



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Continuation of the project on Baltic-wide assessment of coastal fish communities in support of an ecosystem-based management

FISH-PRO III 2-2020

Vilnius, Lithuania, 11-13 February 2020

Document title	Draft Provisional Timeline and Preliminary Plan for HOLAS III
Code	3-1
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Agenda Item	3 - Information on the process and timeline for HOLAS III including contribution from FISH-PRO III
Submission date	4.2.2020
Submitted by	Secretariat

Background

This document contains the draft provisional timeline and preliminary plan for HOLAS III welcomed by HELCOM HOD 57-2019.

The provisional plan divides the work into two main phases:

- **A three-part HOLAS III preparatory phase** focusing on consolidation and development of indicators, establishing and improving data flows, and refining and further developments of the assessments. The preparatory phase is proposed to run from the beginning of 2020 to the end of 2021, in a staggered structure.
- **A HOLAS III assessment phase**, consisting of data collection, indicator evaluations, integrated assessments and report production, would begin in late 2021 and run to the end of 2023, with the bulk of results and supporting material ready and approved by the end of 2022.

The provisional timeline and preliminary plan outlined in this document are directly linked to the proposed further work on HELCOM indicators (as outlined in HOD 57-2019 [document 4-20](#)) and the project plan for the second step of the preparatory phase ([document 4-21](#) of HOD 57-2019). Both steps are briefly outlined in this document, and the full information can be found in the respective documents.

The Secretariat will develop a more elaborate workflow for the assessment phase, outlining the timing of approval for the respective work strands as well as proposals for at what organizational level the approval is to take place, should the plan be approved at HELCOM 41-2020.

The deliverables expected from FISH-PRO III include execution of the work plan on coastal fish (as included in document 4-1), data collection, indicator assessments, update of indicator reports, review of results as well as possible contribution to the thematic assessment and the final report.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the provisional timeline and preparation for HOLAS III and consider the contribution requested from FISH-PRO III.

Provisional timeline and preliminary plan for HOLAS III

Early planning for the HOLAS III process has been identified as important for the successful implementation of the next holistic assessment, but also for a number of related HELCOM processes. These include consolidation and further development of indicators, improving dataflows, improvements and further developments of the cumulative impacts and economic and social analysis and to ensure the continued policy relevance of the work and the assessments.

The planning for HOLAS III needs to be done within the framework delineated by the BSAP and in accordance with the needs of the Contracting Parties with respect to other international commitments. This places some limitations on how dynamic the HOLAS III process can be and necessitates that some trade-offs be considered early in the process. It also sets hard deadlines which need to be met in order to optimize the added value and to make full use of the HOLAS III work. Efforts have been made to take these considerations into account when developing the provisional plan contained in this document.

One such consideration is the inclusion of 2016 (a data year which was already included in HOLAS II) in the assessment period for HOLAS III. This would be done in order to achieve the required 6-year assessment period while still ensuring that the results are made available for use to the CPs in a timely fashion and that only one iteration of the assessment is done. The repeated use of the year 2016 would be clearly indicated in any subsequent reporting. In relation to the use of 2016 also for HOLAS III the State and Conservation WG has invited GEAR WG to clarify whether, for those CPs that are also EU member states, there are any possible issues with reporting 2016 data to the EU Commission twice, both as regards MSFD requirements and as regards possible technical challenges. The State and Conservation WG also asked that the effect on the assessment of including the same year twice be explored during the assessment process, to properly account for any possible effects.

Another consideration is the likelihood that data for the year 2021 will only be available for a limited number of data-strands, due to the comparatively fast turnaround (approximately 1 year) from collection to reporting in 2022. A detailed analysis based on national data streams and ICES and HELCOM procedure is needed in order to identify for which parameters it will be difficult to report data in time for the assessment in 2022. The Secretariat is looking into performing such an analysis and will invite the CPs to provide information regarding their national dataflow timelines for each strand, in the effort to obtain an overview of for what 2021 data barriers might exist, and plan accordingly. Another possible step to alleviate the data reporting constraints is to clearly identify and communicate the minimum requirements for supporting information needed for data reporting by e.g. ICES prior to data reporting taking place in order to speed up the reporting. Following discussion in STATE&CONSERVATION 11-2019 this has been included in the HELCOM Data Flow project plan.

