



Outcome of the Extra Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (HELCOM GEAR 21E-2019)

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Introduction

0.1 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 21-2019 discussed the proposals from HELCOM Working Groups on revised and new HELCOM objectives and was of the view that there is still a need to adjust the objectives in order to harmonize them across segments.

0.2 In accordance with the outcome of HELCOM GEAR-21-2019 (para. 4.9) the Extra Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (HELCOM GEAR 21E-2019) was held as an online meeting on 26 November 2019 to continue the harmonization and tentative adjustment of HELCOM objectives, inviting also the Chairs of HELCOM Working Groups.

0.3 The Meeting was attended by delegations from Denmark, Estonia, EU, Finland, Germany, Lithuania and Sweden, as well as the Chairs of Maritime and Pressure Working Groups and Co-Chairs and one of the vice Co-chair of State & Conservation. The List of Participants is attached as **Annex 1**.

0.4 The Meeting was chaired by Ms. Andrea Weiss, Germany, Chair of the GEAR Group. Ms. Ulla Li Zweifel, BSAP UP project manager, Ms. Jannica Haldin, Professional Secretary and Ms. Marta Ruiz, Associate Professional Secretary acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

HELCOM objectives

1.1 The Meeting recalled that the technical Working Groups have carried out a review of the existing HELCOM ecological and management objectives and the development of new objectives for marine litter, underwater noise, and loss and disturbance to the seabed during the meeting cycle in 2019. The proposed set of objectives and the provisional BSAP-structure, agreed by HOD 56-2019, will set the framework within which the update BSAP will be further developed.

1.2 According to the Strategic Plan for the BSAP update HOD 57-2019 were to endorse the set of revised and new objectives. The Meeting noted that considering the still ongoing adjustment of the objectives, HOD will be invited to agree on the proposed objectives as part of the provisional BSAP structure, to be used as a basis for the further work, while keeping it open for adjustments to individual objectives or proposal on additional objectives as found relevant in the further BSAP update process.

1.3 The Meeting took note that following GEAR 21-2019, the Secretariat in consultation with the Chair of GEAR reviewed the set of objectives proposed by Working Groups ([GEAR 21-2019 4-3 Rev.1](#)) and prepared a Background document to the Meeting. The Background document contains suggestions for addressing comments to the objectives provided at GEAR 21-2019 (Outcome, para 4.8). In this context, a broader review of the structure, phraseology and completeness of the segment objectives was undertaken in order to identify any additional consistency or coherence issues.

1.4 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 21-2019 was tasked to consider the proposals on ecological and management objectives by HELCOM Working Groups and propose adjustments as seen relevant to harmonize terminology of objectives across segments. The review by GEAR should ensure that objectives are formulated according to the guidance that has been given for the review and revision of HELCOM objectives (Annex 1, Background document to the Meeting).

1.5 The Meeting recalled the provisional structure of the updated BSAP and agreed on a common basis for carrying out the task of the Meeting as follows:

- the objectives do not stand alone. Ecological and management objectives will always be presented together with the segment goal and will thereby always be read in context;
- the segment-oriented section of the updated BSAP document will cover the segment goal, the ecological objectives (the desired state) specifying the goal, management objectives

(sustainable level of human activities or resulting pressures) to achieve the desired state, and associated actions for reaching the ecological and management objectives;

- the objectives should reflect what to achieve, while the way 'how' should be addressed through actions;
- the ecological and management objectives are also external communication tools and should be formulated as higher-level aims (as opposed to technically and detailed descriptions); and in a simple and aspirational way; keeping in mind that the audience for the objectives is broad, covering science, policy, international organizations and the general public. This should however not hinder objectives from being functional and expressed in a way so that their achievement can be assessed;
- there is a need to strike a balance between the continuity of the existing BSAP objectives, consistency and coherence of objectives across segments, and a balanced presentation of objectives. Thus, some difference in wording between objectives is acceptable and in some cases warranted due to distinctiveness of different topics addressed by the objectives. On the other hand, maintaining continuity with the current BSAP should not lead to unnecessary differences in phraseology.

