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<b>Document title</b>	HELCOM input on synergies with EUSBSR
<b>Code</b>	3-2
<b>Category</b>	CMNT
<b>Agenda Item</b>	3 - Cooperation with other Regional Seas Conventions and organizations
<b>Submission date</b>	24.2.2015
<b>Submitted by</b>	Executive Secretary
<b>Reference</b>	Outcome of HOD 47-2014, Paragraphs 5.10-5.11

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## Background

HOD 47-2014 concluded that it is important to develop a proposal to institutionalize the cooperation between HELCOM and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), and to define the specific tasks of the Working Groups, Chairs, the HELCOM Secretariat and the EUSBSR Coordinators and Steering Committees.

Further, HOD 47-2014 agreed to bring up the cooperation issue again in HELCOM 36-2015 and requested the Secretariat to initiate the preparation of a consolidated input by HELCOM to the revision process of the EUSBSR utilizing the expertise of the working groups.

The attached is the agreed HELCOM input on the synergies between the activities under HELCOM and the Strategy. The input has been forwarded to the relevant contacts (DG REGIO and National Contact Points) for consideration in the revision of the EUSBSR.

As the next step, a consolidated input by HELCOM to the updating of the descriptions in the Action Plan is to be provided.

## Action required

The Meeting is invited to take note of the HELCOM input to the revision of the EUSBSR. The Meeting might wish to follow-up on the outcome of the revision process.

Further, the Meeting is invited to agree on the following procedure for preparing a HELCOM input to the updating of the descriptions of the Priority Areas/Horizontal Actions of the EUSBSR (former names, a new structure is under consideration):

- once the new structure of the Action Plan of the EUSBSR is agreed, initial revisions will be prepared by the Secretariat focusing on reflecting HELCOM's governance framework and role, both in general and specifically in the individual PAs/HAs, and on areas where new implementation projects under EUSBSR could be initiated;
- input will be requested from the relevant Working Groups via correspondence;
- Secretariat will finalize the updating based on the feedback received and will circulate it to the EUSBSR Coordinators and Leaders.



# Increasing synergies with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

- Ways to institutionalize the cooperation between HELCOM and EUSBSR

## Background

Optimal cooperation between the activities carried out under HELCOM as well as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) will save resources and add to the efficiency in reaching mutual goals.

The HELCOM Group on the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (GEAR 8-2014) proposed a joint meeting, to prepare recommendations on practical ways for further improvements and, on a broader level, to fulfil the refined mandate of the Gear group to improve synergies and implementation between HELCOM and the EUSBSR.

Such a HELCOM-EUSBSR session was held on 10 December 2014, as a part of the 47<sup>th</sup> HELCOM Heads of Delegation meeting. Invited guests included representatives of seven selected EUSBSR Priority Area Coordinators (PAC) and Horizontal Action Leaders (HAL) being responsible for HELCOM-relevant issues (PA Bio, PA Hazards, PA Nutri, PA Safe, PA Secure, PA Ship and HA Spatial Planning). The Ambassador for Baltic Sea Affairs from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, being nominated as the National Contact Point for EUSBSR, also participated. The outcome of the session served as a starting point for development of this document.

The Russian Federation is on board with these developments, considering that EUSBSR complies with the objectives of HELCOM and serves as a tool for implementation of the HELCOM commitments, which are in line with the Strategy of Social and Economic development of North West region of Russian Federation. On a practical level, Russian experts have the possibility to participate in the EUSBSR activities for mutual benefits.

The Action Plan of the EUSBSR is currently being revised and the update is planned to be ready in spring 2015. Once National Coordinators for the Strategy have agreed on the new structure of the Action Plan, PACs/HALs will be asked to submit suggestions/modifications for their respective parts. The official launch of the new Action Plan has been scheduled for the 6<sup>th</sup> EUSBSR Annual Forum in mid-June 2015.

