



Outcome of the 15th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (HELCOM GEAR 15-2016)

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Introduction

0.1 In accordance with the outcome of HELCOM GEAR 14-2016 (par. 6.2), the 15th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (GEAR 15-2016) was held on 17-18 November 2016 in Helsinki, Finland, at the premises of the HELCOM Secretariat.

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

0.3 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 took note of the time-table for finalizing the first version of the 2nd HELCOM holistic assessment by mid-2017 and the timing for Contracting Parties and HELCOM Working Groups to approve of components of the assessment (**Presentation 1**). The meeting took note that the writing process, including needs for particular competence, will be clarified by the next meeting of the HOLAS II core team which will take place 19 January 2017.

2.3 The Meeting took note of the information by the European Union on the positive vote by the MSFD Committee on the revision of the Commission Decision on GES criteria (GES Decision) and the MSFD Annex III and that the map of the MSFD regions and sub-regions has been finalised.

Agenda Item 3 Coordination and information related to the implementation of the ecosystem approach and related policies

3.1 The Meeting noted the Outcome of STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016 (**document 3-1, Presentation 3**) as regards indicators and assessment tools. The Meeting recalled that HOD 51-2016 will be invited to adopt new core indicators and approve of the use of assessment tools in HOLAS II based on the outcome of STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016.

3.2 The Meeting took note of the status of endorsement of indicators at STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016 and how the anticipated set of indicators, pending remaining study reservations, match to the themes that will be assessed in HOLAS II.

3.3 The Meeting appreciated the constructive discussion and work done at the State and Conservation 5-2016 and the contribution towards lifting study reservations on indicators.

3.4 The Meeting noted that Germany has a study reservation on all core indicators due to an ongoing national process but is aiming at lifting the general study reservation by HOD 51-2016. The Meeting further noted that Germany lifted reservations on specific indicators at State and Conservation 5-2016.

3.5 The Meeting took note of the statement from Denmark regarding the mandate at State & Conservation 5-2016 which was to take study reservations on endorsement of most of the core indicators, shift in status of indicators, GES-boundaries for core indicators, and assessment tools. This limited mandate was partly due to the pending decision of the MSFD Committee meeting regarding the proposal to revise the GES Decision. The Meeting noted that Denmark is not in a position to lift the study reservation due to the need for a political process after the adoption of the GES Decision. Therefore there is no new Danish mandate for agenda item 3. The Meeting noted that Denmark regrets the inconvenience that this position is causing to the work carried out under the HOLAS II project.

3.6 The Meeting noted the following national information related to study reservations:

- Sweden is not in a position to provide additional information on their study reservation.
- Poland will clarify the study reservation on the indicator on total nutrients as soon as possible.
- Estonia clarified that the study reservation on the GES-boundaries for the metals indicator is due to the proposal to use BAC levels for metals, derived for the OSPAR region, which may be too strict for the Baltic Sea.

3.7 The Meeting encouraged countries with study reservations to clarify their position as soon as possible to ensure that the HOLAS II project is not jeopardized.

3.8 The Meeting considered the questions addressed by State and Conservation 5-2016 regarding the use of results for indicators not yet operational on a regional scale in HOLAS II (Outcome of STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016 para 4J.32).

3.9 The Meeting supported the use of core indicators in HOLAS II also in the case that they are only operational in a limited number of assessment units as long as they are agreed by the countries sharing a sub-basin.

3.10 The Meeting recalled that themes and topics which have no operational indicators, e.g. marine litter, underwater noise and by-catch, will be covered in the HOLAS II report by using a more descriptive approach.

3.11 The Meeting considered the possibility to include additional indicators in the updated and final version of the 2nd holistic assessment in 2018 in the case that indicators are tested and made operational in the meantime (Outcome of STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016 para 4J-4).

3.12 The Meeting supported in principle the inclusion of additional indicators in the updated assessment by mid-2018 and proposed that 'place holders' could be used in the first version of the report to indicate that additional information may be included in the final assessment report. The Meeting acknowledged that countries will investigate further the possibilities for reviewing their national reports with the aim of updating them according to HOLAS II in 2018.

3.13 The Meeting took note of the agreement of STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016 to adjust the biodiversity and hazardous substance assessment tools.

3.14 The Meeting considered the view of State and Conservation 5-2016 that the integrated assessment of hazardous substances can be used for an overall assessment of contamination status in the Baltic Sea but not for assessing whether good environmental status (GES) has been achieved or not.