1.6 The Meeting discussed the comments by GEAR 21-2019 (Table 1, Background document) and agreed on the following general issues:

- to use an active form for the objectives i.e. 'minimize', 'prevent', 'ensure'. This agreement has been implemented in Table 1, Annex 2;
- not to include more precise targets in the objectives but to address such aspects through HELCOM actions;
- not to develop an ecological objective on the amount of litter;
- to apply the HELCOM writing guidelines when revising the objectives.

1.7 The Meeting discussed the suggested proposals to harmonize and resolve specific comments on the objectives by GEAR 21-2019 as reflected in Table 2 of the Background document. The Meeting agreed on the proposed language revisions as implemented in Annex 2, Table 1, and as detailed in Annex 3.

1.8 The Meeting agreed in general to the structure of the objectives under the respective BSAP segments as outlined in Table 1. Annex 2.

1.9 The Meeting did not discuss the objectives for eutrophication since objectives under this segment are considered as settled.

1.10 The Meeting recommended the following more substantial revisions to the objectives under the remaining segments:

Sea-based segment

1.11 The Meeting discussed the proposed ecological objectives under the segment on sea-based activities for which two objectives have been proposed by the technical Working Groups reflecting loss and disturbance to seabed habitats and underwater noise, as requested by HOD 55-2018:

- 'Activities affecting seabed habitats do not threaten the viability of species' populations and communities'
- 'No harm to sea life from manmade noise'

1.12 The Meeting was of the view that in the effort to improve the alignment within and across segments the proposed ecological objectives under the sea-based segment need to be reconsidered. The two objectives developed by Working Groups are very specific while many of the management objectives are linked to other aspects

than loss and disturbance to the seabed and underwater noise. The Meeting suggested **the following alternatives for HOD 57-2019 to consider:**

- to delete the proposed objectives related to loss and disturbance to the seabed bed and underwater noise and instead formulate one general ecological objective for the segment on sea-based activities; **or**
- to add a third general objective that would address impacts of the types of pressure emanating from seabed activities which are not covered by underwater noise or seabed loss and disturbance (tentative alternatives included in Annex 2, Table 1).

1.13 The Meeting concurred with HOD 56-2019 that it should be indicated through cross-reference that the implementation of objectives for sea-based activities will contribute to reaching the objectives on eutrophication, and hazardous substances and litter, and also suggested that the link between segments should be illustrated visually.

1.14 The Meeting acknowledged that for the segment on sea-based activities it is important that the proposed phrasing of the management objectives retains a clear link to sea-based activities.

1.15 The Meeting supported in general the list of management objectives for sea-based activities and considered the following:

- With regard to **‘Minimize loss and disturbance to seabed habitats from sea-based activities [by pressure reduction, prevention, and mitigation measures]’**, the Meeting proposed that the terms put in brackets should not be included in the objective but instead be covered by new actions in the updated BSAP. It was however agreed to keep the terms in brackets for the time being to ensure that they are addressed in BSAP update process.
- For underwater noise two alternatives were discussed, recognizing that the first option reflects an ecological rather than management objective and is very close to the phrasing of the ecological objective currently proposed for manmade noise, and that the second option is more in line with the phraseology of other management objectives. The Meeting proposed that the **two alternatives are considered by HOD 57-2019**, noting that the first option was preferred by the majority of Meeting attendants:
 - **‘Ensure noise levels do not adversely affect [noise sensitive species and do not injure] sea life’**. It was furthermore suggested that the words in brackets could be deleted with the aim of simplifying the objective.
 - **‘Minimize the levels of manmade noise introduced to the sea so that they do not adversely affect sea life’** which was supported by one country. It was however noted that to ‘minimize’ levels of noise can be debatable due to uncertainties in the impacts of noise, in particular impacts of continuous noise.

1.16 The Meeting proposed to add one management objective to reflect sea-based activities that are not covered by the current proposals: **‘Ensure sustainable use of marine resources’**. Such an objective would cover e.g. the extraction of living and non-living resources. **The Meeting proposed the suggested new objective to be considered by HOD 57-2019.**

1.17 The Meeting agreed to remove reference to ships in the objective related to non-indigenous species (NIS) so that it reads **‘No introductions of non-indigenous species’**. It was noted that actions associated to the objectives will anyway need to specify measures for different sea-based activities. One country was of the view that it is not possible to achieve this objective but it was noted it follows the guidance of HELCOM objectives to be aspirational and that “no introductions” already forms the basis for the HELCOM core indicator on non-indigenous species. The Meeting furthermore proposed to make it clear in the updated BSAP that climate change may affect the aim of no introduction of NIS.

