators, and was of the view that it would be good to test the indicators developed by Sweden using data from the other countries as well. The Meeting suggested that this work could be used to prepare a scientific research paper that analyses aspects of perch size distribution at the regional level, and recognized that it could potentially support the development of sub-basin wise thresholds for management purposes. The Meeting welcomed the offer of Örjan Östman, Sweden, to take the lead in this activity, noting that it will be carried out as a separate activity outside of FISH-PRO II, but that the results will be presented to the project.

Coastal fish stocks and MSFD Descriptors 1 and 3

3.33 The Meeting recalled that FISH-PRO II 3-2016 concluded that it is up to each Contracting Party to use coastal fish under both Descriptor 1 or Descriptor 3, and that the currently developed coastal fish core indicators are mainly applicable under Descriptor 1.

3.34 The Meeting took note of the information on the revision of the commission decision on GES criteria with respect to fish in D1 and D3 as presented by the Project Manager (presentation 5) and discussed where coastal fish fit under the MSFD descriptors.

3.35 The Meeting was of the view that it would be beneficial to regionally agree on how to assess coastal fish with respect to descriptors in future assessments, noting that if coastal fish is included under D3, then also fishing mortality would need to be assessed. The Meeting also recognized that if coastal fish is included under D3, it would require justifying that the species being assessed are of commercial value and that a major pressure on fish stocks is fisheries.

3.36 The Meeting was also of the view that the core indicator on functional groups of coastal fish could serve D4 (foodwebs) and suggested that information on round goby could also be relevant under D4.

4.4 The Meeting recognized the value to evaluate temporal and spatial patterns of round goby abundance in the future.

4.5 The Meeting was of the view that it would also be relevant to share information for identifying other non-indigenous goby species, in addition to round goby, to facilitate their monitoring.

4.6 The Meeting recalled that information on recreational fisheries in the Baltic Sea and availability of data was gathered by FISH-PRO II in 2013-2015 (document 4-1). The Meeting took note that getting an overview of data collection activities related to recreational fishing is included in the work plan of the HELCOM FISH group and acknowledged that the information compiled by FISH-PRO II would be relevant and beneficial for this task. The Meeting agreed to review and update the table prior to submitting the information to the next meeting of HELCOM FISH.

Future work

5.4 The Meeting discussed the continuation of the work of FISH-PRO, acknowledging that the FISH-PRO II project will be ending in mid-2018. The Meeting considered the draft project proposal for FISH-PRO III contained in document 5-2 and updated it as contained in document 5-2-Rev.1. The Meeting requested the Project Manager and Secretariat to submit the draft proposal to State & Conservation 7-2017 and FISH 7-2017 (to be held in November 2017) for endorsement so that HOD 53-2017 (to be held in December 2017) can approve the application.

5.6 The Meeting encouraged the Contracting Parties to provide financial support to the monitoring and assessment of coastal fish.

7.1 The Meeting agreed to hold the next meeting (FISH-PRO II 5-2018) on 14-16 February 2018, starting at 9 am on 14 February and ending by mid-day on 16 February 2018. The Meeting welcomed the offer of Sweden to investigate the possibility to host the meeting in Sweden.

7.2 The Meeting agreed that the next meeting of FISH-PRO II should discuss the following issues:

- Update data and status assessments for HOLAS II
- Finalize Thematic Assessment for coastal fish
- Update monitoring guidelines according to new outline
- Develop indicators (i.e. data for size-related indicators)
- Continuation of the project beyond 2018 (including election of project manager and working procedures)

38th Meeting of the Helsinki Commission ([HELCOM 38-2017](#)), Helsinki, Finland, 28 February – 1 March 2017

High-level segment

2.1 The high-level representatives of the HELCOM Contracting Parties: Lisbet Ølgaard (Denmark), Harry Liiv (Estonia), Joanna Drake (EU), Hannele Pokka (Finland), Helge Wendenburg (Germany), Iveta Teibe (Latvia), Mindaugas Gudas (Lithuania), Mariusz Gajda (Poland), Vladimir Ivlev (Russia) and Per Ångquist (Sweden) debated the following questions, according with the updated outline (document 2-1-Rev.1):

- How can the ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals and targets be met in the Baltic Sea by 2030 particularly in relation to eutrophication, marine litter and climate change?
- How should HELCOM enhance cooperation to reach effective results and which partnerships should be strengthened?

2.2 The draft report “Measuring progress for the same targets in the Baltic Sea” (document 2-2) provided background information for the debate during the high-level segment.

