



## Outcome of the 14th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (HELCOM GEAR 14-2016)

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## Outcome of the 14th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (HELCOM GEAR 14-2016)

### Introduction

0.1 In accordance with the outcomes of HELCOM GEAR 13-2016 (par. 6.2) and HELCOM 37-2016 (par. 4.8), the 14th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (GEAR 14-2016) was held on 10-11 May 2016 in Gothenburg, Sweden, at the premises of the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management.

0.2 The Meeting was attended by delegations from the European Union, Finland, Poland and Sweden, as well as Observers from CCB, and the Finnish Environment Institute as invited guest. The List of Participants is attached as **Annex 1**.

0.3 The Meeting was welcomed by Ms Maria Hellsten, Executive Officer of the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management who wished a successful Gear meeting.

0.4 The Meeting was chaired by Ms. Heike Imhoff, Germany, Chair of the GEAR Group. Ms. Ulla Li Zweifel, Professional Secretary and Ms. Marta Ruiz, Associate Professional Secretary acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

### Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

1.1 The Meeting adopted the Agenda as contained in document 1-1.

### Agenda Item 2 Matters arising from other meetings of relevance to GEAR

2.1 The Meeting took note of the outcomes of recent HELCOM meetings of relevance to GEAR (**document 2-1**).

2.2 The Meeting discussed the timing of the PLC-8 assessment and supported the proposal by the Pressure Working Group to align PLC-8 with the MSFD reporting cycle i.e. to carry out monitoring in 2021 and reporting to HELCOM in 2023 to support the next HELCOM holistic assessment with the most recent loading data in 2024.

2.3 The Meeting regretted that only four Contracting Parties were represented at the Meeting and stressed that a better representation of Contracting Parties is needed to achieve the task of the Group to steer the implementation of the HELCOM BSAP and to facilitate the regional coordination for the implementation of the Ecosystem approach and the MSFD for those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States. The Meeting proposed the issue to be addressed by HOD 50-2016. Furthermore, the Meeting considered that online meetings could be used more often e.g. to discuss a few selected topics that require the attention of the Group.

2.4 The Meeting took note of the following national information on matters of relevance for the Gear Group:

- Finland: the Programme of Measures has been reported to the EC. National work has continued on the review of environmental targets and their updates. The national coordination of work linked to HOLAS II is carried out by SYKE. The European Maritime Day will take place 18 May 2016 in Turku, where a meeting of HELCOM Ministers will take place as a side event.
- Lithuania: the Ministry of Environment has prepared a Water Management Programme and Action Plan, which should be approved by the Regulation of the Government. The MSFD PoMs is an integrated part of the Programme. The Programme is expected to be approved in July.

- Poland: a draft version of the PoMs is under Council decision and will subsequently be submitted to the European Commission, tentatively before summer.
- Sweden: national work is focusing on HOLAS II and the development of indicators and with consideration of the Commission decision on GES criteria.

2.5 The Meeting took note of the information from the European Union that a new draft version of the Commission decision on GES criteria has been prepared for consideration by the MSFD Committee meeting 19-20 May 2016. The new version has considered comments received by countries and stakeholders. It makes a clearer differentiation between the role of the GES decision, which delineates the assessment on the extent to which GES is achieved, and the determination of GES which is an obligation of the EU Member States. WG GES is leading the development of a guidance document for the Article 8 assessments.

### **Agenda Item 3 Activities of relevant HELCOM projects or processes**

3.1 The Meeting took note of progress on BalticBOOST Work package 3.1 to develop joint principles for environmental targets for pressures affecting seabed habitats as presented by Lead partner SYKE, Finland (**document 3-6, Presentation 1**).

3.2 The Meeting noted that the project will develop an approach to define quantitative targets. The Meeting acknowledged that while “environmental target” refers to the needed reduction in pressures, the project focuses on defining the maximum allowable pressure that is consistent with GES which in turn can form the basis for defining environmental targets.