Input and information related to the HOLAS III process brought forward by the HELCOM Expert and Working Groups have, as far as possible, been included in the plan and timeline outlined in this document. In addition, feedback on the HOLAS II process, received through the regional survey on the process and results of the project conducted by GEAR in 2018 as well as comments from the regional State of the Baltic Sea report consultation process have been taken into account wherever possible. More specific details raised under these processes will need to be considered throughout the HOLAS III process.

Some of the main points which have been identified and incorporated are as follows:

- **Only one iteration of the assessment is to be done.**
- Wherever possible **overlap between development, data collection and assessments should be avoided.**
- Set up as many **frequent and regular data flows** as possible prior to the start of HOLAS III, **minimize ad hoc data calls and data dumps.**
- Ensure **clear structure and timelines for approval processes** to avoid iterative assessment runs.
- Prepare and approve the thematic assessments and supporting material prior to starting work on the summary report.
- Where possible **follow the general structure outlined under HOLAS II.**
- Consider the **timeline for MSFD** article 8 reporting.
- Consider the **need for national consultations** for CPs who are also EU member states.

Following the wishes expressed by the Contracting Parties the provisional plan contained in this document encompasses only one iteration of the assessment and follows the general structure agreed on under HOLAS II. The provisional plan divides the work into two main phases (outlined in figure 1):

- **A three-part HOLAS III preparatory phase** focusing on consolidation and development of indicators, establishing and improving data flows, and refining and further developments of the assessments. The preparatory phase is proposed to run from the beginning of 2020-to the end of 2021, in a staggered structure. It is important to note that any indicators not ready by 2021 will not be included in the assessment process for HOLAS III.
- **A HOLAS III assessment phase**, consisting of data collection, indicator evaluations, integrated assessments and report production, would begin in late 2021 and run to the end of 2023, with the bulk of results and supporting material ready and approved by the end of 2022.

This division of the work is intended to give more time for preparation and more evenly spread the need for input by the experts and resource allocation the Contacting Parties. In the proposed timeline development work takes place prior to the start of the assessment process. Under the planned assessment phase plan, data collection and approval take place prior to indicator evaluation, which in turn is planned to be approved prior to running the integrated assessments. The workflow is planned to focus on production and approval of thematic assessments and other supporting material prior to the work on the summary report commencing (for an overview see workflow chart in figure 4). The overall process strives to give as clear a structure and timeline for approval processes of the respective products as possible. Overall the project plan strives to have assessment results and supporting material in place for approval to make them available for national reporting purposes (see figure 1 for an overview of the provisional timeline).

The following sections in this document outline the proposed phases, as well as the included main steps, of HOLAS III in more detail.

Provisional draft timeline for HOLAS III

The Secretariat has prepared a draft provisional timeline for the proposed work on HOLAS III (figure 1). Each of the phases and main steps included in the Gantt chart below are further elaborated in the respective sections of this document.

		2020				2021				2022				2023				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
HOLAS III Preparatory phase	Indicator development/consolidation																	
	Establishing and ensuring dataflows																	
	Refining and further developments of assessments																	
HOLAS III Assessment Phase	Indicators	Data collection																
		Data approval																
		Indicator evaluations																
		Approval of indicator evaluation results																
		Update indicator reports																
		Updating indicator report metadata and maps																
		Approval of indicator reports																
		Prepare supplementary information																
		Approval of report content																
	Indicator based integrated assessments	Run integrated assessments																
		Validating and approving results																
		Prepare supplementary information																
		Approval of report content																
	Cumulative impacts assessment	Data collection																
		Data approval																
		Running indices																
		Metadata descriptions																
		Validating and approving results																
		Prepare supplementary information																
		Approval of report content																
	Economic and social analysis assessment	Data collection																
		Data approval																
		Analysis																
		Validation and approval																
		Prepare supplementary information																
		Approval of report content																
	Report	Collate and write summary report text																
		Create synthesized figures																
		Approval of report content																
		Website production																
Layout																		
Publication																		

Figure 1. Provisional draft timetable for HOLAS III.