2.3 In their debate, the high-level representatives highlighted particularly the following:

- HELCOM targets are well aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- HELCOM can significantly contribute to the implementation of marine related SDGs in the Baltic Sea, also in a cross-cutting manner, and should take a coordinating role for these SDGs and make its active role visible;
- Implementation of HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) has progressed both on regional and national level, including to reach nutrient reduction targets, but needs to be further strengthened;
- Renewal of the BSAP with a time perspective until 2030 is the next step to be jointly undertaken by the Contracting Parties, in line with the SDGs;
- Examples of topics that need further attention by HELCOM are: eutrophication, marine litter, agriculture including improvement of soil management practices, biogas production, aquaculture, fisheries, shipping, climate change, circular economy including nutrient recycling, and maritime spatial planning.

2.4 In their debate, the high-level representatives referred to the upcoming HELCOM Ministerial Meeting and stressed the importance of taking concrete steps to [e.g.]:

- Plan for renewal of the BSAP in a both ambitious and realistic way with the view that the next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in 2018 would consider embarking on a renewal process;
- Implement HELCOM Recommendation 37/3 on sustainable aquaculture;
- Investigate the effectiveness of e.g. mussels farming in removing nutrients from the sea;

- Ensure closer cooperation between HELCOM and other organisations such as Baltfish in the field of fisheries and environment;
- Engage municipalities and other local actors more closely to implementing the BSAP commitments, which could be addressed intersessionally by the Contracting Parties prior to the SDG 14 Conference to formulate a possible voluntary HELCOM commitment to be registered at the Conference;
- Ensure strengthened cooperation with sectorial organisations including in the field of agriculture;
- Further engage HELCOM observers, including private sector, in practical work and new forms of cooperation building on positive experience in HELCOM work such as within clean shipping;
- Use research and innovative approaches, e.g. generated within BONUS, in developing new solutions and techniques to address problems and translate them into policies;
- Utilize the potential for economic growth in efforts to restore the status of the marine environment;
- Engage other regional organisations including Council of the Baltic Sea States and use the potential of the existing initiatives within the Baltic Sea region such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region for enhanced cooperation and coordination for strengthened BSAP implementation;
- Identify how to enhance cooperation with regional organisations also outside the Baltic Sea region, especially OSPAR and other regional seas organisations and the Arctic Council;

Next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting

3.1 The Meeting took note of the information by the European Union on possible dates for the next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in 2018 and supported that the meeting would be organized on 6 March 2018 back-to-back with the EU Environment Council in Brussels. The Meeting invited EU to confirm the possibility to organize the Ministerial Meeting on this concrete date.

3.2 The Meeting decided to organize a regular HELCOM meeting in 2018 back-to-back to the Ministerial Meeting.

3.3 The Meeting exchanged views on the Ministerial Meeting and took note that the Secretariat will circulate a working document on the issues raised in the discussion to the Heads of Delegation.

3.4 The Meeting decided to continue planning concrete topics and possible outcomes of the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, to be initiated by the Secretariat and Chair intersessionally, with the view to formulate a proposal for HOD 52-2017.

Matters arising from the subsidiary bodies

4.23 The Meeting took note of the proposal by Sweden for inclusion of size distribution of fish into HOLAS II (document 4-13) and agreed to use information of size distribution of the fish community in the Baltic Sea based on peer reviewed scientific publications into the 'State of the Baltic Sea report' supported by Denmark. While agreeing on the proposal, the Meeting regretted that there is still no agreement on how to develop a quantitative indicator on the size distribution of fish and encouraged the further development of the indicator to continue in the future.

4.24 The Meeting noted the proposal from Finland to come to an agreement on the LFI indicator on a sub-basin scale and that Finland is prepared to work with Sweden to test the indicator in the northern Baltic Sea.

Activities of the Commission during 2016 and contributions to the work of the Helsinki Commission

5.3 The Meeting agreed that the further work on streamlining of HELCOM processes assuring better involvement of national experts will be discussed at HOD 52-2017.

5.4 The Meeting took note of the suggestion by CCB regarding closer involvement of stakeholders and public into the work of the Helsinki Commission. The Meeting also took note of concern

by CCB regarding potential adverse effect of the large scale infrastructural projects on marine nature protected areas as well as regarding fisheries activities which are planned to be launched in the areas with restricted fisheries.

5.5 The Meeting took note of the statement by WWF regarding progress in implementation of BSAP as well as requirements of the EU regulations. Particularly, the concern of WWF is on the dramatically bad shape of the western stock of cod and continuous fishing as well as the current status of Baltic salmon and eel stocks. The Meeting also noted that WWF welcomed the progress achieved by HELCOM in implementation of the BSAP.

Other institutional and organisational matters of the Commission

6.5 The Meeting considered the applications by Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) and by Baltic Sea States Sub-Regional Cooperation (BSSSC) for observer status in HELCOM (document 6-1) and granted observer status to Baltic Sea States Sub-Regional Cooperation.

6.6 The Meeting decided to postpone the decision on granting observer status for Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) to HOD 52-2017 in June in order to receive more information regarding the potential contribution of this organization to HELCOM work taking into account current Observers.

8.1 Meeting decided to arrange the next meeting of the Commission back-to-back with the Ministerial Meeting in 2018.