3.3 The Meeting took note that the approach will be based on an inventory of available knowledge on pressure and impacts on benthic habitats and that the approach will be tested in a number of case study areas of the Baltic Sea. Available evaluation of GES for benthic invertebrates (e.g. BQI) will, as far as possible, be used to verify the link between pressures and impacts on benthic communities in the test areas. A suggestion on how environmental targets could be formulated will be proposed for these case study areas and the results will serve as basis for development of guidelines (i.e. joint principles) that Contracting Parties can use to extend the approach to other areas.

3.4 The Meeting noted that BalticBOOST WP 3.1 will get information on impacts from fishing activities from Work package 3.2 (Development of a tool to assess the impact of fisheries on seabed habitats) while WP 3.1 will contribute to the development of the HELCOM indicator on cumulative impacts on benthic habitats and the development of the Baltic Sea Impact Index under the TAPAS project.

3.5 The Meeting requested the project to consider the following guidance:

- to consider the environmental target setting also from point of view of the state of the benthic habitats and not only from the point of pressures and human activities,
- to consider the proposed assessment scales in the evolving Commission Decision on GES criteria and evaluate whether the assessment units used for the status assessments are relevant for the environmental targets or if they should possibly be linked to the scale of the pressures,
- to consider if existing status indicators can be used to follow up achievement of environmental targets or whether there is a need to develop additional indicators for this particular purpose,
- to consider the links between GES (Article 9), Environmental targets (Article 10), and Measures (Article 13) with the understanding that environmental targets should guide the needs for measures and not the other way around.

3.6 The Meeting was of the opinion that while the aim of the project is to develop a common approach to the development of environmental targets, HELCOM should maintain an ambition towards development of joint environmental targets for the Baltic Sea that can provide a regionally coordinated basis for development of national targets e.g. as done under the MAI/CART.

3.7 The Meeting noted the information on the joint HELCOM BalticBOOST workshop of Work packages 3.1 and 3.2 that will take place in Copenhagen 2-3 June 2016 and encouraged all Contracting Parties to participate in the workshop.

3.8 The Meeting took note of the update on HELCOM work on underwater noise towards common principles for environmental targets as presented by the Secretariat (**document 3-7, Presentation 8**) as carried out under the BalticBOOST project.

3.9 The Meeting noted an assessment of sound sensitivity of Baltic Sea biota have resulted in a draft list of six priority fish and mammals species and that the project is currently aiming at identifying sound sensitive areas for these species. The list of species is a living list. The information is anticipated to form the basis for formulating principles for GES for sound sensitive species and eventually environmental targets related to underwater noise. The Meeting reminded Contracting Parties to provide, through State and Conservation contacts, relevant information and proposals on how to define biologically sound sensitive areas and inform the Secretariat **by 1 June 2016** ([marta.ruiz@helcom.fi](mailto:marta.ruiz@helcom.fi)). A HELCOM BalticBOOST workshop will be held 5-6 October 2016 to support the conceptual development of environmental targets.

3.10 The Meeting took note of the recent developments under the HOLAS II project and the outcome of HOLAS II 5-2016 as presented by the Project Coordinator (**document 2-2 and 3-2, Presentation 3**).

3.11 The Meeting welcomed the work carried out under HOLAS II and appreciated the high ambition set by the project. The Meeting took note of the reflection of the Chair of the HOLAS II core team that very good progress is made in the project and that the external projects BalticBOOST and TAPAS are providing a significant contribution to the developments taking place under HOLAS II.

3.12 The Meeting took note that a process has been started to look into the use of indicators additional to the HELCOM core indicators (e.g. sub-regional or bilateral) according to principles developed by HOLAS II 5-2016. The outcome of selecting additional indicators will be presented for endorsement by State and Conservation 5-2016.

3.13 The Meeting noted that indicator evaluations on commercial fish species within D3 criterion 2, to be provided by ICES, are also planned to be included in the assessment of biodiversity in HOLAS II. The Meeting regretted that indicators and GES definitions on the size and age distribution of commercial fish species have not yet been developed. The Meeting noted that the 'Proportion of large fish in the community' (LFI), developed for the Baltic Sea by HELCOM, addresses the property of size of fish populations. The Meeting encouraged the Secretariat together with ICES to ensure availability of data to support the development and evaluation of the LFI indicator.