1.18 The Meeting agreed to propose the deletion of the management objective ‘Minimum threats from offshore installations’ as already discussed by MARITIME 19-2019.

1.19 The Meeting expressed different views on whether Maritime Spatial Planning should be addressed in a HELCOM objective as currently proposed by HELCOM-VASAB MSP. Some participants felt that as a key tool for managing sea-based activities MSP should be represented among the objectives while another view expressed was that MSP should rather be addressed as part of actions to reach the objectives. **The Meeting proposed that HOD should considered the issue.**

Hazardous substances

1.20 The Meeting supported in general the ecological and management objectives for hazardous substances and considered the following:

- With regard to '**Minimize input and impact of hazardous substances from human activities** [by elimination, substitution, and source management]'. The Meeting proposed that the terms put in brackets should not be included in the objective but instead be covered by new actions in the updated BSAP. It was however agreed to keep the terms in brackets for the time being to ensure their inclusion the upcoming process.

1.21 The Meeting discussed the management objectives for litter and considered the following:

- With regard to the proposed objective 'Products are designed, produced, used and reused, recycled and disposed by applying principles of circular economy to prevent marine litter' the Meeting was of the view that this part and the application of circular economy could rather be expressed as an action than part of an objective. The text should be kept in square brackets as a memorandum item for the time being to ensure that it is addressed in the BSAP update process.
- The Meeting furthermore proposed to combine the above mentioned objective with the proposal 'Prevent input of litter' and for the combined objective to read: '**Prevent production of waste and its input to the sea**'.
- The Meeting noted that for the management objective '**Significantly reduce amounts of litter on shorelines and in the sea**' it should be understood that the seafloor is covered by the reference to 'in the sea'.

1.22 The Meeting noted that the addition of the word "and food webs" to the ecological objective "Healthy sea life", as proposed by STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019 and discussed at GEAR 21-2019, has been suggested for deletion as bioaccumulation can be considered as covered by the phrase "healthy sea life". The Meeting did not discuss this proposed change.

Biodiversity

1.23 The Meeting discussed the overlap between the ecological objectives 'Functional, healthy and resilient food webs' and the proposed new goal of the biodiversity segment 'Baltic Sea ecosystems are healthy and resilient'. The Meeting proposed that the objective and goal remain as currently formulated.

1.24 The Meeting noted that 'biodiversity' was covered by the broader term 'ecosystem' in the segment's goal. The Meeting acknowledged that to halt the loss of biodiversity or species was not explicitly mentioned by the ecological objectives, but was of the view that 'no loss' can be considered as covered by the goal of the segment together with the full set of ecological objectives and that the issue could be further addressed through actions under the biodiversity segment.

1.25 With regard to '**Human induced mortality** [including, hunting, fishing, and incidental bycatch,] **does not threaten the viability of Baltic sea life**'. The Meeting discussed the possibility to remove the specification of activities indicated in brackets. The Meeting noted that this issue was discussed thoroughly by STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019 and that the meeting was of the view that the specification should be included in the objective. However, the approach used for similar long objectives with specifications, i.e. to consider the specification in new actions rather than in the objectives (cf para 1.15 and 1.20), would improve consistency across segments and simplify the objective. The Meeting agreed to **ask HOD 57-2019 for guidance on the matter.**

1.26 The Meeting discussed the possibility to develop a management objective related to the restoration of habitat and reintroduction of species but was of the view that this could be expressed as actions associated to the management objective on e.g. conservation of species and habitats.

1.27 The Meeting recalled that the term wildlife was proposed to be exchanged by GEAR 19-2019 with the view of using a broader term and that several different alternatives have been discussed and proposed by the Working Groups. The term 'sea life', was proposed by PRESSURE 11-2019 and is implemented in the current list of objectives. The Meeting was of the view that alternative terms should still be considered.

