



Document title	Guidance paper for discussion and scoping for HOLAS III
Code	4-1
Category	CMNT
Agenda Item	4 – Activities of relevant HELCOM projects or processes
Submission date	1.4.2019
Submitted by	Secretariat
Reference	

Background

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 other HELCOM processes, including consolidation and further development of indicators, 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.

This document contains some general, more principle and policy related background and proposed questions to guide the discussion.

To support the initial discussions and scoping for HOLAS III the Secretariat has prepared information on a draft tentative timeline for the proposed work on HOLAS III (Attachment 1, Excel file).

GEAR 17-2018 agreed to conduct an exercise of “lessons learnt” from the HOLAS II process and a regional survey on the process and results of the HELCOM HOLAS II project was circulated on 16 July with a deadline to provide feedback by 31 August 2018. GEAR 18-2018 noted the low response rate to the survey and agreed to re-open the survey for four additional weeks (mid-November-mid-December). The analysis of the responses to the survey, with special focus on the open-ended answers relating to how to improve the assessment and HOLAS III are available in attachment 2 (Attachment 2).

GEAR 17-2018 took note of policy related comments from the regional State of the Baltic Sea report consultation process which included proposals for HOLAS III. These comments, as well as comments by the stakeholders on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the 2017 State of the Baltic Sea report have been collated to support the discussions (Attachment 3).

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- discuss components of the HOLAS III, including what could be further developed based on HOLAS II but also what is possibly missing and start considering what might be different for HOLAS III in terms of e.g. MSFD requirements,
- note the preliminary overall timeline and note that the proposed steps are tentative, and should not as such be discussed at this stage,
- note the provided background information when initiating the discussion and scoping regarding further development in the design, structure, contents of HOLAS III, based on HOLAS II design, structure, and contents,
- highlight links with ongoing work in HELCOM (e.g. BSAP update), SDGs and EU MSFD CIS which could be expected to contribute to topics, as well as MSFD-requirements which might be relevant for the discussion of preparing the HOLAS III report.

Guidance paper for discussion and scoping for HOLAS III

Content of HOLAS III report

(Background information: Att. 2 and Att. 3 to this document).

Regional consultation

As part of the regional consultation process for the 2017 version of the State of the Baltic Sea report the respondents were invited to answer the question “If a new, Third Holistic Assessment were to be carried out in a few years, what should that assessment do differently?”

To this question, numerous proposals on what to include in the next assessment have been provided. Considering the main weaknesses expressed in the consultation process (see Att. 3), to improve availability of data has been highlighted as an obvious task for future. Other proposals for a future assessment include to:

- ensure comparability of results between assessment periods so that improvements can be assessed,
- put more emphasis on implementation of necessary measures,
- relate results to the delivery of SDG objectives and describe the extent to which the region, contributes to SDG14 and other relevant goals,
- provide linkages to EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,
- rank pressures and impacts clearly,
- focus on pressures and impacts of climate change on biodiversity and the marine environment that could prevent achievement of a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea,
- focus more on the results and leave out some of the background/enrichment information and highlight even more the key findings,
- regional reporting of relevant indicators from the Contracting Parties to UN custodian agencies and facilitate joint implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

To remedy that data is quickly getting old, it is also proposed to set up a supplementary website, where indicator evaluations and associated information are provided in "living" tables, updated frequently during the years between Holistic Assessment.

One respondent proposes that the next HELCOM holistic assessment could include a "get involved"-button during the assessment stage to clarify how stakeholders can contribute and share ideas.

HOLAS II process and products survey

GEAR 17-2018 agreed to conduct an exercise of “lessons learnt” from the HOLAS II process and a regional survey on the process and results of the HELCOM HOLAS II project was circulated on 16 July with a deadline to provide feedback by 31 August 2018. GEAR 18-2018 noted the low response rate to the survey and agreed to re-open the survey for four additional weeks (mid-November-mid-December). The analysis of the responses to the survey, with special focus on the open-ended answers relating to how to improve the assessment and HOLAS III are available in Attachment 2.

To support the discussion on process for HOLAS III process or policy related comments received through the HOLAS II process and products survey have been extracted.

The following challenges related to the policy/science interface were identified in the survey.

Challenges in translating science to policy, responses from HOLAS II process and products survey

Constraints in the ecology/policy interface	MSFD related challenges
<i>"Attempts to compare and generalise components of marine ecosystem which are not directly comparable or cannot be generalised in the way it was done. This is the problem of translating science to politics, same terms are used with different scales or units of measure."</i>	<i>"Matching the requirements of the MSFD and the integrated assessments (especially BSPI/BSII)."</i>
<i>"To get a coherent assessment for the whole region. Environmental conditions, indicator GES definitions, data quality vary across the Baltic region and to get results that are comparable across the region is challenging."</i>	<i>"The connection to MSFD and the consequent need for approval at higher levels."</i>
<i>"The target levels/thresholds of different indicators are not harmonized and developed independently off each other without peer-review. Hence the integrated status does not inform much about the status of the Baltic Sea."</i>	<i>"Adapting to the changing basis for the report i.e. the COM-decision on MSFD descriptors and criteria. I think that changing the indicators hazardous substances from state to pressure indicators leads to confusion and resulted in the lack to describe the actual pressure i.e. sources of contaminants"</i>
<i>"Concerning economic and social analysis (ESA) part: linking ESA and environmental assessments."</i>	

Amongst others the following topics were lifted for inclusion or further development in for HOLAS III.

"To what degree GES thresholds for different indicators reflect a similar level of environmental status?"

"Further develop existing indicators/assessment; indicators for harbour porpoise, benthic habitats, bycatch should be further developed so they can be used next time; aspect of climate change."

"Better elucidate the societal drivers behind the environmental degradation, for example consumption patterns and links to e.g. waste, climate change and inputs of nutrients and contaminants"

"Methodological work on some hard issues, such as differentiation between land and sea activities, interrelationship between economic activities and their pressures and impact on descriptors, etc."

"Attempt to understand the significance of data gaps in certain pressure indicators."

"More joint projects on monetary valuation of related sea ecosystem services."

The importance of improved and more consistent dataflows for several parts of the assessment were also highlighted.

Questions to consider

- **Overall, what could be further developed based on HOLAS II?**
- **What is possibly missing in HOLAS II and should be included in HOLAS III?**
- **What might be different for HOLAS III in terms of e.g. MSFD requirements?**

Process for HOLAS III

(background information Att. 2)

To support the discussion on process for HOLAS III, a subset of process or policy related comments received through the HOLAS II survey have been extracted. The full set of results can be found in att. 2 to this document.

The responders were asked to provide information on what was perceived as main challenges in relation to the HOLASII process, and how these might be improved in the future.

Main challenges

Information flow	Work flow	Work load	Lack of time
<i>"Keeping track of HELCOM group interactions, especially when things went back to the expert level and were changed there again"</i>	<i>"Feeling of the drafts becoming a moving target through continued and partly overlapping commenting rounds"</i>	<i>"Establish funding schemes and clear allocation of person months."</i>	<i>"Two short timelines for review and approval procedures for all parts of the HOLAS package"</i>
<i>"Include all countries at an earlier stage; agree earlier on mapping habitats and pressures for a common understanding to ensure similar monitoring, data formats/bases, indicator and thresholds, as well as tools for hierarchal design in the integrated assessment."</i>	<i>"Slow movement of such a large body of participants, lack of quick responses to requests for feedback"</i>	<i>"Do not update the report with one additional years data, too much work for too little gain. Use time instead to finalise products and layout."</i>	<i>"Better scheduling to ensure enough time for political approval, that results are available before the national MSFD consultations, that there is sufficient time for completing and checking different parts, and that there are clear indications of time slots allocated to comments, Allow for more time in the review and approval process."</i>
<i>"More transparency concerning methods applied and data used for human activities and indices, expert judgement aspect of assigning sensitivities needs to be more flexible and transparent."</i>	<i>"Only one HELCOM group below HOD should be responsible for the technical aspects. This group should organize the expert work. HELCOM expert networks with clear TORs should support the responsible group. Projects should only be started in exceptional cases."</i>	<i>"HOLAS II has taken a great deal of manpower and other important issues have had to take a back seat."</i>	<i>"The overall timeline was too tight. The time needed for political approval was especially underestimated."</i>
<i>"Define clearly the role and interaction of HELCOM groups, the information linkage"</i>	<i>Include as many CPs as possible in projects.</i>	<i>"More resources for expert work on the indicators could significantly improve them."</i>	<i>"The process has been very repetitive, and with too short deadlines and foresight."</i>

Information flow	Work flow	Work load	Lack of time
<i>between the groups, networks and projects.”</i>			
<i>“The respective roles of GEAR, S&C and Pressure could be clarified to make the process run smoother.</i>		<i>“Strive towards indicators that are automatically updated when new data is reported.”</i>	
<i>“In general, clarity regarding how the advice from all parties that feed into this sort of exercise will be used in the final product is essential.... This is likely to be easier in future, learning from the HOLAS II decisions.”</i>			
<i>“Projects should be linked closer to expert groups and State and Conservation. A step to achieve this is to allow for technical discussions and influencing the options/assumptions for carrying out the project. It is important to ensure that relevant task managers for work outside the projects are closely involved and that all CPs have a chance to influence the development of the projects.”</i>			

Further planning

Questions to consider

- **Is the overall timing suggested in attachment 1 suitable?**
- **Which of the potential additional components (apart from indicators) would require additional resources?**
- **How can HELCOM processed, e.g. MM 2021, the Baltic Sea Action Plan update, be used to support the HOLAS III process?**

Attachment 2 - Questionnaire answers on HOLAS II process and products

Background

Following discussions at GEAR 17-2017 and GEAR 18-2018 a regional survey on the process and results of the HELCOM HOLAS II project was circulated on 16 July with a deadline to provide feedback by 31 August 2018. GEAR 18-2018 noted the low response rate to the survey and agreed to re-open the survey for four additional weeks (mid-November-mid-December).