HELCOM wishes to provide this input for reflection in the revision of the EUSBSR Action Plan, consisting of the proposal for operationalization of the cooperation between HELCOM and EUSBSR. At a later stage, a consolidated input to the updating of the PAs and HAs descriptions will also be provided by HELCOM.

As the first annual cycle of the new HELCOM after streamlining is well on its way, it is vital that the effective dialogue and strategic reflections continue, to help ensure that the joint work is operationalized and that the revision of the EUSBSR Action Plan will be accomplished in a successful manner.

## Focus on complementarity

HELCOM's ambition – even more clearly after the streamlining – is to ensure a policy-relevant agenda and associated outcomes, avoid any duplication of work, and maintain a flexible working structure to meet the constantly evolving needs. The developments on the EUSBSR revision process, as in late 2014, indicate that there will also be more focus on synergies and complementarity.

Priority areas for actions to achieve good environmental status for the Baltic Sea are identified by HELCOM in the Baltic Sea Action Plan, the follow-up Ministerial Declarations, and more recently in the outcome of the modernization process finalized in September 2014 and resulting in a new HELCOM working structure. These priority areas are:

- reduction of inputs of hazardous substances and nutrients
- underwater noise and marine litter
- biodiversity protection
- monitoring and assessment of the status of and pressures on the marine environment
- reducing impact of shipping
- safety of navigation
- response to pollution accidents at sea and on shore
- maritime spatial planning
- sustainable agriculture practices
- ecosystem-based sustainable fisheries.

## Adhering to our roles

Clarifying and understanding, as well as adhering to the roles of HELCOM and EUSBSR, will help to ensure complementarity of our activities.

HELCOM's major role is to set policy goals and, based on best available science, to advise managers on solutions and actions needed to reach a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea. HELCOM acts to ensure harmonized implementation of the jointly-agreed measures and of other international regulations.

The EUSBSR's key role, as expressed in relevant documents, is to address common challenges in the region. This may involve facilitating initiation of projects to support implementation of HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan, policy goals and targets. EUSBSR offers political visibility to urgent environmental problems, as identified by HELCOM, and has tools available to initiate projects in areas where they are needed. EUSBSR acts as a platform for facilitating EU, national, regional and private funding for regional priority projects and facilitating coordination and joint activities between stakeholders acting in the Baltic Sea macro-region.

HELCOM's governance framework and role need to be clearly reflected in the revised Action Plan of the EUSBSR, both in general and specifically in the individual PAs/HAs.

Closer cooperation will increase understanding about how we act and what can we expect from each other.

## Projects

While HELCOM remains a policy-driven organization it is not distant from project delivery. Many of its activities, albeit not formulated as projects, are relevant to EUSBSR. While the main responsibility to implement HELCOM requirements, such as the Helsinki Convention and the Baltic Sea Action Plan, lies with the Contracting Parties, there are HELCOM projects which support implementation, focusing on regional

perspectives. A harmonized approach on a regional level will continue to have a pivotal role in many HELCOM tasks and processes, such as, but not limited to, joint procedures, assessments and databases.

Consequently, good information exchange and consultation on ongoing and planned activities in HELCOM, and in the relevant priority areas of EUSBSR, is a pre-requisite to avoid launching duplicating initiatives in the region.

HELCOM Heads of Delegations, as well as HELCOM's Working Groups, are in the position to provide policy direction to and expertise on areas in need of further implementation, which can be supported by projects associated to EUSBSR.

Commonly, projects seek HELCOM's involvement in considering their policy-relevant outcomes and in general HELCOM is ready to offer its platform for such policy considerations. However, the outcomes have to match the specific priorities and timetables in order to be successfully taken up.

Quality EUSBSR projects, designed to meet specific implementation needs and building on work previously done in HELCOM and elsewhere, will bring us forward to reaching the common goal.