1.28 The Meeting agreed to submit the proposed adjustments as included in Annex 2, Table 1, for consideration by HOD 57-2019 and the identified need for further guidance by HOD as outlined in the Outcome to this Meeting.

Outcome of the Meeting

2.1 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	Andrea Weiss	Federal Environment Agency	andrea.weiss@uba.de
Contracting Parties			
Denmark	Asker Juul Aagren	Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark	askja@mfvm.dk
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Germany	Gesine Lange	NABU - Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (consultant for BfN)	gesine.lange@nabu.de
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Annex 2 Proposal of HELCOM objectives as of GEAR 21E-2019

Table 1. Text in red indicates objectives with more substantial proposed revisions, proposed new objectives or open issues as reflected in the main Outcome. Text in brackets includes text that is proposed to be deleted from the objectives and instead reflected through actions. It is kept for the time being to ensure that these aspects are reflected in the updated BSAP.

Goals	Baltic Sea unaffected by eutrophication	Baltic Sea undisturbed by hazardous substances and litter	Environmentally sustainable ¹ sea-based activities	Baltic Sea ecosystems are healthy and resilient ²
Ecological objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concentrations of nutrients close to natural levels - Clear waters - Natural level of algal blooms - Natural distribution and occurrence of plants and animals - Natural oxygen levels 	<p>Hazardous substances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concentrations of hazardous substances close to natural levels - All seafood safe to eat - Healthy sea life - Minimal risk to humans and the environment from radioactivity <p>Litter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No harm to sea life from marine litter 	<p>Develop one broad general ecological objective to replace the two objectives on seabed habitats and noise, OR to add a third general objective to cover impacts from other pressures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activities affecting seabed habitats do not threaten the viability of species' populations and communities - No harm to sea life from manmade noise - No or limited disturbance on the marine environment from sea-based activities/No or limited disturbance on Baltic Sea species communities and the ecosystem/No or limited disturbance to biodiversity and ecosystem from sea-based activities/No or limited disturbance from sea-based activities to... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Viable populations of all native species - Natural distribution, occurrence and quality of habitats and associated communities - Functional, healthy and resilient food webs
Management/conservation objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimize input of nutrients from human activities 	<p>Hazardous substances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimize input and impact of hazardous substances from human activities [<i>by elimination, substitution, and source management</i>] <p>Litter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [<i>Products are designed, produced, used and reused, recycled and disposed by applying principles of circular economy toto</i>] Prevent production of waste and its input to the sea - Significantly reduce amounts of litter on shorelines and in the sea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimize loss and disturbance to seabed habitats from sea-based activities [<i>by pressure reduction, prevention, and mitigation measures</i>] - Ensure noise levels do not adversely affect [noise sensitive species and do not injure] sea life OR - Minimise the level of manmade noise introduced to the sea so that it does not adversely affect sea life. - No introductions of non-indigenous species - Minimize the contribution to eutrophication and hazardous substances and litter from sea-based activities - Enforce international regulations – no illegal discharges - Safe maritime traffic without accidental pollution - Effective emergency and response capabilities - Minimize harmful air emissions - Zero discharges from offshore platforms - Maritime Spatial Planning applying an ecosystem- based approach throughout the Baltic Sea - Ensure sustainable use of the marine resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effectively manage an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas - Minimize disturbance of species, their habitats and migration routes from human activities - Human induced mortality, [<i>including: hunting, fishing, and incidental bycatch</i>], does not threaten the viability of Baltic sea life - Effective and coordinated conservation plans and measures for threatened species, habitats, biotopes, and biotope complexes - Reduce or prevent human pressures that lead to imbalance in the foodweb

¹ proposed revision by Maritime 10-2019 (the original segment uses the term 'friendly' instead of 'sustainable')

² new proposal by State and Conservation 11-2019 (the original segment reads "Favourable status of Baltic biodiversity")

Annex 3 Details on proposed adjustment of GEAR

Text in brackets includes text that is proposed to be deleted from the objectives and instead reflection through actions. It is kept for the time being to ensure that is reflected in the updated BSAP