This document contains a compilation of the responses provided to the survey. Overall the response rate improved after the survey was reopened, the highest estimate being ~14% (normally a 10% or higher is required for analysis), and several more answers to the open-ended questions regarding strengths, weaknesses and possible improvements to the next assessment process. However, it should be noted when interpreting the responses that several of the questions still have a response rate of only 1-2%. Information on the response rate has been included in the analysis of the responses to the survey contained in this document. Special focus has been placed on presenting the open-ended answers relating to strengths, weaknesses and possible improvements to the assessments and HOLAS III.

Overall the response rate was around 14% corresponding to 60 answers out of 420 invitations. Representatives from all Contracting Parties responded to the survey. When interpreting the responses please note the following:

Contact points were invited to forward the questionnaire internally, indicating that the number of invited responders is likely to be higher than 420.

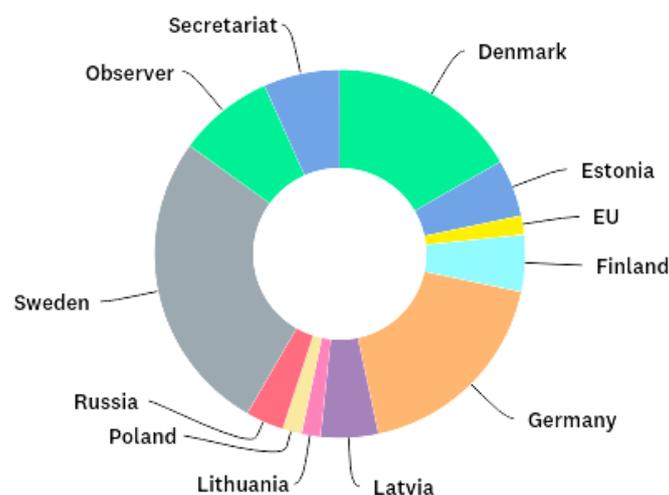
Some questions (questions 3-6) only have a less than 2% response rate. Information on the response rate has been included in the analysis of the responses.

For some questions with a high response rate a large number of responses are in the categories "NA" or "Cannot say".

Analysis of results

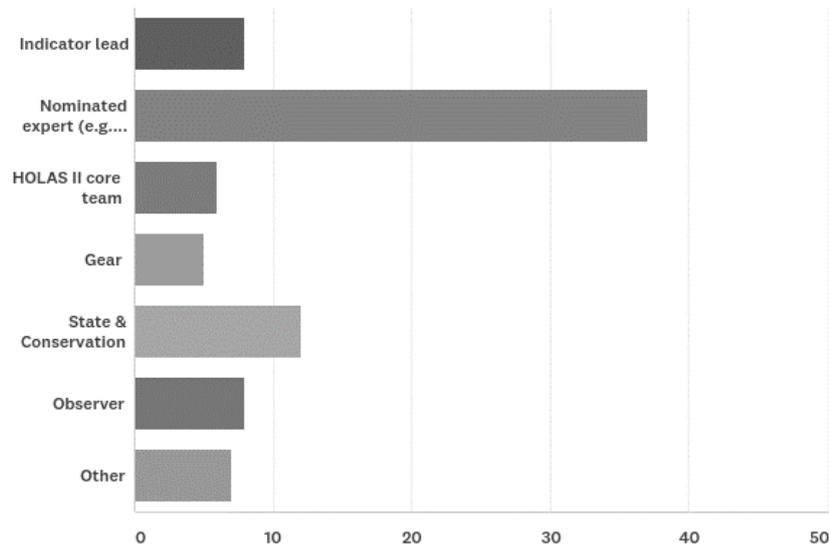
Q1 Please indicate which entity you represented in the HOLAS II project:

This question was answered by 60 participants out of an estimated 420 giving a response rate of ~14%.



Q2: Please indicate which group or groups of Stakeholders you represent (multiple options possible):

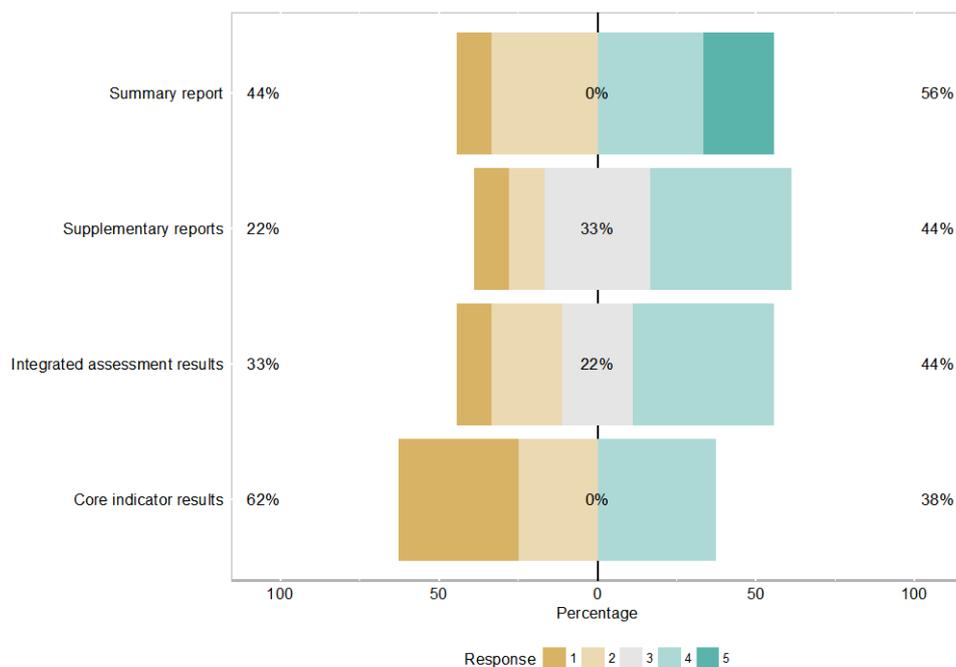
This question was answered by 60 participants out of 420 giving a response rate of ~14%.



Q3: Please rate the processes for the review and approval of the following HOLAS II project components:

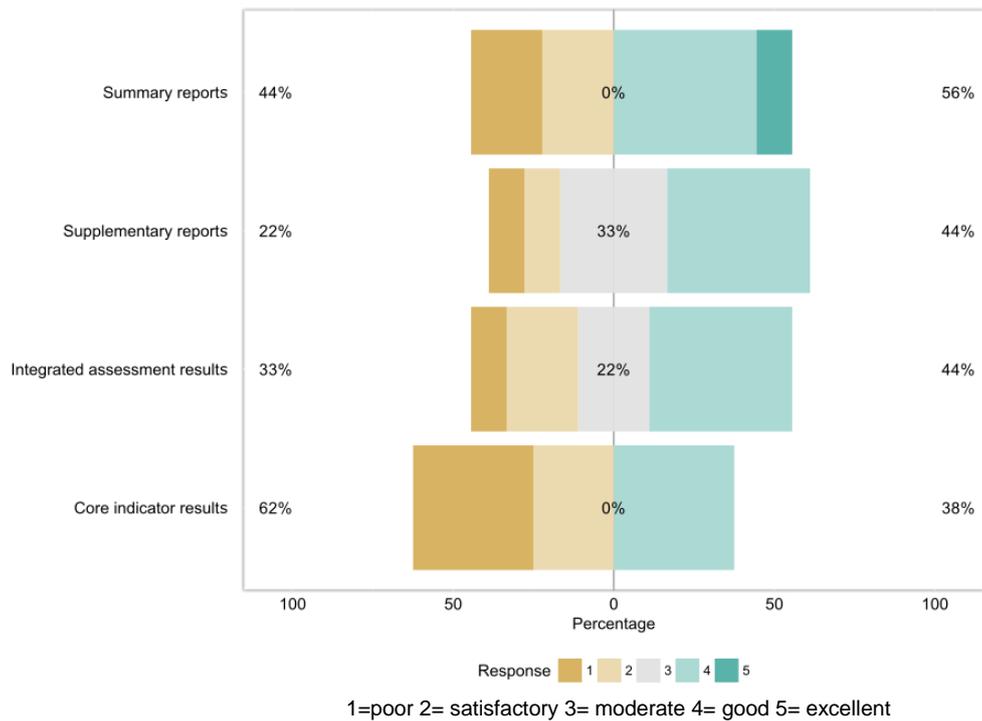
This question was answered by only 9 participants (skipped by 51) out of 420 giving a response rate of only ~2%.