3.14 The Meeting discussed how to link the assessment for ecosystem health to the assessment of impacts of pressures as assessed e.g. through the Baltic Sea Impact Index (BSII). The Meeting noted that the impact factors developed through the BSII will provide information on the most important pressure on specific ecosystem elements and that by clearly separating the state and pressure assessment there is an opportunity to compare and validate the outcome of the two approaches.

3.15 The Meeting noted that the development of indicators and assessment tools under the HOLAS II project are closely following the evolving Commission Decision on GES criteria, e.g. through the tests that will be carried out in the development of assessment tools under the BalticBOOST project.

3.16 The meeting further noted that those EU Member State representatives of the core team that are interested can take part on an online meeting, planned for mid-June 2016, to discuss the planned HOLAS II approach compared to the draft Commission Decision on GES criteria. The Secretariat will provide a draft analysis prior to the discussion to outline how HELCOM indicators, assessment scales and integrated assessment approaches match the most recent version Commission Decision on GES criteria.

3.17 The Meeting took note of the status of adoption of GES boundaries and remaining study reservations, as well as the progress of development of pre-core and candidate indicators and their anticipated availability for HOLAS II as presented by the Secretariat (**document 3-4**).

3.18 The Meeting appreciated the work done by Lead and Co-lead countries on the development of indicators and recognized that the continued development on indicators is crucial for the success of the HOLAS II project, in particular to fill the gaps in the set of core indicators compared to the reporting requirements under the MSFD such as for benthic habitats and marine litter.

3.19 The Meeting acknowledged the importance to clarify remaining study reservations by end of 2016 and encouraged Contracting Parties to resolve remaining issues through the ongoing discussions among national experts and relevant HELCOM expert groups and projects.

3.20 The Meeting noted that the European Commission has provided in its draft Decision that there should be an EU level process by TG litter and TG noise to set threshold values for marine litter and noise. The Meeting was of the view that this should be considered in the continued development of indicators on marine litter and noise while it should not halt development of regional threshold levels that are based on characteristics and pressures relevant to the Baltic Sea region as the experience gained could also help the envisaged EU process.

3.21 The Meeting took note of the information on the development of a biodiversity assessment tool under the BalticBOOST project as presented by Lead partner SYKE, Finland (**Presentation 4**).

3.22 The Meeting noted that the 2<sup>nd</sup> HELCOM BalticBOOST workshop to guide the development of the biodiversity assessment tool will take place 14-15 September 2016 in Copenhagen.

3.23 The Meeting took note of the tentative outputs from HOLAS II project as presented by the Project Coordinator (**document 3-3, Presentation 5**). The Meeting noted that work is ongoing to develop a visual identity for HOLAS II that will be used in the planned printed product of HOLAS II as well as a more extensive web-based product.

3.24 The Meeting welcomed the planned output of the project and supported the current direction of work and requested the project to bear in mind that the web-based version should be structured so that it also can support national reporting requirements.

3.25 The Meeting took note of the work plan of TAPAS theme on economic and social analyses as presented by the Secretariat (**document 3-5, Presentation 6**). The Meeting noted that the aim is to integrate the planned analyses with other component of the HOLAS II e.g. the analysis of use of marine waters with the chapter human activities and pressures, and that the assessment of benefits lost if GES is not met could potentially be included in the chapter on status assessments.

3.26 The Meeting noted that the ESA work under HOLAS II is aiming to develop a coherent framework for ESA analyses in the Baltic Sea region aligned to the general guidance from the MSFD CIS ESA Working Group and that experts taking part in TAPAS are also participating in the MSFD CIS ESA Working Group. The Meeting recognized the importance to link the outcome of the TAPAS project to the national ESA work, and for national experts to take part in and provide feedback to the work of TAPAS ESA to ensure compatibility with national needs.

3.27 The Meeting appreciated the ESA development taking place under the TAPAS project and supported the need to continue ESA work beyond lifetime of TAPAS project so that the developing framework can be further applied within HOLAS II and support a regionally coherent reporting in 2017 and 2018.

