



Document title	Planning for the next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting
Code	3-2
Category	CMNT
Agenda Item	3 – Next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting
Submission date	3.3.2016
Submitted by	Executive Secretary
Reference	

Background

HELCOM HOD 49-2016 discussed the next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting and identified HOLAS II and MAI/CART as the most important issues suitable for ministerial attention, with the possibility to include other issues as well. The Meeting agreed that in order to attract high-level political attention, the discussion of the next Ministerial Meeting should focus on a few topical priority issues and that the programme should be arranged so that it is interactive and the ministers can actively make an impact, and a new type of outcome could be planned for.

Action requested

The Meeting might wish to use this document as background information to continue the consideration of the next Ministerial Meeting and plan for timely preparations of the Meeting.

New Angles and Fresh Visions for the Future

HOLAS II, the second holistic assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea, will provide updated information on the status of the marine environment and cumulative pressures and impacts from major human activities.

For the first time, social and economic analysis will be truly incorporated into the HELCOM assessment by linking human activities to pressures and impacts on ecosystem components within one holistic framework.

Overall, HOLAS II will demonstrate improved application of ecosystem approach on a sea basin scale, thus promoting understanding of the ecosystem approach and its practical use.

In 2018, based on HOLAS II and MAI/CART, the Ministers would be in a position to evaluate progress towards achieving Good Environmental Status by 2021, according to the Baltic Sea Action Plan and follow-up commitments.

More specifically, it would be possible to:

- draw conclusions on how the status of the marine ecosystems has changed and improved since the BSAP baseline;
- identify possible new areas for further attention;
- review in general whether the implemented measures are bringing the desired effect and are sufficient, and consider further actions, including to fulfill Country-wise Nutrient Reduction Targets and Maximum Allowable Inputs;
- know the cost of degradation of the marine environment and benefits of improved marine status in relation to some human activities and come up with a practical meaning to balancing the needs of environmental protection and economic growth in the Baltic Sea region;
- provide important input to a regional baseline for use in maritime spatial planning which may be expanded to a new type of use in real-life planning, such as of areas of ecological significance (“green infrastructure”);
- offer a starting point for joint deliberations on desired future developments of human activities from the Baltic-wide perspective.

In the run-up to the Ministerial Meeting

To have an impact, new knowledge and information gathered in HELCOM by 2018, including from HOLAS II and MAI/CART assessments, should find their use in management and policy-making. The Ministerial Meeting can help to gain political support to achieve this. However, political attention will likely be higher and last longer if the process prior to the Ministerial meeting succeeds in bringing marine environment protection, HELCOM work and new outcomes to high-level attention and discussion. The involvement of major stakeholders and interest groups should be part of such a process.

Between now and the Ministerial Meeting the following could take place:

- HELCOM could organize high-level events with the participation of Ministers/high-level representatives; they could be held within the framework of some major regional and European conferences and forums and start as soon as possible;

- Bi-lateral/multi-lateral meetings of the Ministers and high-level national representatives could also offer an opportunity to address issues of importance to HELCOM work; individual Contracting Parties may wish to identify nationally suitable processes for this purpose and initiate bilateral dialogues on the chosen HELCOM topics;
- HELCOM Chair and/or Executive Secretary could pay official visits to the Capitals/meet the Ministers/high-level representatives as may be arranged;
- HELCOM Stakeholder Conference as well as Baltic Sea Day in St. Petersburg could pay increased attention to the Ministerial Meeting and the topics it is to cover.

Timely planning

The first outcomes of HOLAS II will be released in June 2017, which provides an opportunity to start debating the results of the assessment and possible use early on prior to the updated HOLAS II is available in June 2018.

To prepare for the Ministerial Meeting the following could take place:

In 2016

- Carry on planning process with the aim to gain political attention and engage stakeholders prior to the Ministerial Meeting,
- Estonia completing HELCOM Chairmanship and its achievements, EU taking over Chairmanship and its priorities, to feed into the considerations,
- Identify opportunities for and organize possible high-level events (e.g. as part of or on the side of major planned events related to seas and oceans).

In 2017

- Further consideration of priority topics and scope based on discussions in HELCOM and feedback from the Contracting Parties,
- Orientation discussion on the type of preferred outcome and planning the format of the Ministerial Meeting,
- Decision on the more exact timing of the Ministerial Meeting,
- Negotiations start between the Contracting Parties on the matters of the highest importance for reaching the Baltic Sea in Good Environmental Status and future HELCOM work,
- High-level events and meetings organized by HELCOM continue as opportunities arise.

In 2018

Negotiations between the Contracting Parties continue.

HELCOM Ministerial Meeting takes place.