Q3a) Please rate the process for the review of the following HOLAS II project components:



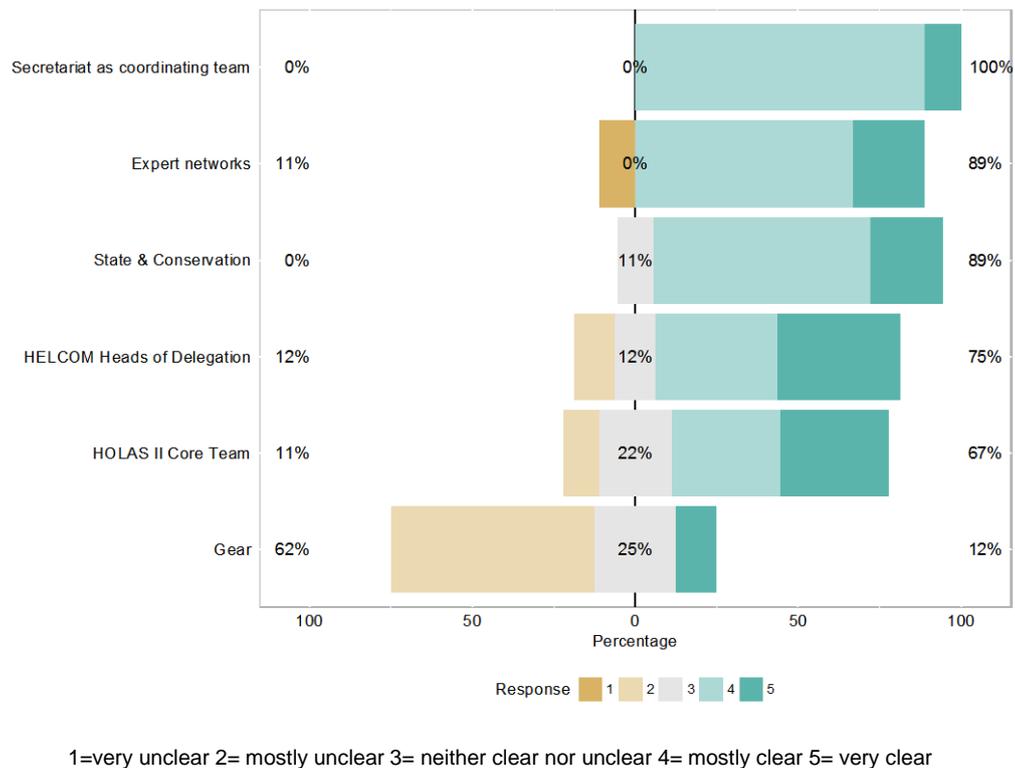
1=poor 2= satisfactory 3= moderate 4= good 5= excellent

Q3b) Please rate the process for the approval of the following HOLAS II project components



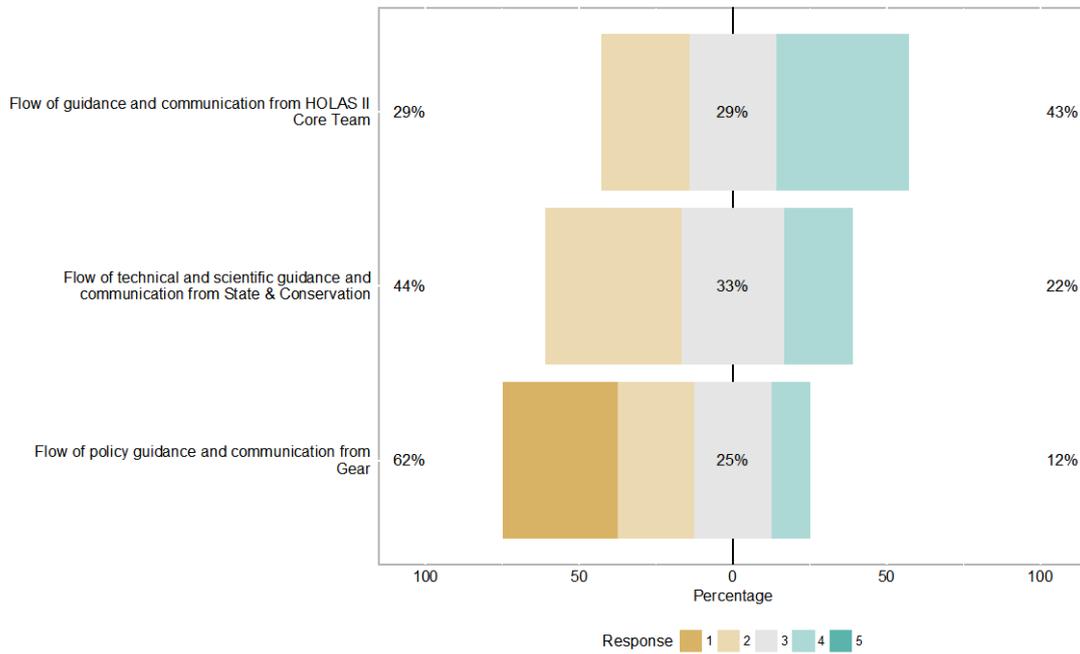
Q4: How clearly were the roles of the following HELCOM groups defined in relation to the activities of the HOLAS II project?

This question was answered by 9 participants (skipped by 59) out of 420 giving a response rate of only ~2%.



Q5: Please rate the following within the HOLAS II project:

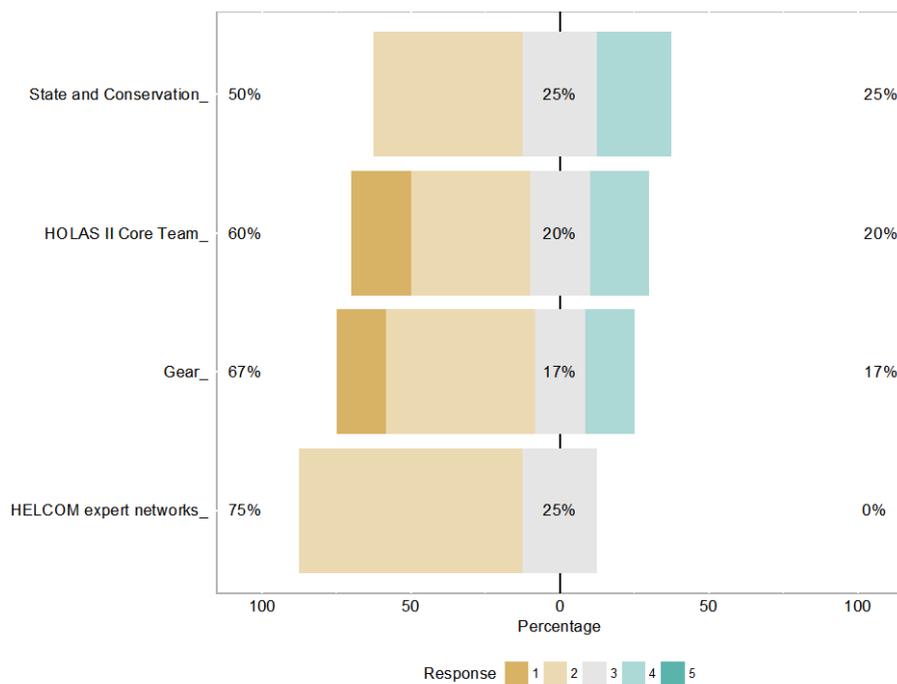
This question was answered by 5 participants (skipped by 22) out of 420 giving a response rate of only 1%.



1=poor 2= satisfactory 3= moderate 4= good 5= excellent

Q6: Please evaluate the interaction between HOLAS supporting projects (BalticBOOST, TAPAS, SPICE) and the following groups:

This question was answered by 5 participants (skipped by 22) out of 420 giving a response rate of only 1%.



1=poor 2= satisfactory 3= moderate 4= good 5= excellent

Q7: In the future, what should be done differently regarding projects that support HOLAS?

This question was answered by 7 participants (skipped by 53) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~1,5%.

“Only one HELCOM group below HOD should be responsible for the technical aspects. This group should organize the expert work. HELCOM expert networks with clear TORs should support the responsible group. Projects should only be started in exceptional cases.”

“Wider country representativity in partnership”

“More time to be able to involve national experts in the Project applications”

“Projects are really good opportunities to gain knowledge and use it in a wider context. HELCOM does this well. However, it is important to clarify which HELCOM work the results should feed into. Further it is important that as many countries as possible participate in the projects.”

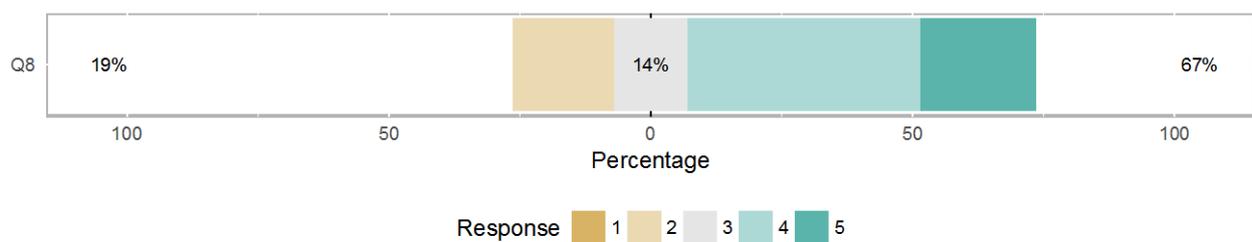
“Invite all interested parties to participate in the supporting Projects. Make sure project results are representative for all HELCOM CPs. Communicate more clearly to GEAR and HODs how project results are envisioned used in the HELCOM Work.”