HOLAS III Preparatory Phase

The preparatory phase presented as part of the HOLAS III process in figure 1 is suggested to include three steps (as illustrated in figure 2). Each step is complimentary to the following steps and, to varying extents, the consecutive steps build on each other e.g. indicators outline new and improved data needs, information on indicators and data to be included in the assessment inform the process on modifying and improving assessment methodology or tools. In accordance with this the steps outlined under the preparatory phase are staggered, allowing the planning for each consecutive step to build on more concrete information coming out of the previous work. Hence the indicator work has already commenced, the project plan for data flows to start in summer 2020 was approved by HOD 57-2019, pending securing of funding to cover the work, and the intention is to submit the proposal for further developments of assessment methods and tools for approval to HOD 58-2020, in lieu of the planned work starting in early 2021. More information on the steps can be found under the relevant section for each work strand.

		2020				2021			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Preparatory phase	Indicator development/consolidation								
	Establishing and ensuring dataflows								
	Refining and further developments of assessments								

Figure 2. Provisional timeline of HOLAS III preparatory phase.

Step 1: Indicators (Q2 2018-Q3 2021)

The first step focuses on core indicators and this work strand is already generally established. The work has commenced as outlined in the section on indicators below and is planned to continue until late 2021.

Review of existing indicators (Q1 2018- Q4 2019)

This part of the process is outlined in the plan approved by HOD 54-2018, but encompasses the following main steps:

- Where are we with our existing indicators?
- How well do they match the policy requirements?
- Policy prioritization for inclusion in HOLAS III and beyond
- Technical input, what is feasible by 2021 and what would it take to get there?
- Plan for what indicators to consolidate and develop for HOLAS III

Further developments and consolidation (Q1 2020-Q3 2021)

The work to take place as part of this process is planned and prepared as part of the work of the indicator review, largely guided by the work of the two indicator workshops. It will focus on finalizing already initiated and ongoing work on indicators, as well as on those indicators agreed on as being priorities for HOLAS III, based both on the policy priority and the technical feasibility. For those indicators and topics which have been part of the prioritization process a work plan has been developed for each indicator. **Any indicator not ready by the end of 2021 will not be included in HOLAS III.**

Step 2: Establishing and ensuring data flows (Q3 2020-Q4 2021)

Step number two focuses on improving and establishing dataflows to support the assessments. Data collation and validation was identified as one of the most time consuming and resource intensive aspects of the HOLAS II process, and as such further development of this work strand will bring direct added value to the process. Establishing as many frequent and regular data flows as possible prior to the start of HOLAS III also minimizes the need for ad hoc data calls. This step is partially guided by the work on indicators (e.g. what indicators and in what format are likely to be included in the assessment, are there gaps in the dataflows and how can these be filled prior to the assessment phase etc.) but it also expands to include those assessments under HOLAS

which are not based on core indicators, namely the pressure and impact indices and the economic and social analyses (ESA).

This work will be based on the initial gap analysis of existing assessment dataflows prepared by the Secretariat, presented at State and Conservation 9-2018 and 10-2019. It will focus on establishing consistent and functional dataflows, as well as data handling and data storage infrastructure. The need to even and spread out the data reporting to ease the load on national and regional data hosts at times of peak activity (e.g. for MSFD reporting) has been highlighted by State and Conservation 9-2018. State and Conservation has also supported that more frequent, more regular reporting facilitates communication between the data host and the reporter, the identification and solving of issues, better governance and control over data quality.

A project proposal for the dataflow strand was approved by HOD 57-2019, pending securing of funding to cover the work.

Step 3: Refining and further developing assessments and methodology

The third step of the preparatory phase is proposed to focus on refining and further developing assessment tools (HEAT, BEAT and CHASE) and methodology, including spatial aspects, aspects on sensitivity and confidence, further developments of cumulative impacts assessment and economic and social analyses (ESA) as well as modification and refinements of the integrated assessment tools following the incorporation of new data strands stemming from step two and possible new or consolidated indicators stemming from step one.

GEAR 20-2019 further invited the Secretariat and the relevant Expert Groups to prepare more specific information on identified gaps and development needs for the various work strands not covered by the indicator work, namely the Cumulative Impacts assessment and the ESA work, as identified in the HOLAS II process or in subsequent work. GEAR 21-2019 agreed to continue the discussion on the topic in GEAR 21-2019 with the intention to develop a concrete proposal for step 3, building on the work done in step 1 and 2, for consideration at HOD 58-2020.

