



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach

GEAR 20-2019

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Document title	Information on the review of existing HELCOM objectives and development of new objectives
Code	5-8
Category	CMNT
Agenda Item	5 – Implementation and update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan
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Submitted by	Secretariat
Reference	

Background

HELCOM Pressure 10-2019 and State & Conservation 10-219 initiated the review of existing ecological objectives and the development of new ecological objectives and management objectives to support the update of the BSAP. Attachment 1 to this document includes the Working Paper from State & Conservation 10-2019 which also reflects the further elaboration of initial ideas prepared by PRESSURE 10-2019.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- take note of the information.
- provide further guidance as seen relevant.

Background

The strategic plan for the update of the BSAP includes the step to review and adjust the overall structure the BSAP (activity 2.2). A review of the existing HELCOM ecological objectives and management objectives is to be carried out by HELCOM Working Groups and Expert Groups as part of this activity. The aim of the review of existing objectives is to ensure that they are up to date and reflect the current topics and approach of addressing environmental status and pressures in HELCOM. It was also agreed by HOD 55-2018 to develop new objectives for marine litter, underwater noise, and loss and disturbance of the seabed.

The review of existing objectives and development of new objectives will be carried out through an iterative process in such way that the review is initiated by one Working Group, while other Groups will have the possibility to comment the proposals of relevance for the mandate of their work. The review has been initiated at spring meetings 2019 and will continue in autumn 2019 with the aim of presenting final proposals for endorsement by HOD in December 2019. So far the following Groups have initiated the task related to the following HELCOM objectives:

Pressure 10-2019:

- review of existing ecological objectives for eutrophication and hazardous substances
- proposals on new ecological objectives for marine litter, underwater noise and loss and disturbance to the seabed
- proposals on management objectives for all of the above topics

State & Conservation 10-2019:

- review of existing ecological objectives for biodiversity
- proposals on management objectives for biodiversity
- further elaboration of the initial ideas from Pressure 10-2019.

It is planned that the following Working Groups will also be actively involved in the review and development of objectives.

- Fish Group (loss and disturbance to the seabed from fisheries)
- Maritime group (objectives related to impacts from shipping activities, non-indigenous species)
- Response (existing objective related to emergency and response capabilities)

Guidance given to groups

The guidance that has been given to the Groups is based on the outcome of GEAR 19-2018 and further elaborations by the Chairs of the Working Groups and the Secretariat (Pressure 10-2019, [document DS2](#), State&Conservation 10-2019, [document 8J-6](#)). The guidance has in short been the following:

General guidance

The objectives should be:

- linked to HELCOM assessments i.e. achievement should be possible to follow-up through HELCOM assessments,
- easy to communicate to the wider community,
- not too many.

Ecological objectives

- should reflect the desired state of the environment and be of aspirational character,
- should be possible to follow-up by use of indicators and associated threshold values,

- with regard to new topics (marine litter, underwater noise, loss and disturbance to seabed) the ecological objectives should focus on the state elements of these topics or on their impacts on the environment e.g. on the concentration, amounts or extent of litter/noise/disturbance to seabeds, or properties of the ecosystem that should be maintained or not harmed.

Management objectives

- management objectives describe the desired effect of or aspirational targets of management measures,
- follow-up of management objectives should in principle be done using indicators and associated pressure targets or in the case of biodiversity by targets for conservation and protection.

The outcome of the discussions is presented in Working Papers from the respective meeting ([Pressure 10-2019, DS WP.1](#), State&Conservation 10-2019, 8J, WP.1 – Attachment 1). The discussions have been held in groups during the Working Group meetings with the guidance to provide initial ideas and noting that the objectives will also be discussed at autumn meetings 2019. Objectives related to ‘Loss and disturbance to seabed habitats’ as proposed by Pressure 10-2019 are presented in Annex 1 to this document, with a reflection by the Secretariat on how the proposals meet the guidance.

Annex 1 Proposals from Pressure 10-2019 on Loss and disturbance to seabed habitats.

Objectives related to loss and disturbance to seabed habitats were meant to be further elaborated by State&Conservation 10-2019 but the task was omitted due to time constraints. Here the proposals from Pressure 10-2019 are listed with proposed further guidance added by the Secretariat.