“In general, clarity regarding how the advice from all parties that feed into this sort of exercise will be used in the final product is essential. In a future assessment, the way sensitivity scores are used and cumulative impacts are summarized should be determined from the start, prior to engaging project groups. This is likely to be easier in future, learning from the HOLAS II decisions.”

“Projects should be linked closer to expert groups and State and Conservation. A step to achieve this is to allow for technical discussions and influencing the options/assumptions for carrying out the project. It is important to ensure that relevant task managers for work outside the projects are closely involved and that all CPs have a chance to influence the development of the projects.”

Q8: Overall, how satisfied were you with how the HOLAS II project was planned?

This question was answered by 41 participants (skipped by 19) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~10%. Please note that out of 41 respondents 5 (12%) answered “can’t say”.



1= very unsatisfied 2=somewhat unsatisfied, 3= neither satisfied or unsatisfied 4= somewhat satisfied 5= very satisfied

Q8 elaborations

Strengths

“To start with small subgroups in the first workshop to collect ideas felt very efficient and also brought together everyone in a nice way. In general, the way the workshops and meetings were organized was very focused on the crucial questions and always had a clear aim that guided the participants.”

“Qualified staff at HELCOM and national agencies were involved. The meetings were well organized.”

“The work was a success.”

“Overall the process was well planned, although the schedule was somewhat tight at the end of the period.”

"Can't remember any major short comings at this point. However, the survey comes several years after my active participation making assessments less reliable."

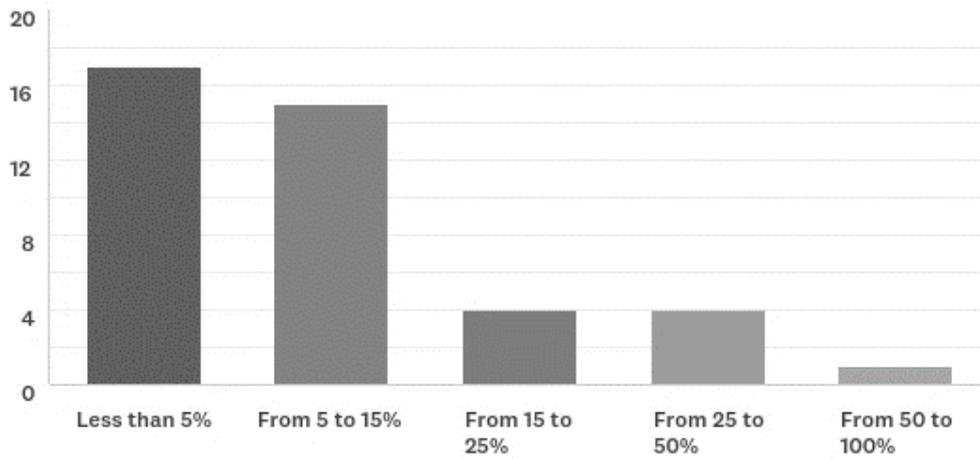
"I was involved in ESA part of HOLAS II. The work was well planned and implemented."

Weaknesses

Information flow	Work load	Lack of time
<i>"EN - Noise was not in the loop when the first pressure map of underwater noise was created which resulted in a lot of work in short time for the EN-Noise group."</i>	<i>"HOLAS II has taken a great deal of manpower and other important issues have had to take a back seat."</i>	<i>"The overall timeline was too tight. The time needed for political approval was especially underestimated."</i>
<i>"The information flows were not sufficiently clear"</i>	<i>"The workload was extremely high on contracting parties and HELCOM secretariat"</i>	<i>"I was only involved at very final stage of the project, mainly during 2017 the timeframe became very tight towards the end of the project"</i>
<i>"Basically a "simple thing" like holistic assessment got so many layers in the organisational side that it was difficult to follow who is actually doing what on different levels. I did not pay much attention to this but as an expert who produced the input in a field which was quite effectively elaborated on HELCOM expert level I saw how this input was further interpreted on other (higher) levels without understanding they already got a ready "product". Those attempts were somewhat confusing the initial idea and submitted results"</i>		<i>"The process has been very repetitive, and with too short deadlines and foresight."</i>
		<i>"The time frame was often to short"</i>

Q9: How much of your work time did you spend on the HOLAS II project over the last two years (2016-2018)?

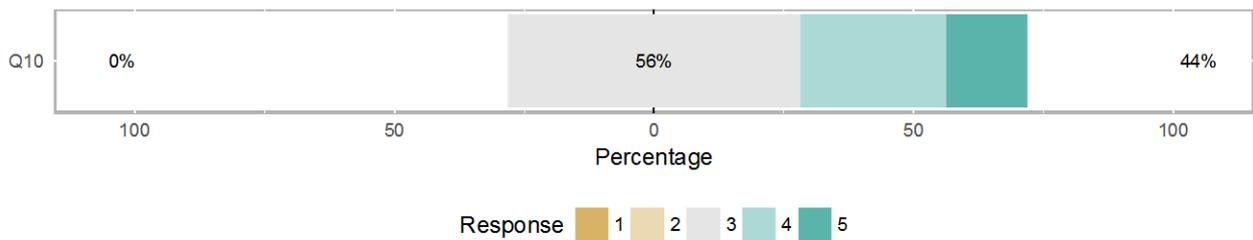
This question was answered by 41 participants (skipped by 19) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~10%.



Q10. How would you describe your overall workload in the HOLAS II project in relation to what you anticipated?

This question was answered by 41 participants (skipped by 20) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~10%.

Please note that out of 41 respondents 9 (22%) answered “can’t say”.



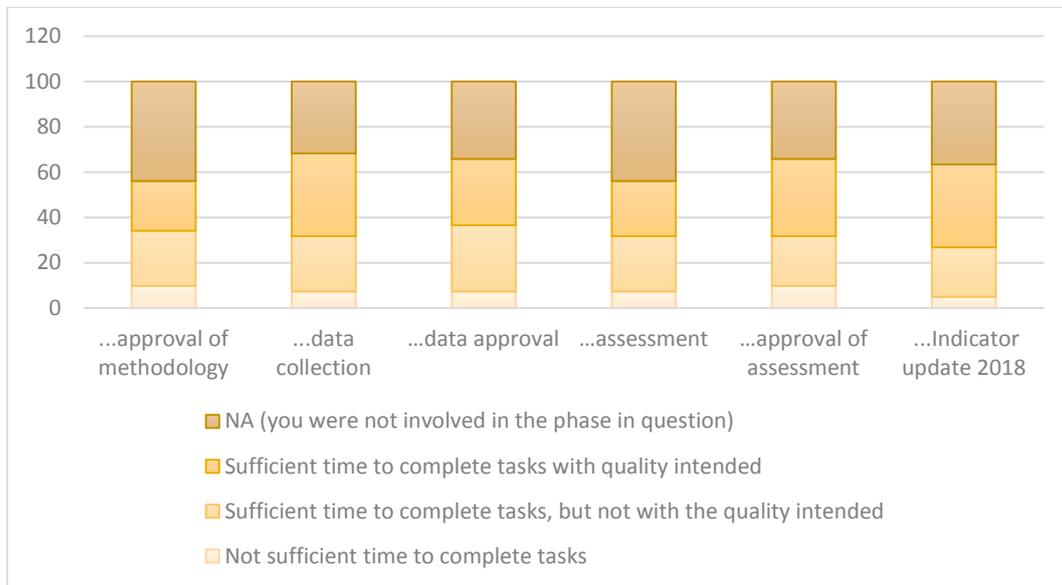
1=clearly below, 2=somewhat below, 3=matched 4=somewhat exceeded, 5=clearly exceeded

Q11: How would you describe the calendar time allocated for completing your tasks in the HOLAS II project?

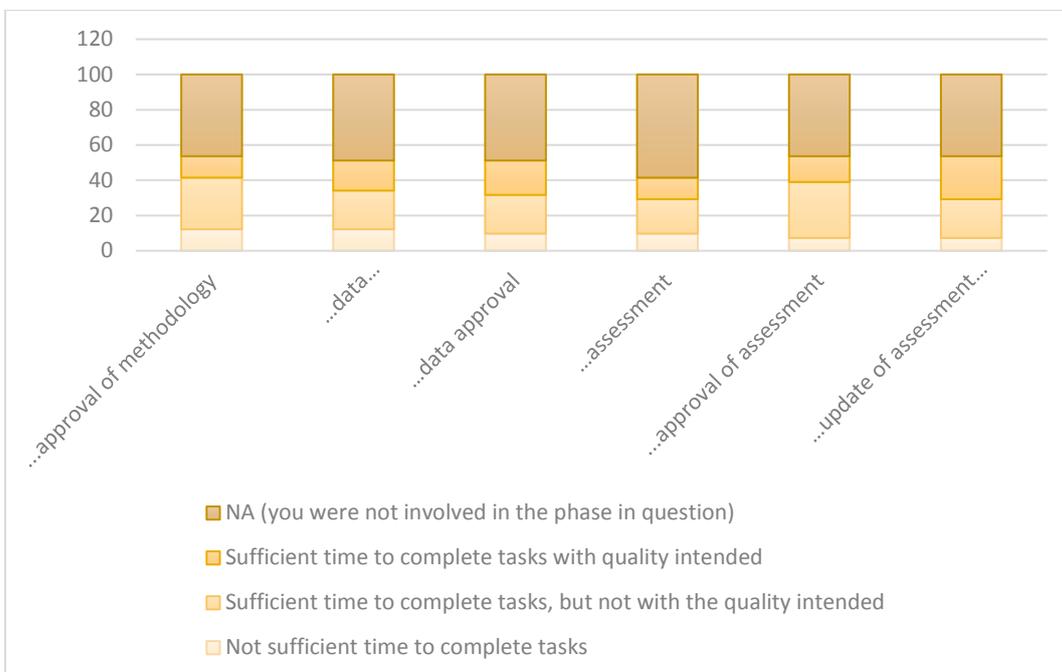
This question was answered by 41 participants (skipped by 19) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~10%.

