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Background

A proposal for a new Communication Strategy of HELCOM has been considered and commented by HELCOM Heads of Delegation (HELCOM HOD 45-2014).

The Heads of Delegation welcomed the strategy proposal, with the aim that it complements the streamlining process of HELCOM. The Meeting considered the role of communication overall as important, and despite the challenges the Meeting urged for stronger involvement of the national level and relevant EU bureaus in effective communication, especially the respective communication offices, as well as of creating better synergies with other environmental media.

The Meeting agreed to submit any additional comments to the draft strategy by Wednesday 12 February 2014 the latest, to be incorporated and further developed by the Secretariat with a view to have it submitted for HELCOM 35-2014 for adoption. No additional comments have been received.

The document complements the 2013 HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy, which also incorporates the HELCOM Data and Information Strategy. The previous communication related document, "Outline for the HELCOM Information and Communication Strategy" was approved by the HELCOM Heads of Delegation in 2001 (HELCOM HOD 5A/2001).

Action required

The Meeting is invited to consider and adopt the HELCOM Communication Strategy.

Draft HELCOM Communication Strategy

Introduction

This document sets the strategic direction for HELCOM internal and external communication, in order to accurately reflect the main priorities of HELCOM work and to support HELCOM's key function as the provider of reliable and timely information.

The implementation of the Communication Strategy is facilitated by HELCOM Secretariat in cooperation with the Contracting Parties.

This Strategy responds to the needs of streamlined HELCOM activities in reaction to inevitable changes in the realities surrounding and interacting with HELCOM key working areas. The achievements of the streamlining process will ensure an up-to-date, more efficient HELCOM in both internal processes and in its plentiful external relations.

The clear role of HELCOM, long-term priority setting, as well as the well-functioning operational structure particularly facilitates the organisation's internal communication and information flow. HELCOM's external communication activities will take into account the developments within relevant processes, including sectorial. Communication efforts will be executed with the view to cooperate with other organizations in the field of environmental protection and management and with national and international NGOs, associations and institutes.

Successful communication bases on a focused profile, or brand, of the organisation, which in turn is rooted on its core goals, values and operational methods. For HELCOM these have in essence always stayed truthful to the founding document, the Helsinki Convention, and further supported and expanded by the adoption of the Baltic Sea Action Plan in 2007. The 2010 and 2013 HELCOM Ministerial Declarations also reiterated the overall HELCOM goal: to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution, while restoring and safeguarding its ecological balance. HELCOM efforts continue to be on ensuring higher level of activities in implementing the measures of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, especially where progress has been slower, and fulfilment of HELCOM requirements by the agreed deadlines.

The HELCOM communication activities will stay in harmony with the jointly agreed goals and policies and further support their fulfilment.

1. The overall goal of communication

1.1. The goal of HELCOM communication is to promote the awareness of HELCOM as an environmental, intergovernmental policy-maker of the Baltic Sea region. HELCOM communication will strategically support HELCOM's key function in providing reliable and timely information on the Baltic marine environment and pressures towards it.

1.2. All communication activities will reflect the current main HELCOM priorities and aim to reach the intended audiences.

2. Communication objectives

2.1. The **overall objectives** of the HELCOM communication activities are:

- a) to increase political and public interest in the Baltic Sea environment and the work of HELCOM, including improving awareness of HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and its main features, as well as Ministerial Declarations and HELCOM Recommendations;
- b) to increase awareness of and access to the outcomes and information on progress of HELCOM's work in environmental policies as well as its scientific background, including assessments and data, on state of and trends in the marine environment, and pressures towards it;
- c) to promote the need to implement the agreed measures and policies as well as to expand the ownership and recognition of HELCOM's value by the Contracting Parties; to contribute to the aim that marine protection would be better integrated into other policies on national, regional and European level, *inter alia*, by raising awareness of the main HELCOM functions and achievements among regional key stakeholders and all relevant sectors, business communities, and industries.