HOLAS III Assessment Phase

Proposed Timing and Work Strands

The proposed work strands under the Assessment Phase and their respective timing can be found in figure 3. This timeline has been elaborated based on input from the HELCOM experts and WG, as well as the timeline for reporting of Art. 8 under the MSFD, for those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States. The proposed timing of the work in the assessment phase has, as far as possible, been planned to ensure that the assessment results and supporting material are in place for approval in time to make them available for national consultation and reporting purposes under MSFD.

As a result of the proposed timeline, and to ensure the assessment covers a six-year period, the year 2016 which was already included in HOLAS II, would be included also in HOLAS III. In order to incorporate data for a six-year assessment period, in practice the years 2016- 2021, and to avoid reiterating the assessment in 2023, the reporting of national data for the year 2021 will need to be made available with no more than one year of time-lag in order to be included in the assessment. Realistically this might result in 2021 data not being included for some of the topics.

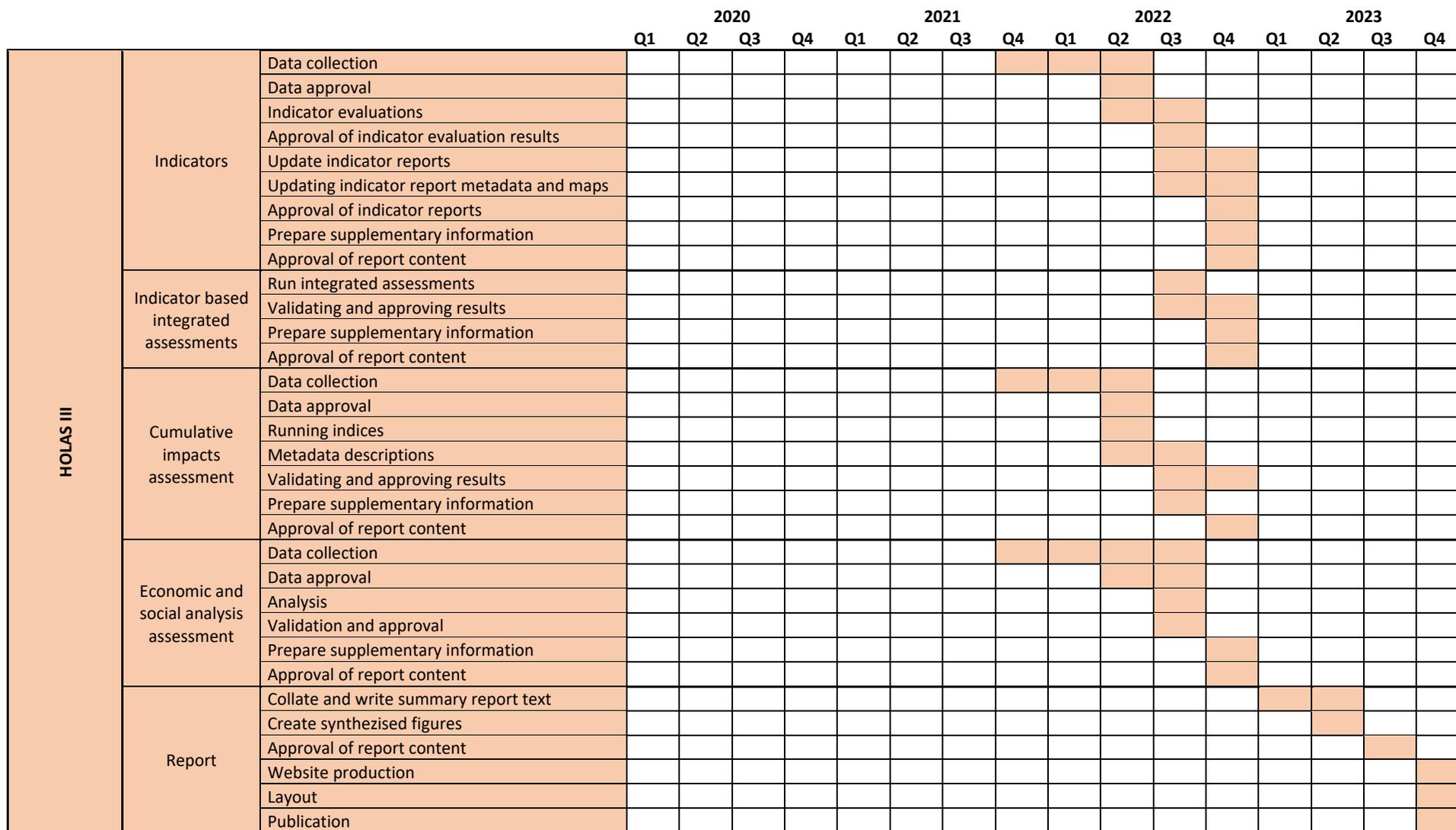


Figure 3. Gantt chart of assessment phase

Proposed Process and Workflow of the Assessment Phase of HOLAS III

The proposed process and workflow of the assessment phase is illustrated in figure 4. Each stage of the process is followed by an approval step, with the aim to minimize the risk for ripple effects from changes in one stage affecting consecutive stages and the subsequent need for repeated assessments. It also gives each consecutive stage a firm basis to build on and gives more freedom for e.g. national consultations for those Contracting Parties who are also EU Member States and might wish to use results in their national reporting.

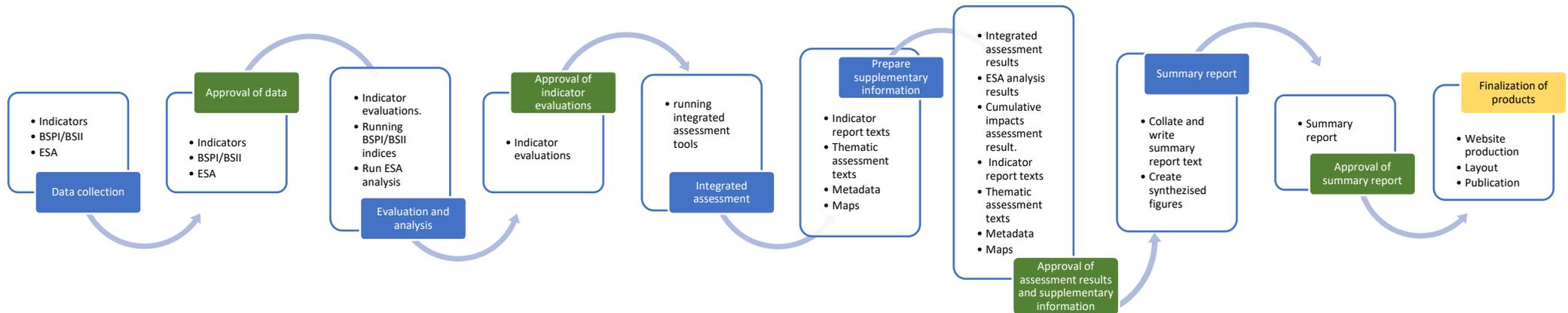


Figure 4. Proposed process and workflow for HOLAS III

Annex 1. Initial Scoping for Planning HOLAS III

This annex contains the components of HOLAS III, including aspects possibly missing, needing further development or benefitting from a different approach based on the work done under HOLAS II as proposed by GEAR 20-2019, the Second HELCOM Indicator workshop, STATE&CONSERVATION 11-2019.

Initial Scoping for Planning HOLAS III, prepared by GEAR 20-2019, the Second HELCOM Indicator Workshop and STATE&CONSERVATION 11-2019.

