



Document title	Draft HELCOM Ecological coherence assessment of the marine protected areas network in the Baltic Sea
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Background

The draft HELCOM Ecological coherence assessment of the marine protected areas network in the Baltic Sea has been developed by the HELCOM ECONET project under the State and Conservation Working Group and with support by the HELCOM MPA Task Group. The project was financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. In addition to the assessment of ecological coherence the report also contains a follow-up of HELCOM Recommendation 35-1 on the System of coastal and marine Baltic Sea protected areas (HELCOM MPAs¹) as agreed by State and Conservation. Both analyses are based on information submitted by Contracting Parties to the HELCOM MPA database that was modernized and updated in 2015.

The methodology used for the assessment of ecological coherence was agreed at State and Conservation 2-2015 and 3-2015. As furthermore agreed at State and Conservation 3-2015, a draft assessment report was circulated for review by State and Conservation contacts and the MPA Task Group in January 2016. After incorporation of comments an updated version of the report was circulated for a second round of commenting and endorsement 8-12 February 2016. Finland, Germany, Poland, Sweden have participated in the review process. Also Oceana submitted their comments. Denmark has informed on a study reservation on the report. Denmark is invited to clarify their study reservation as soon as possible.

As to the conclusions, the report shows an impressive system of marine protected areas in the Baltic Sea compared to other marine regions. However, since the protection needs set by HELCOM for the MPA network are high, the commitments made by Contracting Parties have only been partly met to date. The assessment of ecological coherence shows that some aspects considered in the assessment are at an acceptable level but overall the network is not yet ecologically coherent. In particular, the connectivity, i.e. the migration and dispersal of species between MPAs, is not sufficient. The objectives of Recommendation 35-1 are in most cases in progress but yet only partly accomplished. For example, only 67% of MPAs has management plans and HELCOM Red Listed species, biotopes, biotope complexes and habitats does not appear to be protected by the HELCOM MPAs to the extent intended. The report provides a section on “next steps” to improve the HELCOM MPA network as well to the methodology to assess its ecological coherence.

Language editing and layout will take place at a later stage.

¹ Former BSPAs.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to consider and approve the HELCOM Ecological coherence assessment of the marine protected areas network in the Baltic Sea and agree on its publication as part of the Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings series.