3.15 The Meeting acknowledged that the integrated assessment approach of the CHASE tool is relevant for assessing HELCOM objectives but that such integration is not required for MSFD purposes.

3.16 The Meeting supported the view of State and Conservation that the assessment results from the integrated CHASE assessment can be used to summarize the contamination status of the Baltic Sea in HOLAS II, however that the integrated assessment results should not be expressed in terms of GES/sub-GES. The Meeting was of the view that the use of results in the HOLAS II summary report needs to be considered once the assessment results for single substances are available.

3.17 Germany reserves its position to the application of CHASE to coastal waters pending the testing of the tool in those waters.

3.18 The Meeting discussed the use of terminology in HELCOM in relation to indicators and assessment tools and concluded that there is a need to revisit the terminology in order to ensure a consistent use of terms in HELCOM as well as to be coherent with the GES Decision. The Meeting agreed, in a first step, to change the term 'GES-boundary' as used in relation to HELCOM indicators to 'threshold values'. The Meeting recognized the need to scrutinize this change in relation to the GES Decision, since in some cases the term GES as used in HELCOM is already consistent with the GES Decision.

3.19 The Meeting took note of the draft comparison of the GES Decision (v 10.11.2016) and the indicators, assessment scales and tools for use in HOLAS II (**document 3-2**), welcomed the document, and was of the initial view that HOLAS II and the Baltic Sea region is well off in meeting the reporting requirements under the MSFD for EU Member States.

3.20 The Meeting agreed to consider the implication of the GES Decision beyond HOLAS II e.g. in relation to the MSFD criteria elements, threshold values and methodological standards which should be established through cooperation at regional level.

3.21 The Meeting discussed the assessment of eutrophication and took note of the view of the European Union that HELCOM has a regionally agreed method for integration that appears to be coherent with the GES Decision which states "in a manner agreed where possible at Union level, but at least at regional or subregional level". Any future agreement at the Union level could lead to the need to adapt the HELCOM method.

3.22 The Meeting took note that a minor adjustment of HEAT was proposed by Finland for consideration by the HELCOM IN Eutrophication at their next meeting, taking place in December 2016 (date still to be set), and invited Contracting Parties to provide their views to that meeting. The Meeting furthermore requested the HELCOM IN Eutrophication to clarify the proposal to estimate the area affected by eutrophication.

3.23 The Meeting took note that comments on the document can be submitted to the Secretariat (UllaLi.Zweifel@helcom.fi) by **6 December 2016** and that it will be updated in the preparation of the HOLAS II core team on-line meeting 19 January 2017.

Agenda Item 4 Activities of relevant HELCOM projects or processes

4.1 The Meeting noted the 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)" as summarized in **document 4-1**. The proposal was submitted in response to the EU call for proposals 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*" based on the identified priorities by HOLAS II core team and Gear ([Outcome of HOLAS II 5-2016](#), para 3.3; [Outcome of GEAR 14-2016](#), paras 4.14-4.15) and the mandate given by HOD ([Outcome of HOD 50-2016](#), para 4.56). If funded the project could start in January 2017 at the earliest and would run for 12 months.

Continued work on Economic and Social Analyses (ESA) in HELCOM

4.2 The Meeting noted a status update on the economic and social analyses in HOLAS II, being based on use of marine waters approach and the assessment of the cost of degradation of the marine environment, and discussed the proposed roadmap for further regional socio-economic analyses in HOLAS II and in HELCOM up until 2021 as contained in **document 4-2, Presentation 2**.

4.3 The Meeting welcomed the work carried out by the TAPAS project and the HELCOM ESA network, recognizing that it brings together the social and economic competence around the Baltic

Sea and provides an appreciated complement to the MSFD reporting. The Meeting further welcomed that there is a close link between the regional ESA work and the MSFD CIS Working Group POMESA.

4.4 The Meeting recalled the view of Denmark, expressed at HOLAS II 6-2016, that the stated preference approach is not found acceptable as basis for analysis of the cost of degradation and noted that the revealed preference approach has been taken up by the TAPAS project in order to meet this position.

4.5 The Meeting agreed to strengthen the HELCOM ESA network by nominating national representatives in case of the Contracting Parties who have not done so yet and by establishing ToRs for the network. The Meeting commented on a draft ToR for the network elaborated during the meeting and requested Contracting Parties to provide further possible comments to the draft ToR (**document 4-5**) by **6 December 2016** (UllaLi.Zweifel@helcom.fi) with a view to submitting the draft ToR to the Heads of Delegation for approval. The Meeting requested the Secretariat to inform Contracting Parties on any particular missing competence in the network to maximize the nomination process as well as indicate estimated time allocation by national experts to the ESA work.