Topic	Missing	Improve	Revise	Comments (including possible sources)
Comparability of results		(x)		Ensure that, wherever possible, results are comparable between assessments (between successive assessment).
BSPI/BSII		x		Ensure that the indices are fit for purpose.
Continuous update of indicators	x			Resources needed to automatize indicator evaluation.
Trends		x		Important for interpreting indicator results.
Compare indicator and the results of the indices	x			E.g. for ecosystem component layers with corresponding indicator evaluation results.
Structure of report and results		x		Ensure the results are, to the extent possible, optimized for national use.
How to capture progress in a six-year period?		x		More focus on understanding, analyzing and presenting the results.
Use same structure as HOLAS II				Using a similar structure to HOLAS II allows for more focus to be put on analysis,
Indicator and assessment tools fit for rev. Com. Dec.		x		Should be part of the intersessional preparatory work.
Only one assessment				
Indicator evaluations and supporting material available in time for national reporting.		X		Strive to fit the timetable to have approved products in time for national processes
Use of SOM and ACTION project products and results for HOLAS III	x	x		Consider how to pick up on work that has been done intersessionally between HOLAS II and HOLAS III
How to address include expert judgement assessment				E.g. for invasive species

Design

Strucutre

Content

Benthic habitats	x	x		Need to consider a possible alternative timeline for approval?
Food web aspects	x	x		Food web aspects need to be significantly improved.
How to improve integration of information		x		Integration of various datalayers, as well as improved storytelling for the report
Effectiveness of measures				Use the results of SOM and ACTION
Climate change	x			How to include climate change in the assessment and the reports. From EN CLIME
More focus on activities, sources, distribution etc.		x		From SOM work.
Report structure		X	X	Review the HOLAS II reporting structure.
Resource needs		x		Start securing resources, consider opportunities to further work etc. under possible projects.
Dataflows		X		Even and spread out the reporting to ease the load on national and regional data hosts at times of peak activity, frequent, more regular reporting facilitates communication between the data host and the reporter, the identification and solving of issues, better governance and control over data quality.
Thematic assessments first				Thematic assessments should be produced and approved prior to the summary report, and the latter should build on the former.
Timelags		x		In HOLAS II it was challenging to work with the time lags between the various work strands and
Dataflows which feed into the assessment in 2022			x	For several topics it will not be possible to provide data for the year 2021 within the proposed timeframe for the indicator evaluations
Using the same data for several different parts of the assessment		x		Consider if there is an issue associated with using the same pressures/activities data in several parts of the assessment (cumulative buildup skewing the importance of some pressures?)
Pressure state linkages needs to be strengthened, especially for hazardous substances		x		

Include the EGs more closely in the process, especially for the topics which have no indicators.		x		
ICES dataflows, define the minimum requirements for data to be accepted for the assessment		x		could be included in the monitoring guidelines as well
can 2016 data be re-reported to the EU Commission?				there is already variation in the timeframe that is reported to the Commission, one year not a big issue. Could be brought to WG GES to get a common perspective?
changes in EU reporting requirements for 2024		x		the EU needs will be defined early in the process so that this can be considered when running the assessments, possibly in 2022, in the effort to limit the need for double reporting
Data for several topics might not make it for the year 2021 (especially eutrophication)		x		e.g. ICES reporting sets some of the timelines and so this is out of the hands of the expert
if using the same year twice this might influence the assessment results				it should be explored how the year affects the respective assessments? Is it a problem?
how to dislocate the indicator result approval process from that of the integrated assessment?			x	

Annex 2. Meeting extracts regarding the Provisional Timeline and Preliminary plan for HOLAS III in 2019

Early planning for the HOLAS III process has been identified as important for the successful implementation of the next holistic assessment. In light of this GEAR 20-2019 commenced the planning process through a scoping exercise where the Working Group discussed components of HOLAS III. This included aspects possibly missing, needing further development or benefitting from a different approach based on the work done under HOLAS II, as well as considering what might be needed for HOLAS III in terms of e.g. MSFD requirements and how work done under the BSAP update might be incorporated.

GEAR 20-2019 also noted the proposed provisional timeline for the HOLAS III process and the division of the work into a preparatory phase and an assessment phase as prepared by the Secretariat. The meeting in principle supported the suggestion that intersessional preparatory work for HOLAS III should take the form of three consecutive, interlinking work strands focusing on indicators, dataflows, and assessments and methodologies, respectively, and invited the Secretariat to prepare a draft for a project proposal for the dataflow strand, to be presented to STATE&CONSERVATION 11-2019 and GEAR 21-2019 for review.