## Make it more systematic

So far, the cooperation between HELCOM and EUSBSR has been carried out on an *ad hoc* basis. HELCOM supports the following ways of optimizing the future cooperation between actors involved in HELCOM and EUSBSR:

- 1. Use the existing forums of a given area or topic; do not create new ones when not necessary.**
- 2. Co-leading of the PAs and HAs is considered to be a good solution, with relevant activities and plans considered 'under one roof'.**

For example, the HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group serves as a steering committee for HA Spatial Planning and is co-led by HELCOM and VASAB.

The benefits of these joint approaches are: involvement of all Baltic Sea countries as well as stakeholders (HELCOM Observers), linkages provided to a larger policy context (e.g. the existing or developing integrated coastal management frameworks for HA Spatial Planning), outcomes taken forward for implementation at national level and no risk of double structures or duplicated meetings. For successful co-existence, EUSBSR matters should have a proper place in the work plan and agenda of the HELCOM meetings; EUSBSR visibility has to be ensured and pro-active contributions to EUSBSR processes provided as needed.

- 3. Capitalize on a country leadership approach, already used in both HELCOM and EUSBSR**

Ensuring countries' ownership for results is a matter of increased importance in HELCOM. Having one country assigned responsibility for a shared topic in a HELCOM Working Group and EUSBSR is a straight forward and effective way to ensure synergies, not only on the regional but also on the national level. Liaison country reports of the latest EUSBSR developments in HELCOM meetings, brings forward policy-relevant outcomes and gets feedback and expert advice as needed. Such a cooperation format has just been started in the newly established HELCOM Pressure group with Finland and Sweden serving as lead countries in their capacities as Coordinator of PA Nutri and PA Hazards respectively (and roles mapped to the work plan of the group accordingly).

- 4. More back-to-back meetings**

We all experience the challenge of an increased number of meetings. In some cases back-to-back meetings/joint sessions of a PA steering committee and a HELCOM group can be of added value to national administrations with overlapping participation. Back-to back or common thematic sessions will improve frequent exchange between HELCOM and EUSBSR and help to find complementarity.

HELCOM increasingly uses on-line meetings and encourages partner organization to consider using them as well, when possible and suitable.

#### **5. Giving HELCOM the opportunity to provide feedback with regard to complementarity of new project ideas considered for flagship status with HELCOM activities.**

One of the roles of the EUSBSR PA and HA international Steering Committees is to provide advice and support to the PA Coordinators / HA Leaders concerned regarding the selection of worthy projects and seed-projects for financing from certain EU sources, as well as to follow and provide guidance for projects and assist conveying relevant results and recommendations of ongoing and completed flagship projects to the policy level. The implementation needs are considerable and HELCOM welcomes the process where project proposals are thoroughly considered, advised and followed.

HELCOM Working Groups hold the knowledge of the existing requirements in a specific area, expertise of the current status of the marine environment and pressures from human activities, and what are the constantly evolving implementation needs. Importantly, national perspectives are taken into account in the group considerations.

Giving HELCOM the possibility to provide feedback on new project ideas considered for a flagship status would contribute to the relevance and quality of projects and that the policy needs are matched, taken that initiation of projects is very often a bottom-up approach.

HELCOM is invited to participate to appropriate Steering Groups or to follow-up the activities and/or to provide information by correspondence. In the PA NUTRI there is very good experience from this kind of co-operation.

#### **6. Involving higher levels**

The information exchange can be developed and intensified also in the upper organizational levels, where the Working Groups' and everyday PA/HAL work feeds into.

Meeting between HELCOM Heads of Delegations and representatives working with EUSBSR (EU COM, National Contract Points, PACs/HALs) could be repeated to follow up this guidance. Further, HELCOM could make such targeted inputs to the EUSBSR processes also in the future.

Annex 1. Correspondence and contacts of HELCOM & selected EUSBSR Priority Areas and Horizontal Actions (next page)

## HELCOM main groups

## Corresponding EUSBSR PA/HA

## Chairs of HELCOM groups & Secretariat contacts

