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Background

Following the recommendation from GEAR and subsequent agreement by HODs a HELCOM project proposal was submitted in response to the EU call “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” to ensure that a possible Baltic project directly support the needs of the countries as jointly identified in HELCOM ([Outcome of HOLAS II 5-2016](#), para 3.3; [Outcome of GEAR 14-2016](#), paras 4.14-4.15, [Outcome of HOD 50-2016](#), para 4.56).

This document contains information from the summary of the application, entitled “Implementation and development of key components for the assessment of Status, Pressures and Impacts, and Social and Economic evaluation in the Baltic Sea marine region (SPICE)”.

Action required

The Meeting is invited to note the information.

HELCOM project proposal “Implementation and development of key components for the assessment of Status, Pressures and Impacts, and Social and Economic evaluation in the Baltic Sea marine region (SPICE)”

HELCOM is developing a Second Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea through the HOLAS II project that started in late 2014 and will run until mid-2018. The 2nd holistic assessment will assess progress towards reaching a Baltic Sea in a Good Environmental Status and will follow-up the initial HELCOM holistic assessment that was published in 2010 ([HELCOM 2010](#)). The Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention being EU Member States have decided to use the outcome of HOLAS II for the purpose of their reporting under Article 8 of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) in 2018 ([Outcome of GEAR 14-2016](#), para 4.10).

Currently, several projects and activities are being conducted to deliver the first version of the 2nd holistic assessment by mid-2017 which will serve national consultation purposes. An updated version of the assessment report, including the most recent monitoring data and taking into account the outcome of the consultation process, will be prepared by mid-2018.

HOLAS II has benefited from the EU co-financed projects [BalticBOOST](#) and [TAPAS](#). This project is to a large extent building on activities initiated under these projects and aims to refine and finalize prioritized components of HOLAS II as jointly identified by the Baltic Sea countries and EU in HELCOM. Specifically the SPICE project will contribute to:

Theme 1: Finalize and quality assure the thematic assessments on biodiversity, eutrophication, hazardous substances as well as pressures and impacts and support the final collation of data

In HOLAS II, commonly agreed core indicators will form the basis for the assessment of status of the Baltic Sea marine environment. Through the [BalticBOOST project](#) and previous HELCOM activities, assessment tools have been developed that enable aggregation of indicators to arrive at the status of the thematic areas biodiversity, hazardous substances and eutrophication. Through the [TAPAS project](#) the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact Indices (BSPI/BSII) have been further developed. The tools to be used in HOLAS II, which are based on the evolving European Commission Decision on GES criteria, will be agreed in HELCOM in late 2016. Theme 1 will 1) enable final collation of data, 2) implement the thematic assessments as well as the assessment of pressures and impacts, 3) run a set of workshops for the countries to quality assure and agree on the assessment results, 4) make possible last-minute changes to the tools.

Theme 2: Develop marine litter indicators towards operationalization and prepare a proposal for the assessment of marine litter in the 2nd holistic assessment

HELCOM is currently finalizing core indicators to follow-up the Baltic Sea Action Plan and the [HELCOM Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter](#). The current lack of operational indicators on marine litter has been identified as a critical gap in the set of HELCOM core indicators by the HOLAS II core team ([Outcome of HOLAS II 5-2016](#), para 3.3) and the Gear Group ([Outcome of GEAR 14-2016](#), para 3.18). Theme 2 will 1) define a baseline for beach litter, 2) explore the possibilities to define a baseline for litter on the seafloor, 3) analyse available data with the aim to assess the amount of microlitter in the water, and 4) develop a proposal for assessment of marine litter in the 2nd holistic assessment by mid-2017.

Theme 3: further develop and implement the economic and social analyses at the Baltic Sea regional scale

In the TAPAS project, HELCOM and project partners are developing a framework for the coherent application of the economic and social analyses (ESA) in the Baltic Sea region and have established a regional ESA network for the Baltic Sea. To continue the development of the ESA framework beyond TAPAS has been identified as a priority issue by the HELCOM Gear Group ([Outcome of GEAR 14-2016](#), para 3.27).

This theme focuses the ESA work in four tasks: 1) collecting available data to carry out regional ESA on the use of marine waters and cost of degradation for the Baltic Sea using the TAPAS framework, and further developing the ecosystem service approach in the framework, 2) developing principles and methods for a regional business as usual scenario to be used as a baseline for assessing changes in pressures and state, progress towards achieving GES, as well as for the ESA, 3) building tools towards an integrated assessment of activities, pressures, state, socio-economic activities and human well-being based on the ESA framework and results from the HOLAS assessment of cumulative pressures (the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact Index and its further developments), and 4) improving institutional capacity and coherence of the approaches by continuing the regional cooperation in the HELCOM ESA network as well as by exchanging experiences and good practices among Regional Sea Conventions.

Theme 4: Develop guidelines for assessments of cumulative impacts and thresholds related to pelagic and seabed habitats

The EU co-financed BalticBOOST project has analyzed how to define maximum allowable physical pressures on the benthic ecosystem and will propose a framework and guidelines for the development of environmental targets for seabed habitats by the end of 2016. The work is aligned with the work of the TAPAS project, in which HELCOM has further developed the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact indices that will be used to assess cumulative impacts for pelagic and benthic habitats. The continued development of benthic indicators and assessment approaches for seabed habitats has been identified as a priority by the HOLAS II core team ([Outcome of HOLAS II 5-2016](#), para 3.3) and the Gear Group ([Outcome of GEAR 14-2016](#)). In contrast, there are several HELCOM core indicators for water-column features, but no conceptual model has been developed how these can be used to assess the impact on or state of the pelagic habitats. Theme 4 will build on the outcome from BalticBOOST and TAPAS projects to explore how thresholds for assessing the status of broad scale habitats can be defined e.g. according to criteria D1C56, D6C3, D6C4 and D6C45 of the evolving Commission Decision on GES criteria (reference to version for consultation 14.9.2016) and produce guidelines how the assessment can be made and how habitats at different levels of classification can be assessed. This theme will also support the continued development of environmental targets for pressures affecting seabed habitats in the Baltic Sea region.

The project furthermore aims to promote enhanced inter-regional cooperation through dedicated coordination activities under themes 2, 3 and 4.

Project management

The work of the project will be carried out by a project team consisting of the HELCOM Secretariat as project coordinator and six additional partners: EMI (Estonia), SEI Tallinn (Estonia), SYKE (Finland), IMGW PIB (Poland) and SwAM (Sweden). AKTiivs (Latvia) and Goteborg University (Sweden) are planned to be sub-contracted by HELCOM. SwAM will also subcontract some of the tasks within the current national framework agreement.

The duration of the project, if funded, is 12 months. The total cost of the project is 489 010 €, including 391 208 € requested EU co-financing, i.e. 80 % rate of the total budget. Planned starting date is 1 January 2017.