Note the proportion on NA answers.

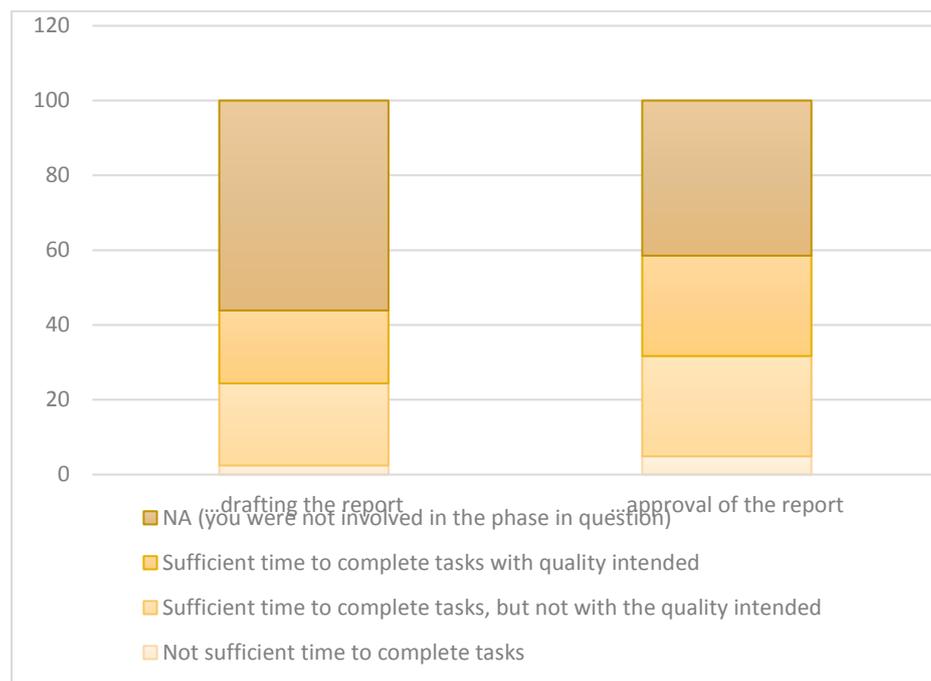
Q11: ...with regard to the *INDICATOR work*



Q11:...with regard to the *INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT work*

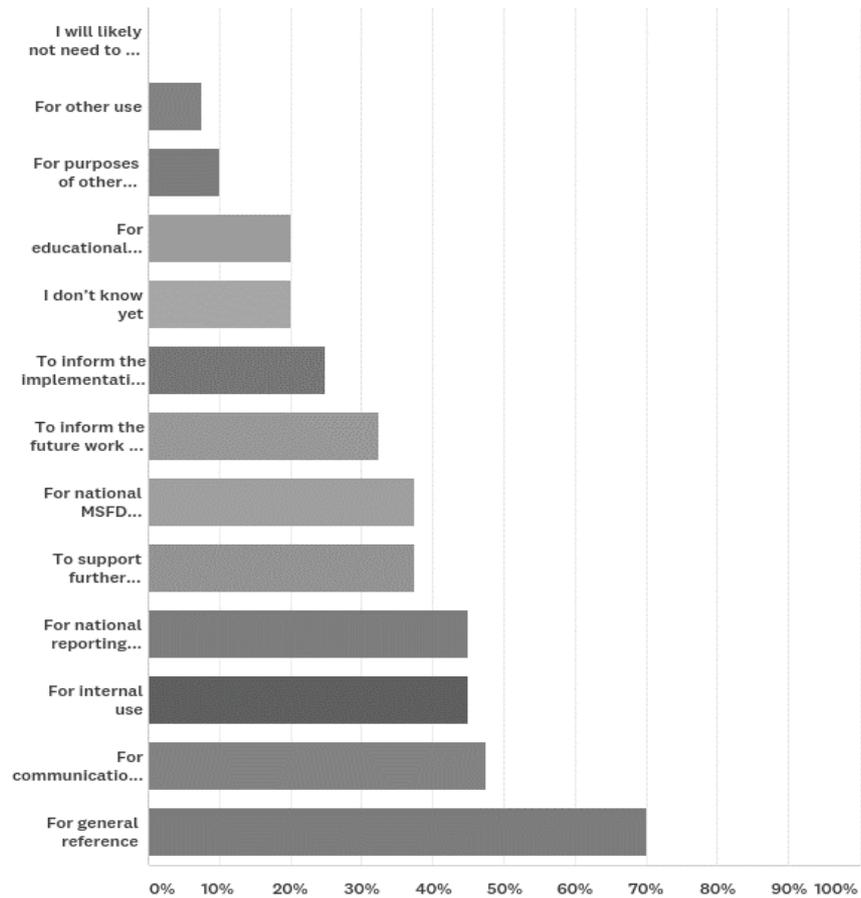


Q11:...with regard to the *STATE OF THE BALTIC SUMMARY REPORT*



Q12: How have you or will you use the State of the Baltic Sea summary report? Multiple options available.

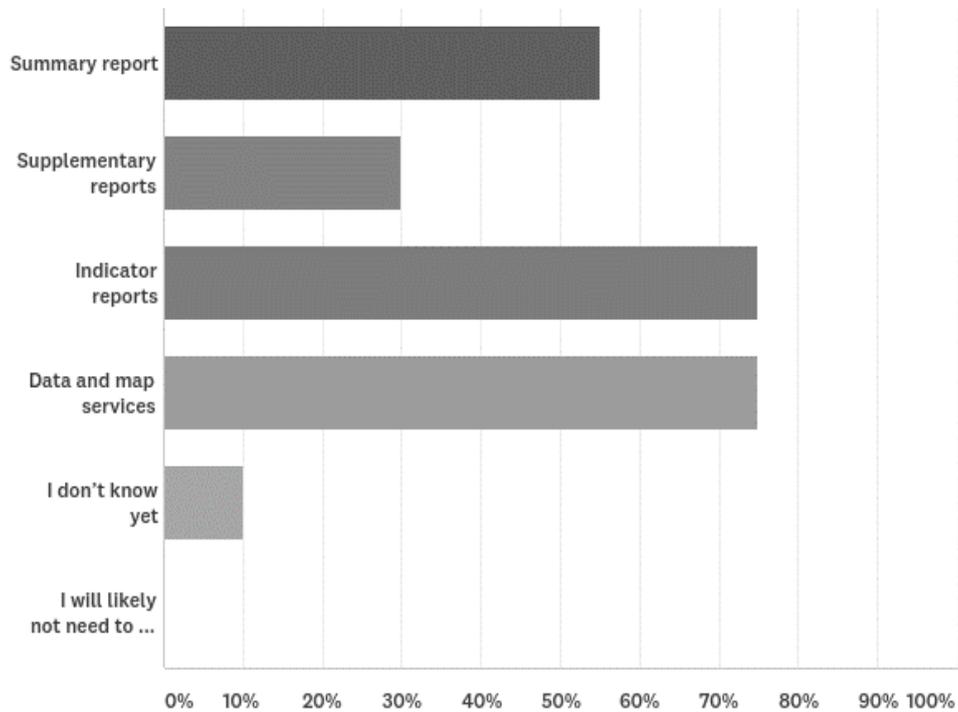
This question was answered by 40 participants (skipped by 20) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~9%.



Q13: Which components of the HOLAS II project have you used / are you most likely to use?

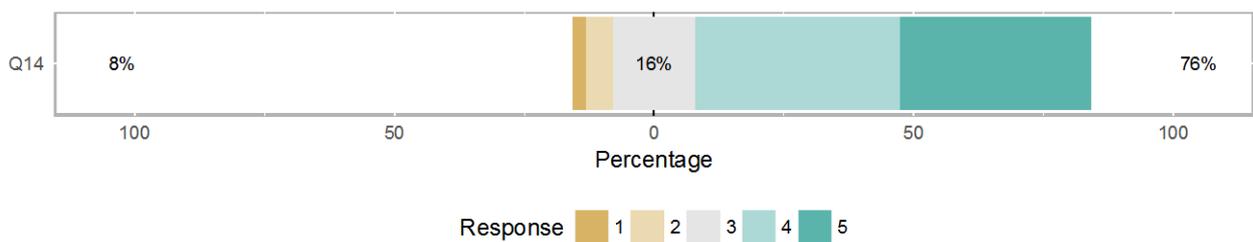
Multiple options available.