Ecological objectives

- Healthy seabed habitats
- Maintaining natural seabed conditions

Proposed guidance: At Pressure 10-2019 the difficulty to distinguish ecological objectives for 'benthic habitats' (as part of the biodiversity segment) from for 'loss and disturbance to seabed habitats' was mentioned and some participants felt that the above proposals are more related to state of seabed habitats. If the objective on 'loss and disturbance to seabed habitats' is to be placed under a tentative BSAP segment on sea-based activities the proposals may need to be revised.

Management objectives:

- Sustainable use of sea beds
- Minimise areas affected by (anthropogenically induced) hypoxia
- Methods for ecological sustainable mineral extraction
- Encourage sustainable fishery practices. *Proposed guidance: objectives should be affirmative i.e. avoid using words like 'encourage'*
- Restoration of seagrass beds. *Proposed guidance: this is rather an action, thus not suitable as management objectives*
- Remediation of fibre banks. *Proposed guidance: this is rather an action, thus not suitable as management objectives*
- Maritime spatial planning. *Proposed guidance: this is a tool, thus not suitable as management objective unless further developed.*



Document title	Outcome of drafting groups on the review of existing HELCOM objectives and development of new objectives
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Category	Working Paper
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Submitted by	State&Conservation 10-2019
Reference	

Background

According to the Strategic plan for the BSAP update an adjustment of the overall structure of BSAP should be carried out (Strategic Plan, activity 2.2). A task for HELCOM Working Groups is to review existing HELCOM objectives, to develop new objectives for marine litter, underwater noise and seabed loss and disturbance (Outcome HOD 55-2018, para 3.17), and to develop management objectives as a supporting framework for the BSAP update (Outcome HOD 55-2018, para 3.18).

PRESSURE 10-2019 initiated the task by discussing existing ecological objectives for eutrophication and hazardous substances and potential new ecological and management objectives for marine litter, underwater noise and seabed loss and disturbance and provided initial proposals as contained in a Working Paper produced at the meeting ([DS-WP1, Pressure 10-2019](#)).

State & Conservation 10-2019 initiated the task to review existing ecological objectives and management objectives for biodiversity. The Meeting also considered and further elaborated on the initial proposals prepared by PRESSURE 10-2019.

The Meeting split into groups to discuss the following:

- 1) Ecological objectives and management objectives for biodiversity and loss and disturbance to the seabed
- 2) Follow-up from PRESSURE 10-2019 with regard to ecological objectives and management objectives for eutrophication, hazardous substances, marine litter, underwater noise.

The Meeting made the following reflection on the outcome of group discussion in plenum:

The Meeting noted that not all topics considered as important for development of management objectives for biodiversity was possible to address at the Meeting and that the Working Paper should be seen as a starting point for further discussion. The Meeting further noted that due to time constraints the Biodiversity group did not have the opportunity to discuss the objectives for loss and disturbance to the seabed. The Meeting agreed that Contracting Parties can submit further elaborations or new proposals on ecological and management objectives for biodiversity and for loss and disturbance to the seabed to the Secretariat (Jannica.haldin@helcom.fi) by 23 August 2019 and that the proposed objectives will be further elaboration on at the next meeting of State and Conservation.

Outcome of group discussions on the review, revision and development of new HELCOM objectives, State&Conservation 10-2019

Group on biodiversity and loss and disturbance to the seabed

General considerations:

The proposed ecological and management objectives in this document have been elaborated under following assumptions:

- that biodiversity refers to the variety and variability of life in the Baltic Sea and it is a measure of variation at the genetic, species, functional trait, community and ecosystem levels.
- following the ecosystem approach, based on the application of appropriate scientific methodologies focused on levels of biological organization, which encompass the essential structure, processes, functions and interactions among organisms and their environment. This also recognizes that humans, are an integral component of the ecosystem.
- that biodiversity is an overarching concept, for which the objectives, targets and measures of the other goals and associated pressures and human activities are directly relevant. With that in mind the focus of the objectives under biodiversity should relate to the state of the ecosystem and its components, and the management objectives to the conservation, maintenance or restoration of the system and associated components.

The group agreed that in order to ensure the relevance of the objectives, as well as the possibility to measure progress towards reaching the objective, there is a need to, for this topic, have the possibility to cluster more specific objectives, e.g. for species groups, under the some of the overarching objectives.

Targets for the SDGs and other international commitments and guidance (CBD, IUCN, EU, IPBES...) should be taken into account where possible. The group sees a need to have further discussion on the use of good environmental status (GES) and Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) in the objectives.