3.28 The Meeting noted that the ESA work is currently not linked to any HELCOM subsidiary body and was of the view that the Gear Group could act as the main Working Group for consideration of the ESA component in the TAPAS project.

3.29 The Meeting welcomed the progress of the BSAP follow-up system and the visualization of results as informed by the Secretariat (**Presentation 2**). The Meeting found the results useful for planning future activities in HELCOM as well as nationally and encouraged its regular update.

3.30 The Meeting took note of the updated Roadmap for HELCOM activities on ecosystem approach (**document 3-1**). The Meeting noted that the graphic presentation will be updated by HOD 50-2016 to reflect recent agreements by HELCOM and Working Groups.

#### **Agenda Item 4 Coordination and information related to the implementation of the ecosystem approach and related policies**

4.1 The Meeting took note of information provided by Germany on the state of play concerning discussion points under agenda item 4 (**document 4-5**).

4.2 The Meeting, building on the Outcome from GEAR 13-2016, tackled the still open issues regarding the discussion on public consultation on HOLAS II as contained in **document 4-2, Presentation 7**.

4.3 The Meeting took note of the following preliminary plans for consultation on HOLAS II:

- Sweden: the plan is to send the short version of the HOLAS II report to the same respondents as the national report. Sweden envisions to instruct the respondents that the focus on the consultation is on the short version of the HOLAS II report but will also provide a link to the HOLAS web-site for access to the full background material.
- Finland: initial plan is that material from HOLAS II will be extracted and translated to a Finnish summary report that may reflect the structure of the HOLAS II report but have more focus on the status of national waters. The HOLAS II report is planned to be part of the consultation.
- Poland: initial plan is to have consultation on the national report in March 2018. The previous national consultation on HOLAS II will be considered in the national report. NGOs, stakeholders, research institutes will be specifically informed on the consultation on HOLAS II.

4.4 The Meeting recalled that the first version of the HOLAS II report will be prepared by mid-2017 and that comments to be considered in the updated version need to be available for the project by end of February 2018 (Outcome of GEAR 13-2016, para 4-14) so that the HOLAS II report can be updated by mid-2018. The Meeting recognized that this regional timetable is fixed. The Meeting invited Contracting Parties that have not yet done so to inform the Secretariat **by 1 June 2016** ([ullali.zweifel@helcom.fi](mailto:ullali.zweifel@helcom.fi)) on the current status of planning of national consultation on HOLAS II as well as the timing and length of national consultation processes.

4.5 The Meeting requested the HOLAS II core team to identify the focus for the desired feedback on HOLAS II and, based on this, draft a common information on the aim and scope of the consultation on the HOLAS II report that countries can use as appropriate in the national consultation processes.

4.6 The Meeting supported the proposal to carry out a regional consultation on the HOLAS II report as a way to involve observers and stakeholders as well as to get publicity for the assessment in the Baltic Sea region. The Meeting noted that the planned printable report and web-based presentation of results could serve as the basis for a regional consultation.

4.7 The Meeting took note of the plans for EU Member States on how to address MSFD Articles 8, 9 and 10 as follows:

- Sweden: is currently working on updating Article 8 while the timing for updates of Article 9 and 10 are not yet fixed. The HELCOM GES boundaries for core indicators are expected to be used under Article 8.
  - Finland: initially plans to use the GES assessment carried out by HOLAS II as the main component of Article 8 reporting, possibly with complementary national information. The
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HELCOM GES boundaries for core indicators are initially planned to be used for the determination of GES under Article 9. HELCOM MAI/CART was reported already in 2012 as environmental target under the MSFD.

- Poland: Results of the HOLAS II report and GES boundaries for HELCOM core indicators are anticipated to be used in the reporting of Articles 8 and 9, complemented with national information as needed. Environmental targets have been reported to the European Commission in November 2015. Use of HELCOM MAI/CART as environmental target in the 2018 reporting under Article 10 is pending.

4.8 The Meeting took note of the template prepared to share information on the revision of national environmental targets as contained in **document 4-4**, and invited Contracting Parties to inform the Secretariat as appropriate when such revisions are made ([ullali.zweifel@helcom.fi](mailto:ullali.zweifel@helcom.fi)).