4.6 The Meeting took note that Estonia will update the list of nominated experts to the ESA network and the request to consult on involvement of experts from the countries in future projects.

4.7 The Meeting agreed in principle on the roadmap, to be forwarded to HOD 51-2016, however requested the Secretariat to amend its content to reflect that:

- the priority of the ESA network is to contribute to the holistic assessment work according to the tasks in table 1 and points 1-5 while points 6-8 require further scoping therefore are regarded as potential future activities;
- proposed future analysis of the cost-effectiveness of measures would not analyse cost-effectiveness of national measures but should focus on analyses from the perspective of cost-effectiveness of collective actions at a regional level;
- that it would be useful in the future to try to link cost of degradation and use of marine waters as soon as more data becomes available;
- carrying out ESA is an interdisciplinary effort.

4.8 The Meeting noted that the SPICE project proposal, if approved for funding, will support some of the future ESA tasks.

BalticBOOST components related to environmental targets

4.9 The Meeting noted that under the HELCOM BalticBOOST project, two work packages have had the task to develop guidelines on how to define environmental targets: WP 3.1 related to pressures acting on seabed habitats, and WP 4 related to underwater noise. The Meeting recalled that GEAR 14-2015 provided initial guidance to the work.

4.10 The Meeting took note of a proposal on the principles for defining levels of underwater noise that are consistent with GES for noise sensitive species as well as decision support trees for establishing environmental targets for ambient and impulsive noise as contained in **document 4-4, Presentation 4**. The Meeting recalled that the principles and decision support trees were discussed at PRESSURE 5-2016.

4.11 The Meeting noted that an agreement has been reached on principle one (1) on impulsive noise for harbour porpoise between Danish and German experts (on-line meeting held 15 November) which was left as an open issue in Pressure 5-2015 and which has not been reflected in the document for this meeting yet.

4.12 Germany, supported by Poland, informed that there are additional sensitive areas for harbour porpoises in the Western Baltic Sea and that the map of sound sensitive areas need further development (e.g. Pommeranian Bay and protected areas east of Rügen are missing as well as important areas between Puck Bay and Pommeranian Bay).

4.13 The Meeting noted that Denmark and Russia have study reservations on the principles and Denmark, Germany and Russia have study reservations on the draft ToR for the HELCOM EN-Noise which Germany expects to clarify by 21 November 2016.

4.14 The Meeting noted that the Danish study reservation is related to the requirement of the GES Decision to agree on threshold values for underwater noise at the European level.

4.15 The Meeting took note of the view of European Union that the work fills an important gap in regards underwater noise, that the reference in the GES Decision to define thresholds at the Union level should not halt the development of the approach at the regional level e.g. to address regional characteristics, and the encouragement to introduce the HELCOM work to the MSFD TG Noise where the principles are important to agree as a basis for setting regional specific values.

4.16 The Meeting agreed to change the term 'principles ' to 'regional input for defining levels of underwater noise...' in the title of document 4-4 to reflect the nature of the document and its potential to contribute to the ongoing work in other RSCs and on European level.

4.17 The Meeting supported the national testing of the decision support trees and for the HELCOM EN-Noise to further develop them according to the conclusions from the HELCOM underwater noise workshop and in close coordination with the MSFD TG Noise and OSPAR.

4.18 The Meeting agreed to submit the document to HOD 51-2016 and recommend support to the document with the changed title and its intended use to guide further work on GES and provide input to the MSFD TG Noise and OSPAR.

4.19 The Meeting invited Denmark and Russia to clarify the position on the document and the proposed change of term by HOD 51-2016.

4.20 The Meeting noted that the second BalticBOOST workshop to discuss guidelines for defining environmental targets related to pressures on the seabed habitats ([BalticBOOST Theme 3 WS 2-2016](#)) will be arranged 28-29 November at the premises of the HELCOM Secretariat, Helsinki.

4.21 The Meeting noted the interim guidelines for setting environmental targets for pressures affecting benthic habitats developed in the frame of the BalticBOOST Work package 3.1 as presented by Lead partner SYKE, Finland (**document 4-3, Presentation 5**). The Meeting noted that the document presents draft results of the WP that is being further development as a background document for the upcoming HELCOM workshop.

4.22 The Meeting noted that the work focuses on the impact of physical loss and physical damage to seabed habitats and that the project has made a literature survey to compile current knowledge on impacts to benthic habitats and the linkages between the relevant activities, pressures and impacts.