This question was answered by 40 participants (skipped by 20) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~9%.



Q14: How appropriate for your intended use was/is the content (level of detail, type of information presented) of the State of the Baltic Sea summary report?

This question was answered by 40 participants (skipped by 20) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~9%. Of 40 responses three (7.5%) entered: 'NA'



1= not at all appropriate, 2=somewhat inappropriate, 3= neither inappropriate nor appropriate, 4=somewhat appropriate, 5=very appropriate

Q15: Overall, what was the most challenging aspect of developing the State of the Baltic Sea report?

This question was answered by 28 participants (skipped by 32) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~6,5%.

The responses to this question roughly fell into five categories:

- ORGANIZATION & WORK FLOW
- DATA
- TIME & WORK LOAD
- TRANSLATING SCIENCE INTO POLICY
- THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

<i>Organization and workflow</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Time and Workload</i>	<i>Translating science to policy</i>	<i>Cumulative impacts assessment</i>
<i>“Keeping track of HELCOM group interactions, especially when things went back to the expert level and were changed there again”</i>	<i>“Delivering the data to ICES. We had many difficulties to get our data correctly to ICES database and it was too time consuming. But I want to thank the help we received from HELCOM secretary and from ICES.”</i>	<i>“The lack of time during the process was difficult.”</i>	<i>“Attempts to compare and generalise components of marine ecosystem which are not directly comparable or can not be generalised in the way it was done. This is the problem of translating science to politics, same terms are used with different scales or units of measure.”</i>	<i>“Understanding the cumulative assessment, how to present it and how it might be useful in practice.”</i>
<i>“Two short timelines for review and approval procedures for all parts of the HOLAS package”</i>	<i>“Ad hoc data collections”</i>	<i>“Time to contribute/participate that could be allocated was not sufficient.”</i>	<i>“To get a coherent assessment for the whole region. Environmental conditions, indicator GES definitions, data quality vary across the Baltic region and to get results that are comparable across the region is challenging. “</i>	<i>“Without hesitation, the cumulative impact assessment.”</i>

<i>Organization and workflow</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Time and Workload</i>	<i>Translating science to policy</i>	<i>Cumulative impacts assessment</i>
<i>“Feeling of the drafts becoming a moving target through continued and partly overlapping commenting rounds”</i>	<i>“Getting data for indicators from national delegations in time.”</i>	<i>“Time under heavy work load: it is a general question if you either prioritise action or periodic assessments”</i>	<i>“The target levels/tresholds of different indicators are not harmonized and developed independently off each other without peer-review. Hence the integrated status does not inform much about the status of the Baltic Sea.”</i>	
<i>“Slow movement of such a large body of participants, lack of quick responses to requests for feedback”</i>	<i>“Harmonization of data for integrated assessment. The new indicators that were added and are indicating the present problems, did not have comparable data from all the countries. More harmonization is needed in data collection and monitoring programs before the next assessment.”</i>	<i>“The work load”</i>	<i>“Matching the requirements of the MSFD and the integrated assessments (especially BSPI/BSII).”</i>	
<i>“Getting acceptance of results by national delegations”</i>	<i>“To collect sufficient data on human activities”</i>	<i>“I have only been involved in individual indicators and corresponding segments of the report. Here, having sufficient time to develop the most appropriate analyses was a limiting factor.”</i>	<i>“The connection to MSFD and the consequent need for approval at higher levels.”</i>	
	<i>“Getting the data layer up to a good enough level.”</i>		<i>“Finding a common ground/agreement among the countries (especially regarding political obstacles).”</i>	

<i>Organization and workflow</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Time and Workload</i>	<i>Translating science to policy</i>	<i>Cumulative impacts assessment</i>
	<i>“Overall availability of data for ESA, harmonized data from all the countries of the sea region.”</i>		<i>“Presentation (graphical and numerical) of assessment results and procedures.”</i>	
	<i>“Different data from the contracting parties... try to harmonize better in future assessments”</i>		<i>“Adapting to the changing basis for the report ie the COM-decision on MSFD descriptors and criteria. I think that changing the indicators hazardous substances from state to a pressure indicators lead to confusion and resulted in the lack to describe the actual pressure ie sources of contaminants”</i>	
			<i>“The rationale and scientific underpinning behind some indicators were not sufficiently well described. A thorough review of the indicator basis often requires some literature survey to find background information. And sometimes this can be difficult. Improved transparency would be needed. This also applies to the integrated assessment method.”</i>	
			<i>“Concerning economic and social analysis (ESA) part:</i>	

<i>Organization and workflow</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Time and Workload</i>	<i>Translating science to policy</i>	<i>Cumulative impacts assessment</i>
			<i>linking ESA and environmental assessments."</i>	
			<i>"Find a good classification system and well founded reference limits."</i>	
			<i>"In detail the integration och indicators of different scales to make sense in the integrated assessment"</i>	
			<i>"It was hard to describe the work we did in so few words."</i>	

Q16: Overall, what was the most rewarding aspect of developing the State of the Baltic Sea report?

This question was answered by 29 participants (skipped by 31) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~7%.

Four main themes emerged:

- RESULT
- CONTRIBUTION
- COLLABORATION
- INDICATOR DEVELOPMENT

<i>Result</i>	<i>Contribution</i>	<i>Collaboration</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
<i>"But the most rewarding aspect is definitely that the report made people think about how much human activities impact the environment in the Baltic Sea and what the spatial extent of human activities is."</i>	<i>"In many instances, a common sense of doing something FOR the Baltic Sea environment."</i>	<i>"Working with colleagues from other countries and succeeding in finding common denominators for individual indicators."</i>	<i>"Indicator development."</i>
<i>"To get the overview."</i>	<i>"It was great to see what can be reached with the effort of so many people, to see the final product and to experience that new ideas are welcome."</i>	<i>"To work with experts from different countries working together with VERY nice people in a productive and friendly atmosphere"</i>	<i>"Progress with indicators."</i>
<i>"Being able to get a better total picture of the environmental status of the Baltic sea."</i>	<i>"Having a regionally agreed state of the environment report for our shared sea Reading and commenting on the summary report was very rewarding, as it allowed time to learn about the sea, and put things into perspective."</i>	<i>"Working with competent HELCOM colleagues."</i>	<i>"Also the start of developing indicators with threshold values has been a great step forward."</i>
<i>"Getting an overview of the ecosystem and subject area."</i>	<i>"Contribution to an overall picture of the state of the Baltic Sea"</i>	<i>"Negotiations to agree on mapping and monitoring, data use, indicator development and tools for integrated assessments."</i>	

<i>Result</i>	<i>Contribution</i>	<i>Collaboration</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
<i>"Seeing it all come together"</i>	<i>"The general background of the report, and the collection of data for various ecosystem components."</i>	<i>"Bringing all the diverse expertise and the huge amount of knowledge together."</i>	
<i>"Looking at the final report, which is a very impressive piece of work."</i>	<i>"Taking the exercise of compiling a holistic assessment, the synthesis of indicators and mapping the blanks."</i>	<i>"Other rewarding aspect is the collaboration of experts from different countries."</i>	
<i>"Well structured and newest information in one place."</i>		<i>"Knowledge transfer and new contacts were really inspiring."</i>	
<i>"The final results."</i>			
<i>"The most rewarding aspect is the reliable and comprehensive overview about the state of the Baltic Sea, which is based on the best available data and regional assessments "</i>			
<i>"A comprehensive vision of the status was clearly drawn, when all the different aspects and indicator groups are assessed in complex way" "To achieve nice results even though the challenges mentioned above."</i>			
<i>"To see the advances since HOLAS I. Although HOLAS II is far from perfect, the improvements since HOLAS I are remarkable."</i>			

Q17: Which aspects in the HOLAS II process should be done differently in a future HOLAS III process, and how?

This question was answered by 26 participants (skipped by 34) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~6%.