4.9 The Meeting took note of the written information provided by Lithuania: National environmental targets have been revised and submitted to the Water Management Programme and Action Plan. These targets will be revised once more in 2018 under the MSFD. Lithuania believes that environmental targets in the Baltic Sea region should be coordinated and that it should be done at this stage and that the targets should be related to the core indicators system. Common environmental targets should be complemented with specific national aspects of each country.

4.10 The Meeting supported continued development of proposals for common approaches for environmental targets for underwater noise and pressures on the seafloor as currently initiated under the BalticBOOST project and presented under Agenda item 3.

4.11 The Meeting discussed tentative additional themes for development of coherent environmental targets in the Baltic Sea region. The Meeting noted the proposal from Finland to focus the selection of themes to the pressures of most concern in the Baltic Sea, e.g. based on the results from the Baltic Sea Impact Index, as well as to consider the pressure-based descriptors of the MSFD as well as the HELCOM BSAP. The Meeting noted the proposal from the European Union to focus on issues with highest needs for coordination of measures.

4.12 The Meeting took note of the European Commission call on: "Implementation of the Second Cycle of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive: achieving coherent, coordinated and consistent updates of the determinations of Good Environmental Status, initial assessments and environmental targets".

4.13 The Meeting noted that the priority objectives identified for the Baltic Sea were to some extent unexpected and appreciated that the European Union will check the correctness of the priority objectives identified for the Baltic Sea.

4.14 The Meeting recommended to HODs to develop a coordinated HELCOM project proposal in response to the call, to ensure that a possible Baltic project directly support the needs of the countries as jointly identified in HELCOM. The Meeting requested the Secretariat to prepare an application based on the identified priority issues aligned with the objectives of the call.

4.15 The Meeting discussed the need to continue the development of indicators and associated GES boundaries and noted the information by the European Union that priority area 'a) updated determination so GES' can be addressed even if projects will not be able to provide operational indicators and GES in time for use in HOLAS II. With this clarification the Meeting proposed to address priority area a) in the application. The Meeting further supported the proposal by the Secretariat to focus the application on priority area 'e) update environmental targets and associated indicators', the continued work on ESA beyond the TAPAS project, and the implementation of the assessments under the HOLAS II project in 2017, noting that the two latter topics fall under priority area 'b) update the 2012 assessment' which is not identified as a priority area for the Baltic Sea region.

4.16 The Meeting took note of the information on the National Programme of Measures provided by Finland, Lithuania, and Sweden (**document 4-1**).

4.17 The Meeting took note of the information related to the initiation of HELCOM action for further consideration to intensify HELCOM work to reduce airborne transboundary nitrogen input from outside of HELCOM area, in particular the Gothenburg Protocol (**document 4-3**). The Meeting invited Contracting Parties to consider to take the Lead for the activity.

**Agenda Item 5 Upcoming and emerging issues**

5.1 The Meeting took note of the HELCOM information of relevance to the MSFD CIS work programme 2016-2018 which has been finalized according to the new structure of the draft MSFD CIS work programme (**document 5-1**).

**Agenda Item 6 Future work and any other business**

6.1 The Meeting welcomed the information, provided in writing, that Germany is willing to Lead the development of the indicator 'Diatom/dinoflagellate ratio'.

6.2 The Meeting agreed to tentatively arrange the next meeting of the GEAR Working Group 17-18 November 2016, and to include on the agenda the preparation of the HOD meeting in December 2016 in the view adoption by HOD on indicators and assessment methodologies for use in HOLAS II.

6.3 The Meeting updated the contact information for GEAR as contained in **document 6-1**.

6.4 The Meeting thanked Sweden for excellent arrangements and hosting of the Meeting.

**Agenda Item 7 Outcome of the Meeting**

7.1 The Meeting adopted the draft outcome of the Meeting. The final Outcome of the Meeting, together with the documents and presentations considered by the Meeting are available in the [HELCOM Meeting Site](#).

## Annex 1 List of Participants

Representing	Name	Organization	E-mail
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