STATE&CONSERVATION 11-2019 welcomed the early planning and that efforts have been made to incorporate the input received during and following HOLAS II into the preliminary overall timeline and the proposed tentative steps of HOLAS III. The meeting acknowledged that while efforts have been made to improve on the challenges identified under HOLAS II, the plan for HOLAS III needs to be elaborated within the framework delineated by the BSAP and other international commitments (such as the MSFD) and in accordance with the needs outlined by the Contracting Parties. This places some limitations on how dynamic the HOLAS III process can be and necessitates that some trade-offs be considered early in the process. It also sets hard deadlines which need to be met in order to optimize the added value and to make full use of the HOLAS III work. In relation to this the meeting highlighted the importance of ensuring that the HOLAS III results are available for the Contracting Parties that are also EU member states to support their national MSFD reporting process, and to the extent possible ensure that the processes doesn't necessitate national experts repeating the assessments at regional and national scale.

While reviewing the timeline and preliminary plan the STATE&CONSERVATION 11-2019 identified that for several topics included in the assessment it is challenging for data to be delivered with only one year's time lag (2021-2022) and that this could result in the last year of the proposed assessment period (2021) being a data weak year, a possible trade off which needs to be considered when agreeing on the structure of the assessment.

STATE&CONSERVATION 11-2019 endorsed the proposal of the preparatory phase for HOLAS III outlined in the preliminary plan. The meeting agreed that for the assessment phase 6 years of data is needed, and agreed not to include data earlier than 2016, meaning that data until minimum 2021 will be needed for the assessment. The meeting agreed to forward the proposed project structure and timeline to GEAR 21-2019 for further discussion with the intention to submit a preliminary plan and project structure to HOD 57-2019 for approval.

GEAR 21-2019 in turn welcomed the proposed timeline and invited the Secretariat to crosscheck the proposed timeline with that of other HELCOM assessment work, e.g. PLC, and where possible adjust timelines to improve synergies. The meeting considered the inclusion of 2016 in the assessment period and took note of the information by the EU that WG GES will be informed of the topic at it the next meeting of the group. In relation to this Poland proposed to not decide on the assessment period yet. Poland brought forward that ideally the assessment period should be 2017-2022 since reporting to the EU is 2024 and Poland proposed to come back to the question of the assessment period after the discussion at WG GES. GEAR 21-2019 in principal supported the inclusion of 2016 in the assessment period for HOLAS III, noting the reservation by Poland. GEAR 21-2019 further considered the inclusion of 2021 data and that the coverage of 2021 data may

be partial due to the time-lag associated with data reporting. The meeting agreed to include 2021 data in the assessment period, aiming to include a full six years of data wherever possible, but acknowledging that 2021 data might not be readily available for all relevant assessment data strands and encouraged all data rapporteurs to consider the need for shortened data reporting timelines in 2021. The meeting endorsed the proposed provisional plan and agreed to submit it to HOD 57-2019 for approval.

HOD 57-2019 welcomed the proposed provisional timeline and preliminary plan for HOLAS III, acknowledged that the plan is a living document and that changes might occur as the process is further refined. The meeting acknowledged that 2021 data might not be readily available for all relevant assessment data strands, however agreed to aim to include a full six years of data wherever possible and encouraged all data rapporteurs to consider the need for shortened data reporting timelines in 2021.

HOD 57-2019 took note of the information that the assessment period 2016-2020 is also used in the OSPAR status assessment and of the information of the European Union that from the perspective of the MSFD no significant issue is foreseen with regard to the use of 2016 also for the HOLAS III assessment, as long as it is clearly documented and any possible effects explored and accounted for over a six-year assessment period.

HOD 57-2019 further took note that, while Poland in general supports the plan, they retain their study reservation on the proposed assessment period (2016-2021) and that Russia placed a study reservation on the preliminary plan. The Meeting invited the Secretariat to be in direct contact with the respective Contracting Parties to find a constructive way forward, and for Russia and Poland to clarify their positions by end of January 2020, with the aim to submit the preliminary plan and associated documents for approval to HELCOM 41-2020, thus enabling the work to continue.

HOD 57-2019 invited the Secretariat to, should the preliminary plan be approved at HELCOM 41-2020, prepare a more elaborate workflow for the assessment phase, outlining the timing of approval for the respective work strands as well as proposals for at what organizational level the approval is to take place.