- PROCESS PLANNING and TRANSPARENCY
- IMPROVING and INTEGRATING SCIENCE and EXPERTISE
- ANALYSIS and DATA MANAGEMENT

<i>Process planning and transparency</i>	<i>Improving and integrating science and expertise</i>	<i>Analysis and data management</i>
<i>“Include all countries at an earlier stage; agree earlier on mapping habitats and pressures for a common understanding to ensure similar monitoring, data formats/bases, indicator and thresholds, as well as tools for hierarchal design in the integrated assessment.”</i>	<i>“Ensure involvement of proper experts for both the different basins and subject fields from all countries. Accept that many aspects of ecosystem status cannot be well constrained by scientific criteria.”</i>	<i>“Set thresholds and integration of indicators. Carefully consider threshold values between indicators in conflict (e.g. mammals and fish).”</i>
<i>“Better scheduling to ensure enough time for political approval, that results are available before the national MSFD consultations, that there is sufficient time for completing and checking different parts, and that there are clear indications of time slots allocated to comments, Allow for more time in the review and approval process.”</i>	<i>“It would be good to integrate more literature information in a systematic way to replace or to complement the expert judgements for the BSII and/ or to improve the expert questionnaire in a way that more specific information can be received (e.g. more detailed subdivision of pressures and ecosystem components). More precisely formulated questions could also make it easier for experts to reply.”</i>	<i>“Strive towards indicators that are automatically updated when new data is reported.”</i>
<i>“Establish funding schemes and clear allocation of person months.”</i>	<i>“Improve the description of the scientific rationale behind indicators. This would require more than just making reference to a paper and hoping that will cover any potential criticism.”</i>	<i>“The data delivery should be a smoother and less-complicated process. When the indicators are presented it is not wise to combine two matrixes in the same map (e.g. PBDE in fish and in sediment). It gives the public a contradictory message.”</i>
<i>“More transparency concerning methods applied and data used for human activities and indices, expert</i>	<i>“More resources for expert work on the indicators could significantly improve them.”</i>	<i>“Regarding next HOLAS more attention needs to be given to the driving forces. And more clarity on gaps in</i>

<i>judgement aspect of assigning sensitivities needs to be more flexible and transparent.”</i>		<i>knowledge in case we really don't know the causes well.”</i>
<i>“Do not update the report with one additional years data, too much work for too little gain. Use time instead to finalise products and layout.” “More proactive management from the secretariat, I liked the indicator management and advice, but it would have profited from more (wo)manpower.”</i>	<i>“More quantified expert judgements. Total alignment with MSFD reporting areas. Clearer region-wide, quantified coupling of activities, pressures, measures and status (we can but dream!)”</i>	<i>“Me, working on the economic analysis issues, would like to have a bit more focus on the economic analysis of water uses and cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis, and on interrelationship with economic activities and their pressures.”</i>
<i>“Define clearly the role and interaction of HELCOM groups, the information linkage between the groups, networks and projects.”</i>	<i>“Better use of non-HELCOM experts and organizations, integration into other EU systems.”</i>	<i>“HOLAS report highly aggregated information. The thematic reports and indicator reports were supposed to give more detailed background information and ensure clear view of what and how was assessed. However, in some cases (like fish assessment) it did not happen. So, the descriptive part of the process should be more detailed with necessary links so reader can access background information. It's nice to use EQR, but it would be even nicer to find out against what value EQR was determined, in an easy way.”</i>
<i>“I think the Secretariat did a great job. Perhaps the respective roles of GEAR, S&C and Pressure could be clarified to make the process run smoother.”</i>	<i>“As seen in HOLAS II, more slack should be given to expert opinions in the strict matrixes of assessment- some proposed outcomes suggest solutions where we actually are looking at suspensions “</i>	<i>“Tools such as BEAT or HEAT should not be used.”</i>
<i>“Revise the structure of the workspace (there were too many similarly named folders, which was confusing)”</i>		<i>“(i) Better integration of ESA and environmental assessments (require larger collaboration between the two disciplines, interdisciplinary work). (ii) Recognizing that also ESA need sufficient time and resources to develop appropriate data & knowledge basis for the assessments (there should be systematic work on this, support for allocation of time and resources).”</i>

Q18: Which new aspects in the HOLAS II process should be included in a future HOLAS III process? This question was answered by 21 participants (skipped by 39) out of 420 giving a response rate of ~5%.

The emergent themes were:

- CONTINUE WITH...
- TEST OR IMPROVE

Continue with the following for HOLAS III

"Data and map services"

"Integration of assessment results."

"Within-descriptor discussions, conceptual issues of the quantitative and statistical analysis (workshops and training activities)."

Test or improve the following

"Using remote sensing for pan-baltic measurements of e.g. chl a, secci depth, SPM, anthropogenic pressures and vegetation in shallow areas."

"Improve the quantitative analysis on impact from trawl fishing on different benthic ecosystem components (ICES, SE for assistance)."

"Improve knowledge about reference limits and associated natural spatiotemporal variation in relation to climate regimes."

"Further develop existing indicators/assessment; indicators for harbour porpoise, benthic habitats, bycatch should be further developed so they can be used next time; aspect of climate change."

"Methodological work on some hard issues, such as differentiation between land and sea activities, interrelationship between economic activities and their pressures and impact on descriptors, etc."

"Attempt to understand the significance of data gaps in certain pressure indicators."

"More joint projects on monetary valuation of related sea ecosystem services."

"Workspaces for data and indicator approval were useful, and should be further developed in the HOLAS III process."

"Better elucidate the societal drivers behind the environmental degradation, for example consumption patterns and links to e.g. waste, climate change and inputs of nutrients and contaminants."

"More focus on internal nutrient and contaminant load. Clear links between litter (large and small) and socio-environmental effects."

"To what degree GES thresholds for different indicators reflect a similar level of environmental status?"

"Listening to comments made in response to questionnaires like this one will probably go a long way."

Attachment 3 - Responses from the regional consultation related to the planning for HOLAS III, for consideration by the Gear Group

Background

The 'State of the Baltic Sea' report was subject to a regional consultation in October-December 2017, as agreed by HELCOM Heads of Delegation. The regional consultation was directed towards HELCOM Observers and a number of additional international stakeholders working with a Baltic Sea perspective (full list available [here](#)).

This document includes a sub-set of comments from the regional consultation that address suggestions related to the strengths and weaknesses of the 2017 State of the Baltic Sea report and improving the assessment for HOLAS III, both from a policy and a technical perspective. The comments include proposals on expanding or adding new topics to the 'State of the Baltic Sea' report but also reflections that could be of interest to consider for future HELCOM work.

Please note that the comments were provided for the 2017 version of the State of the Baltic Sea report, and as a result some points raised in the consultation might have been considered in the HOLAS II update process and the 2018 State of the Baltic Sea report.

What are the main strengths of the Second Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea?

The assessment report is in general well received with several respondents highlighting the usefulness of such comprehensive report as a reference document to the state of the Baltic Sea. 80% of the respondents agrees unreservedly that the assessment provides good direction for the protection and sustainable use of the Baltic Sea and 87% that the assessment results are useful for their work (Figures 1 and 2).

Respondents are in agreement that the main strength of the report is its holistic approach, the broad scope of topics, and the large amount of data and information that is used to support the assessments. Many respondents also recognize and appreciate that the assessments are based on up to date knowledge and research. The vast number of experts that have been involved in and consulted in the production of the report is also recognized as a strength.

Individual elements that are highlighted as welcome include the expansion of social and economic analyses compared to the initial HELCOM holistic assessment, the focus on additional pressures such as marine litter and underwater sound, and that an evaluation of confidence is included for the status assessments.

Quotes on main strengths:

"Comprehensive overview of the knowledge available at this stage"

"The sheer scope of the report and amount of data sources, expert consulted and work put is its biggest strength"

"The state-of-the-art integrative tools and use assessment indicators and indexes"

"We welcome the extensive report about the status of the Baltic Sea, which will give us useful base facts for our future activities and priorities"

“It is actually very impressive to read a document that encompasses such a wide range of issues, with many different sources of scientific information/ methods and different countries, and still provide a clear overview of the State of the Baltic”

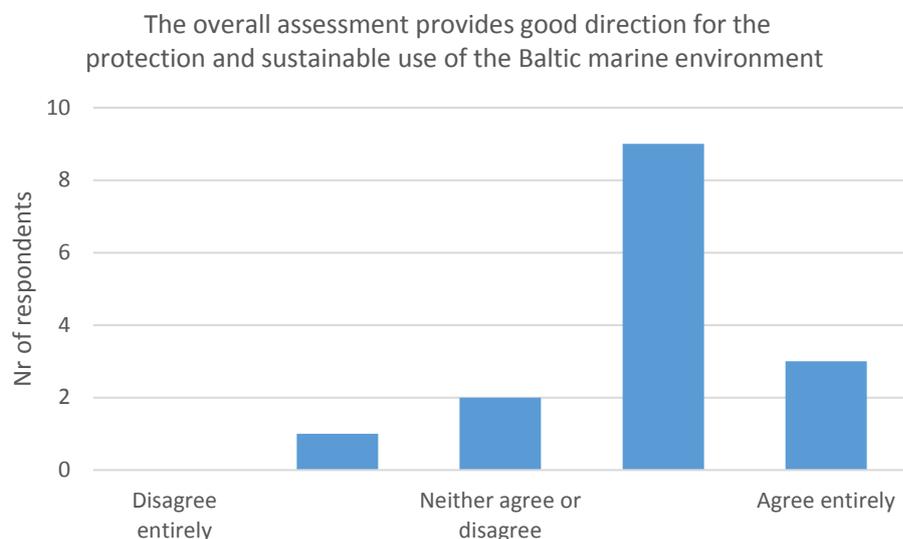


Figure 1. Response to the question “The overall assessment provides good direction for the protection and sustainable use of the Baltic marine environment”

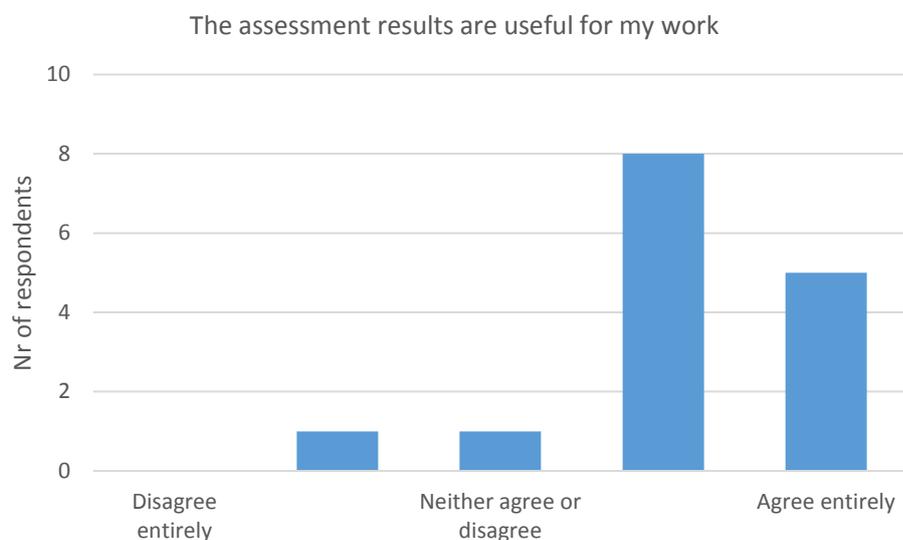


Figure 2. Response to the question “The assessment results are useful for my work”.