Ecological objectives

Topics identified as needed to be covered by the objectives:

- Ecosystem function and development
- Resilience (for each level of the ecosystem and linked to e.g. functional traits)
- Habitats
- Species groups and populations (ensure that all species and populations are covered)
- Communities
- Food webs

Concrete suggestions for Ecological Objectives:

1. **Biodiversity at a resilient level, supporting natural function and development of the ecosystem**
2. **Natural distribution, occurrence and quality of habitats and biotopes**
3. **Viable populations of all species:**
 - a. *Mammal species*
 - b. *Bird species*
 - c. *Fish species*
 - d. *Invertebrate species*
 - e. *Macrophyte species*
 - f. *Zoo and phytoplankton species (ensure that all microscopic species are covered)*
4. **Thriving and resilient communities**
5. **Functional and resilient foodwebs**

Needed definitions/agreements:

- Resilient
- Natural
- Quality of habitats & biotopes
- Viable
- Thriving
- Functional

Management Objectives:

MPAs

An effectively managed, ecological coherent and representative network of marine protected areas

Threatened habitats

Effective conservation plans and/or measures for threatened species

“The 90%” (i.e. areas outside of MPAs)

Management of ecologically important areas outside of MPAs

Targets and measures for broadscale habitats (MSFD)

Spatial management of human activities is regulated to... Link to spatial planning (look at 24/10) – noting that such objectives may be more suitable to address under the tentative segment on sea-based activities.

Threatened species

Effective conservation plans and/or measures for threatened species

Non-threatened species

The level of bycatch does not jeopardize the other species or ecosystem components from reaching a good environmental status

Management of (fish) populations ensures that all exploited (fish) species are within safe biological limits.

All migration routes are ensured.

Habitats

The Group did not find to discuss the topic.

Communities

The Group did not find to discuss the topic.

Species and Population

The Group did not find to discuss the topic.

Foodwebs

The Group did not find to discuss the topic.

Conservation Targets

The Group did not find to discuss the topic.

Loss and disturbance to the seabed

The Group did not have time to address objectives of loss and disturbance to the seabed.

Group on eutrophication, hazardous substances, marine litter, underwater noise

The Group used the output of Pressure 10-2019 as a starting point for discussion. These initial proposals are therefore included in this document but those proposed to be revised or not further elaborated are indicated by strike-through mark and the reasons why is provided within parenthesis. New or further elaborated proposals by the State&Conservation Working Group are indicated in red.

General considerations:

The Group supported to keep the ecological objective related to radioactivity and proposed to invite the next MORS EG 9-2019 (21-23 May) to consider if this ecological objective should be kept as currently formulated or be rephrased in a more general way.

To support the further development of the objectives the Group asked for a clarification from the Secretariat on which activities in the coastal zone that belongs to land-based and sea-based activities (e.g. ports).

With regard to hazardous substances the Group underlined the need to cross-check objectives with the those related to maritime activities to ensure that hazardous substances from all activities are covered by the final set of objectives.

Eutrophication

Ecological objectives

The Group **supported** the following proposals from Pressure 10-2019:

- Eutrophication state variables are well covered by the objectives – no need for new objectives
- Keep the mainly as they are. It is valuable to keep well known objectives.

The Group noted the proposal from Pressure 10-2019 to tentatively exchange the word ‘natural’ which is used in 4 out the 5 objectives on eutrophication but **did not support** this proposal, partly since no alternatives have been proposed but also for the reason of minimizing revisions to the current objectives.

Differing views were expressed with regard to the ecological objective; ‘**Clear water**’; some participants in the Group felt that is a good objective since it easy to envision and communicate but others felt that it is not achievable in the Baltic Sea. Pending a conclusion on the objective on ‘Clear water’, the proposed list of ecological objectives for eutrophication is thus still:

- **Concentrations of nutrients close to natural levels**
- **[Clear water]**
- **Natural level of algal blooms**
- **Natural distribution and occurrence of plants and animals**
- **Natural oxygen levels**

Management objectives

The Group supported and further elaborated objectives:

- **‘Minimize input of nutrients from human activities’ OR**
- **‘Minimize input from agriculture and...’**– with the proposal to formulate an objective where a few critical sectors are pinpointed in the objective (i.e. rather than to make a list with several management objectives for several activities as expressed as a possibility by Pressure 10-2019).