3. Target audiences

3.1 Engaging the appropriate target audiences will ensure that the main goals and objectives of HELCOM communication can be met. Beyond the immediate HELCOM community and contributors, including the scientific community, the target audiences include the following ones in priority order:

- a. Other policy-makers and key stakeholders **in regional and national levels**
- b. General public
- c. Environmental policy-makers and related groups **in global and sub-national levels**

4. Messages

4.1. HELCOM's main and supporting messages are based on HELCOM's key objectives and vary from informative to aspirational, seeking to address common information gaps and misperceptions that may act as obstacles for a positive and accurate impression of HELCOM. The main messages and accompanying supporting messages are as follows:

a. "Cooperation champion in the Baltic Sea recovery through informed decision-making"

- Supporting message: HELCOM provides a unique platform for developing regionally coordinated and coherent approaches for improving the state of the Baltic Sea.
- Supporting message: Helsinki Convention is legally binding the HELCOM Contracting Parties to protect the marine environment, and it is implemented through HELCOM Recommendations, Baltic Sea Action Plan and Ministerial Declarations.
- Supporting message: HELCOM creates joint solutions needed to achieve a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea, and is a global pioneer in applying the ecosystem approach in a cross-sectorial context.
- Supporting message: HELCOM have successfully cooperated for forty years between governments and stakeholders and across several sectors.

b. “Bridges science and policy for a healthier Baltic Sea”

- Supporting message: Solid scientific basis enables wise decision-making.
- Supporting message: HELCOM monitoring and assessment work has a long tradition and makes possible the evaluation of any applied measures.
- Supporting message: Data and map service of HELCOM provides free access to joint and regularly compiled regional data and is the best practice in sharing the information.

c. “Strong connections to regional and global partners and processes”

- Supporting message: HELCOM contributes to global and regional commitments (United Nations Environment Programme, Rio+20 – UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Convention on Biological Diversity, International Maritime Organisation, EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive’s Common Implementation Strategy, etc.) and is well connected to marine organizations outside the region, and utilizes, as well as shares knowledge, solutions and experiences with other frameworks such as other Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans.

d. “Working across sectors and economic realities”

- Supporting message: HELCOM directly engages several sectors, such as shipping, agriculture, fisheries, and spatial planning, in the work to implement the Convention; and facilitates cross-sectorial consultations on a regional level.

e. “Nations have direct benefit from HELCOM cooperation”

- Supporting message: All coastal countries act in HELCOM on an equal footing. The pooling of resources offers true potential for reducing workload on national level and improves cost-efficiency.
- Supporting message: HELCOM ensures that it incorporates other major regional frameworks into all its work, to avoid unnecessary overlaps or duplication.
- Supporting message: HELCOM has longer-term plans of major processes and deliverables, including in the fields of monitoring, assessment, indicators, data and databases, enabling better streamlining of the work of various groups and initiatives.

f. (internal communication) “We continue to be efficient”

- Supporting message: HELCOM has been able to work under tight deadlines and respond to a number of emerging needs with targeted products thanks to *ad hoc* processes, experts groups and projects.
- Supporting message: An efficient and proactive Secretariat has been able to cope with rapidly increasing challenges in terms of policy development and resource availability.

5. Tools and methods

5.1. The deployment of targeted, specific and achievable methods and actions is essential in reaching the Communication objectives set above. When focusing on more singled out messages, using multiple channels and tools simultaneously will be favoured, paying particular attention to social media and mobile devices, as well as other web-friendly design and distribution. The more traditional means, such as print, will coexist.

5.2. For effective HELCOM communication, depending on the sub-objective and message, audience, timeframe, etc., a mix of both modern and well-established communication channels, tools and materials will

be used. These include the website, extranet, social media, press releases and newsletters, PR events and campaigns, involvement of mass media, print products, and multimedia, among others.

6. Coordination and partnerships

6.1. Since the involvement of sectors and stakeholders has grown in HELCOM work, and the scope of work increased, there is a growing need to share the tasks also regarding communication, by the Contracting Parties and their respective communication departments, or equivalent, and the Secretariat.

6.2. For more efficient HELCOM communication, a sharper focus will be on the issues where HELCOM's involvement has a clear value added to the Contracting Parties in relation to their other on-going processes and existing cooperation schemes, whether in national or regional level.

6.3. While HELCOM Secretariat has the overall coordinating role in communication, the national and sub-national communication activities are coordinated within and between Contracting States in order to use resources in an efficient way.