What are its main weaknesses?

The majority of responses on weaknesses of the report are related to limited coverage of data. Indeed, although a vast dataset has been used, there are evident gaps for specific species, pressures, sub-basins and countries. These weaknesses are also demonstrated in the respondents view on how well the report covers information on pressures and their impact: 60% agrees unreservedly that the assessment sufficiently covers existing and emerging pressures on the marine environment (Figure 3) and only 47% that it sufficiently covers problems associated with the pressures (Figure 4).

Another data related issue that is raised is the 'age' of data where in particular the data on fish stocks is highlighted as being rapidly outdated due to the dynamics of fish stocks, thus underlining the need of interim update of results between main HELCOM assessments.

The information on decrease in pressures on the Baltic Sea and signs of improvement in some sub-basins are highlighted as important for motivation by sector organizations. Several respondents would however like for the report to include a clearer explanation as to why the effects of reduced pressures are not yet seen in the results of the integrated status assessments.

The respondents have also highlighted a number of elements that they would have liked to see more of, for example:

- information on several additional sectors and activities with current limited information e.g. transport, tourism, recreational fisheries, fisheries,
- measures still needed to achieve the goals of the BSAP and way forward,
- a more comprehensive comparison with the initial HELCOM holistic assessment,
- more explanation on internal nutrient cycling,
- reflection on the HELCOM/OSPAR approach and why the HELCOM and OSPAR assessments are different in the Kattegat area.

The lack of indicators for some topics is also noted and stressed as important to finalize as soon as possible, e.g. on the number of drowned mammals and birds in fishing gear, cumulative impacts on benthic biotopes, and marine litter.

Quotes on main weaknesses:

"There are significant data gaps and a lack of time series data which makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the management measures applied since the last assessment"

"In parts it not comprehensive enough, data for many species or sub basins are missing and it is not always explained why the data is missing, some important indicators are not operational yet"

"Lack of analysis of regional environmental policy impact on progress towards good environmental status"

"Missed opportunity to outline what actions should be done in the future to achieve the original goals of the BSAP"

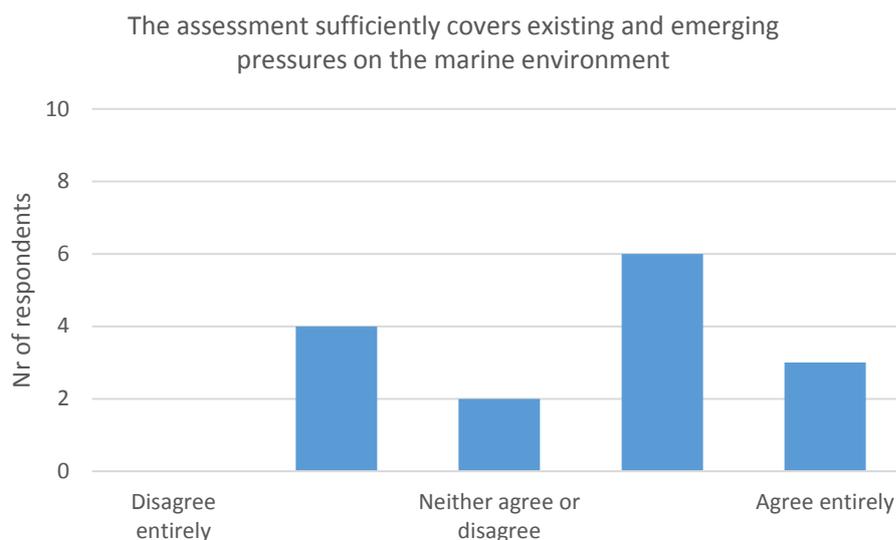


Figure 3. Responses to the question “The assessment sufficiently covers existing and emerging pressures on the marine environment”.

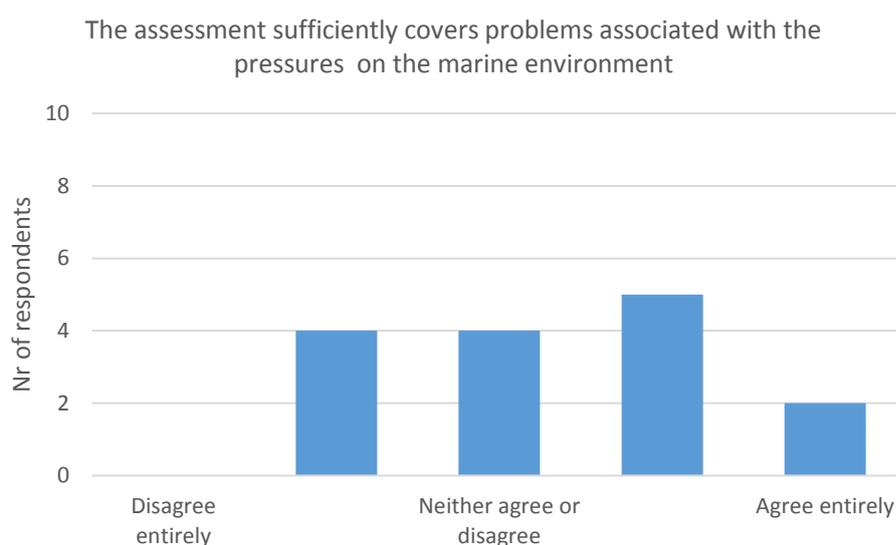


Figure 4. Responses to the question “The assessment sufficiently covers problems associated with the pressures on the marine environment”.

Improvements of HOLAS III

As part of the regional consultation the respondents were invited to answer the question “If a new, Third Holistic Assessment were to be carried out in a few years, what should that assessment do differently?”

To this question, numerous proposals on what to include in the next assessment have been provided. Considering the main weaknesses expressed, to improve availability of data has been highlighted as an obvious task for future. Other proposals for a future assessment include to;

- ensure comparability of results between assessment periods so that improvements can be assessed,
- put more emphasis on implementation of necessary measures,

- relate results to the delivery of SDG objectives and describe the extent to which the region, contributes to SDG14 and other relevant goals,
- provide linkages to EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,
- rank pressures and impacts clearly,
- focus on pressures and impacts of climate change on biodiversity and the marine environment that could prevent achievement of a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea,
- focus more on the results and leave out some of the background/enrichment information and highlight even more the key findings,
- regional reporting of relevant indicators from the Contracting Parties to UN custodian agencies and facilitate joint implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

To remedy that data is quickly getting old, it is also proposed to set up a supplementary website, where indicator evaluations and associated information are provided in "living" tables, updated frequently during the years between Holistic Assessment.

One respondent proposes that the next HELCOM holistic assessment could include a "get involved"-button during the assessment stage to clarify how stakeholders can contribute and share ideas.

Comments on what to improve for HOLAS III, Policy perspective

Type of organisation	Comments
ENV-NGO	The implementation of necessary measures assessed in an easy understandable way. More weight on writing the report from a protection perspective, while of course considering the needs of different sectors
ENV-NGO	Probably, Holistic Assessment exercise requires same type of Guidelines as Pollution Load Compilation, that would set strict requirements for data to be submitted, including parameters, time for data submission, frequency of reporting, QA/QC. Otherwise, repeating the assessment with the same type of data gaps, when one of the Contracting Parties simply ignores data requests, will not provide any credible results that could be used for truly regional policy development purposes.
IGO	Describe the extent to which the region contributes to SDG14 and other relevant goals. The performance of individual countries should be indicated by a scorecard type graphic .e.g. implementation of marine litter action plans.
Partnership and cooperation framework	Provide linkages to EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Concerning the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the report can streamline regional reporting of relevant indicators from the Contracting Parties to UN custodian agencies and facilitate joint implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, based on the HELCOM report "Measuring progress for the same targets in the Baltic Sea".

Proposed further cooperation

Organisation	Comment
UNEP	Contact with the Sargasso Sea Commission would be beneficial in relation to management measures for eels.
UNEP/AEWA	From the perspective of the AEWA Secretariat, there thus seems to be further scope for enhanced collaboration between HELCOM and AEWA in future - both with regard to conservation and sustainable use measures for individual species or species groups (particularly seabirds), as well as on wider topics such as cumulative impacts, by-catch etc.
EEA	[In relation to Marine Protected Areas]: EEA would be happy to work even more together on development of a method of assessing management effectiveness. It is also a focus for some ongoing EEA work.