Not supported in current form:

- ~~‘Nutrient input close to natural level’~~

- ~~‘Reach the maximum allowable input of nutrients’~~ (would provide a link to existing agreements but it was noted that this will not be understandable by the wider community)
- ~~‘Reach input of nutrients that are compatible with ecological objectives’~~ (logic, but not so attractive for communication)

Hazardous substances

The Group **supported** the following proposals from Pressure 10-2019

- Keep mainly as they are. Valuable to keep well known objectives.

The Group noted the proposal from Pressure 10-2019 to consider the development of a new objective for pharmaceuticals but **did not support** the proposal since pharmaceuticals are considered as covered by the general ecological objective on concentrations of hazardous substances.

The Group further elaborated on the proposed revisions to the existing ecological objectives from Pressure 10-2019:

- Revise the ecological objective ‘All fish safe to eat’ to ‘All seafood safe to eat’ linking the objective clearly to human consumption.
- Revise objective on ‘Healthy wildlife’ to ‘Healthy wildlife and food webs’ to cover potential effects of bio-accumulation in the environment

The Group supported to keep the objective on radioactive substances but to ask the MORS Expert group if some if it is still relevant to mentioned Chernobyl or whether the objectives should be formulated more general. Pending a conclusion on the objective on radioactivity, the tentative list of ecological objectives for hazardous substances is thus:

- **Concentrations of hazardous substances close to natural levels**
- **All seafood safe to eat**
- **Healthy wildlife and food webs**
- **Radioactivity at the pre-Chernobyl level** [to be considered by MORS]

Management objectives:

Supported and further elaborated objectives:

- **Minimize input of hazardous substances OR**
- **Minimize input from industry, households, agriculture ...** – i.e. formulate an objective where a few critical sectors are pinpointed in the objective as also proposed for eutrophication, **AND**
- **Replacement of hazardous substance by more environmental friendly alternatives**

Not supported in the current from:

- ~~Consider additional objective for synthetic substances with formulation of zero input target.~~ (not considered as an option to formulate a zero target)
- ~~Can an objective address emerging substances? (e.g. In terms of preparedness)~~ (this was considered as an issue that could be covered i.e. by screening or possible risk assessment procedure)

Marine litter

Ecological objectives

Supported and further elaborated objectives:

- **Wild-life safeguarded from marine litter, OR**
- **No harm to wildlife from marine litter**

Not supported in the current form:

- ~~'Baltic Sea environment is free of marine litter'~~ (considered as unrealistic)
- ~~'Production and consumption patterns in the Baltic Sea area assure litter-free environment'~~ (considered as a management objectives)

Management objective:

New and further elaborated proposals:

- **Products are designed, produced, used and discharged to minimize marine litter** (or possibly include term "life-cycle") **AND**
- **Amounts of litter are significantly reduced on beaches and in the sea**

Not supported in the current form:

- ~~'Zero waste goal is a priority for production and consumption'~~
- ~~'Products are designed to ensures that material flow is free of leakage to the environment'~~ (considered as an action)
- ~~'Producers and consumers mind litter-free environment' [?]~~

Underwater noise

Ecological objectives

Further elaborated objectives:

- No harm to wildlife from anthropogenic noise **OR**
- Introduction of sound does not harm wildlife

Open question: should the objective specify 'underwater' or not?

Not supported in the current form:

- ~~'Undisturbed marine environment by anthropogenic noise'~~ (considered as unrealistic)
- ~~'A [more] naturally quiet Baltic Sea'~~ (considered as unrealistic)
- ~~'Introduction of energy including underwater noise is at levels that does not adversely affect the marine environment'~~ (too long and complex)
- ~~'Input of underwater noise in the Baltic Sea does not exceed levels that are consistent with GES for species identified as sensitive to noise in the region'~~ (too long and complex)

Management objective

Initial consideration:

- Aim to develop **two objectives; one for impulsive noise, one for continuous noise**

Not supported in current form:

- ~~'Identify and address most biological relevant sources of anthropogenic noise to the Baltic Sea'~~ (considered as action]
- ~~'Consider noisy activities in temporal and spatial planning'~~
- ~~'Support the development and application of quieting technologies addressing relevant noise introducing activities'~~ (considered as action]

- ~~'All aspects of litter are addressed in management cycle e.g. size, material, source'~~ (too long as currently worded)