EO=Ecological objective, MO=Management objective

Proposal by Working Groups	Proposed revisions by GEAR	New proposal (as in Table 1, Annex 2)
Baltic Sea undisturbed by hazardous substances and litter		
Healthy sea life and food webs (EO)	Healthy sea life and food webs	Healthy sea life³
Products are designed, produced, used and reused, recycled and disposed by applying principles of circular economy to prevent marine litter (MO)	[Products are designed, produced, used and reused, recycled and disposed by applying principles of circular economy to] Prevent production of marine litter waste and its input to the sea	[Products are designed, produced, used and reused, recycled and disposed to] Prevent production of waste and its input to the sea
Prevent input of litter (MO)	Prevent input of litter	
Amounts of litter are significantly reduced on shorelines and in the sea (MO)	Amounts <u>Significantly reduce amounts</u> of litter are significantly reduced on shorelines and in the sea	Significantly reduce amounts of litter on shorelines and in the sea
Environmentally sustainable sea-based activities		
Ecological objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activities affecting seabed habitats do not threaten the viability of species and communities - No harm to sea life from manmade noise 	Option 1: Delete the two proposed objectives and replace with one very general ecological objective Option 2: Keep the proposed ecological objectives as follows and add a third objective to cover other issues than physical impact and noise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activities affecting seabed habitats do not threaten the viability of species' populations and communities - No harm to sea life from manmade noise 	Option 1: No proposals for an overarching ecological objective Option 2: Tentative alternatives No or limited disturbance on the marine environment from sea-based activities/No or limited disturbance on Baltic Sea species communities and the ecosystem/No or limited disturbance to biodiversity and ecosystem from sea-based activities/No or limited disturbance from sea-based activities to...
Reduce, prevent and mitigate pressures and impacts from activities that are causing loss and disturbance to seabed habitats (MO)	Reduce, prevent and mitigate pressures and impacts from activities that are causing <u>Minimize loss and disturbance to seabed habitats from sea-based activities [by pressure reduction, prevention, and mitigation measures]</u>	Minimize loss and disturbance to seabed habitats from sea-based activities [by pressure reduction, prevention, and mitigation measures]
Ensure noise levels support good conservation status, do not adversely affect stocks of noise sensitive species and do not injure or significantly disturb sea life (MO)	Option 1: Ensure noise levels support good conservation status , do not adversely affect stocks of [noise sensitive species and do not injure or significantly disturb] sea life Option 2: Proposal for alternative formulation to align with management objectives	Option 1: Ensure noise levels do not adversely affect [noise sensitive species and do not injure] sea life Option 2: As an alternative to the objective above: Minimise the level of manmade noise introduced to the sea so that it does not adversely affect sea life
No introductions of non-indigenous species from ships (MO)	No introductions of non-indigenous species from ships	No introductions of non-indigenous species
Minimize the contribution to eutrophication and operational pollution from ships	Minimize the contribution to eutrophication and <u>hazardous</u>	Minimize the contribution to eutrophication and hazardous

³ This proposal was raised at GEAR 21-2019 but not discussed at GEAR 21E-2019

Proposal by Working Groups	Proposed revisions by GEAR	New proposal (as in Table 1, Annex 2)
	substances and litter from sea-based activities operational pollution from ships	substances and litter from sea-based activities
Enforcement of international regulations – no illegal discharges (MO)	Enforcement of Enforce international regulations – no illegal discharges	Enforce international regulations – no illegal discharges
Minimum harmful air emissions from ships (MO)	Minimize harmful air emissions from ships	Minimize harmful air emissions
Minimum threats from offshore installations (MO)	Minimum threats from offshore installations	PROPOSAL TO DELETE
	PROPOSAL ON NEW MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES	Ensure sustainable use of the marine resources
Baltic Sea ecosystems are healthy and resilient		
An effectively managed and ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas (MO)	An effectively managed and <u>Effectively manage an</u> ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas	Effectively manage an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas
Minimized disturbance of species, their habitats and migration routes by human activities (MO)	Minimized Minimize disturbance of species, their habitats and migration routes by <u>from</u> human activities	Minimize disturbance of species, their habitats and migration routes from human activities
Human induced mortality, including: hunting, fishing, and incidental bycatch, does not threaten the viability of Baltic sea life (MO)		Tentatively: Human induced mortality, [including: hunting, fishing, and incidental bycatch] does not threaten the viability of Baltic sea life