4.23 The Meeting took note that based on literature survey the project has ranked the impact from different activities as well as estimated the spatial extent of the impacts. The Meeting noted the view of the project that the current knowledge does not support the definition 'maximum allowable pressure consistent with GES' which was the original aim of the project.

4.24 The Meeting welcomed the work done under the project, including the state-of-the-art knowledge on impacts to seabed habitats, and noted that it provides a good starting point for further work to develop HELCOM guidelines for setting environmental targets for pressures on the seabed habitats. The Meeting noted that the HOLAS II assessment of pressures and impacts is anticipated to provide a basis for identifying problem areas where environmental targets may be required.

4.25 The Meeting discussed the proposed step-wise risk-based approach to set environmental targets and took note that further work on the guidelines and project report is required and took note of the following detailed comments:

- consider further clarifying the relationship between targets and measures in the step-wise approach (steps 5 and 6) to not address management/mitigation measures, but to consider further how to identify environmental targets for specific pressures,

- consider the development of the impact evaluation carried out in OSPAR in the development of the BH2 and BH3 indicators,
- separate more clearly the project products and the guidelines for setting environmental targets,
- give well balanced attention to different activities,
- clarify how fisheries impacts will be considered in the final proposal on guidelines.

4.26 The Meeting supported to relate the scale of applying the guidelines to the scale of the benthic indicators

4.27 The Meeting agreed to submit additional comments to the Lead Partner by **23 November 2016** (samuli.korpinen@helcom.fi), to be considered at the upcoming workshop and in the finalization of the project report by December 2016.

4.28 The Meeting took note that one of the themes of the HELCOM SPICE application (cf para 4.1), if funded, will be able to support the continued work on guidelines for setting environmental targets for seabed habitats. The Meeting agreed to come back to the further development of the guidelines at the next meeting of the Gear Group when the final report from the BalticBOOST project is available and the tentative funding of the project is known.

Agenda Item 5 Future work and any other business

5.1 The Meeting noted the point by Lithuania regarding the use of updated data on retention and transboundary loads in MAI/CART and its follow-up and took note of the invitation by the Secretariat for Lithuania to raise this issue at the HOD meeting and if possible prepare information in writing.

5.2 The Meeting agreed tentatively to arrange an extra on-line session of the GEAR Group in February 2017, in case there are any unresolved issues from the HOLAS II core team meeting. The Meeting agreed to convene the next physical meeting 23-24 May 2017.

5.3 The Meeting updated the contact information for GEAR as contained in **document 5-1**.

5.4 The Meeting thanked the Secretariat for hosting the Meeting.

Agenda Item 6 Outcome of the Meeting

6.1 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
Chair			
Germany	Heike Imhoff	Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety	Heike.Imhoff@bmub.bund.de
Contracting Parties			
Denmark (on-line participation)	Lone Søderberg	Danish Agency for Water and Nature Management	lomu@svana.dk
Estonia	Agnes Villmann	Ministry of the Environment	agnes.villmann@envir.ee
European Union	David Connor	European Union	david.connor@ec.europa.eu
Finland	Maria Laamanen	Ministry of the Environment	maria.laamanen@ymparisto.fi
Germany	Andrea Weiss	MSFD - Secretariat Function for the Ministry of the Environment c/o Federal Environment Agency	andrea.weiss@uba.de
Lithuania	Agnė Lukoševičienė	Ministry of Environment	agne.lukoseviciene@am.lt
Poland	Malgorzata Marciniowicz-Mykieta	Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection	m.marciniowicz@gios.gov.pl
Sweden	Laura Piriz	SwAM	laura.piriz@havochvatten.se
Observers			
WWF	Vanessa Ryan	WWF Finland	vanessa.ryan@wwf.fi
Invited guests			
Invited guest	Samuli Korpinen	Finnish Environment Institute	samuli.korpinen@ymparisto.fi
HELCOM Secretariat			
Secretariat	Heini Ahtiainen	HELCOM Secretariat	heini.ahtiainen@helcom.fi
Secretariat	Lena Avellan	HELCOM Secretariat	Lena.Avellan@helcom.fi
Secretariat	Marta Ruiz	HELCOM Secretariat	marta.ruiz@helcom.fi
Secretariat	Henriette Schack	HELCOM Secretariat	Henriette.Schack@helcom.fi
Secretariat	Monika Stankiewicz	HELCOM Secretariat	monika.stankiewicz@helcom.fi
Secretariat	Ulla Li Zweifel	HELCOM Secretariat	ullali.zweifel@helcom.fi