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## Background

This document summarizes the status of the ongoing HELCOM projects and external projects with HELCOM participation, with a focus on their main achievements and outcomes during 2015. Projects finalized in 2015 are listed separately. Hyperlinks to more detailed project descriptions on the HELCOM web-site are provided.

## Action required

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information.

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## Information on on-going HELCOM projects and external projects with HELCOM involvement

1. [Zooplankton Indicator Integration to Monitoring in the Baltic Sea \(HELCOM ZEN ZIIM\), 2015-2018 \(continuation to “Quality assurance and integration of zooplankton monitoring in the Baltic Sea \(HELCOM ZEN QAI\), 2011-2014”](#)

**Chairman: Ms. Elena Gorokhova, Sweden**

The overarching aim of the project is to promote zooplankton-based indicators to follow-up the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, and MSFD as far as EU countries are concerned, and to support the international Baltic regional zooplankton monitoring. The main activities are training courses/workshops; revising and updating the zooplankton analysis methods, with a particular focus on taxonomic and biomass assessment; and evaluating and operationalizing zooplankton-based indices as environmental indicators (Descriptor 4, Food Webs).

Activities to date include one workshop on methods for the indicator calculation and linkages to other food web indicators, remote work on data analysis and revision of zooplankton biomass assessment, and a series of discussions in conjunction with other relevant meetings (ICES WGZE and various HELCOM meetings. Two manuscripts have also been submitted to be published as research papers.

HELCOM ZEN ZIIM is now in the concluding phase of the indicator development. By the end of 2016, the proposed indicator is envisioned to be fully operational. The evaluation of region-specific reference values and GES targets is currently being finalized by national experts using regional datasets.

2. [Quality assurance of phytoplankton in the Baltic Sea \(HELCOM PEG\), 2014-2016](#)

**Project Manager: Ms. Iveta Jurgensone, Latvia**

The main aim of the project is to ensure and maintain high quality standard of the phytoplankton monitoring within the HELCOM COMBINE Programme. This is done by organizing annual training courses, intercalibration exercises, and jointly harmonizing the sampling, treatment and reporting procedures. HELCOM PEG also maintains the phytoplankton biovolume list. The project updates annually the biovolume list, the Baltic Sea Environmental Fact Sheet on “Cyanobacteria biomass” and reports to the State and Conservation Working Group.

The continuation of the HELCOM PEG project for the period 2014-2016 was approved by HELCOM HOD 41-2013. In 2014 the project held its annual workshop and training course on phytoplankton, in Helsinki, Finland. The training course covered three different topics: identification of dinoflagellates, Prasinophytes, and Cryptophytes. In 2015 the project meeting was held in Pärnu, Estonia. The training course focused on freshwater phytoplankton. Results of the SYKE phytoplankton proficiency test 2014 and analysis of long-term data series of phytoplankton were presented. In 2016 the PEG meeting will be held in Rostock, Germany on 25-29 April.

3. [Making HELCOM eutrophication assessments operational \(HELCOM EUTRO-OPER\), 2014-2015, extended for a new period](#)

**Project Manager: Ms. Vivi Fleming-Lehtinen, HELCOM Secretariat**

The ‘Project on making HELCOM eutrophication assessments operational (EUTRO-OPER)’ started in January 2014 and ended in December 2015. The project aimed towards a regularly updated high-quality thematic assessment of eutrophication status, produced through an operational and streamlined process. It was a

continuation to the CORE EUTRO process, stemming from the EUTRO-, EUTRO PRO-and TARGREV projects, which have since 2005 developed the HELCOM core set of eutrophication indicators, with boundaries of good environmental status and assessment methodology, ending up in the latest update of eutrophication status in the Baltic Sea in 2007-2011.

The EUTRO-OPER project piloted the production of assessment products through efficient data flow processes. During the project, the entire assessment process, from monitoring and data aggregation to assessment calculation, was defined and documented, together with the protocols as well as responsibilities of QA/QC guidance and review. The project continued to improve the quality of the existing eutrophication status core indicators through enabling use of remote sensing and ship-of-opportunity data. Gaps in the present set of core indicator were furthermore investigated and new indicators were proposed. In addition, steps toward coordination of harmonizing the coastal and open sea eutrophication assessment were taken.

Deliverables from the EUTRO-OPER project include:

[A dataview of the test assessment](#), including data and assessment products, together with transparent documentation of review process.

[Eutrophication assessment manual](#). A concise manual explaining the processes and protocols of the assessment work flow, to be used by experts taking part in producing the assessment as well as any party interested in learning about the assessment methodology in more detail.

[EUTRO-OPER project report](#): a description of project activities and results, to inform about the work conducted in the project and to provide background for the continuation of the eutrophication assessment work.

HOD 49-2015 welcomed the outcome of the EUTRO-OPER project and took note that the pre-core indicators developed by EUTRO-OPER will not be finalized by end of the project and that in order to finalize them Lead Countries are needed to ensure their continued development as well as resources for modelling to develop GES-boundaries for three of the indicators. HOD agreed to continue the project for a limited period 3-6 months and welcomed the offer by Germany to contribute to the work financially.

#### 4. [Baltic-wide assessment of coastal fish communities in support of an ecosystem-based management \(HELCOM FISH-PRO II\), 2014-2018](#)

**Project Manager: Mr. Jens Olsson, Sweden**

This project continues the work of the HELCOM projects 'Expert network on monitoring and protecting of coastal fish and lamprey species (HELCOM FISH Project), 2008-2010,' and 'Project for Baltic-wide assessment of coastal fish communities in support of an ecosystem-based management (HELCOM FISH-PRO) 2011-2013'.

The objectives of the project are as follows:

Knowledge: to update and improve knowledge about occurrence, distribution, population and threat and/or decline of coastal fish based on all relevant data.

Assessment and monitoring: to further develop different assessment and monitoring methodologies for coastal fish, including indicators with targets and reference values.

Recommendations: provide advice to national authorities and ongoing HELCOM work on implementation of coastal fish related actions in the BSAP and MSFD.

During the year 2015 the project held its annual meeting in February ([Outcome of FISH-PRO II 2-2015](#)) and has *inter alia* contributed to the development and operationalization of the HELCOM core indicators on coastal fish, produced the following reports: [Recreational fisheries in the Baltic Sea and availability of data](#), [Commercial catch statistics as data source of coastal fish in the Baltic Sea](#), published the [HELCOM Guidelines for Coastal fish monitoring sampling methods](#) and started discussions on ecosystem services valuation in relation to coastal fish.

## 5. [Sixth Baltic Sea Pollution Load Compilation \(HELCOM PLC-6\), 2012-2017](#)

**Project Manager: Mr. Lars Svendsen, Denmark**

The project is an implementation of HELCOM Recommendation [26/2](#) to periodically carry out a pollution load assessment (PLC) including a quantification of waterborne point, diffuse and natural sources.

The overall task of the project is to prepare a comprehensive assessment of the water- and airborne inputs and their sources to the Baltic Sea during the period 1994-2014 with more detailed assessment for 2012 (Germany and Poland) and 2014 (the remaining countries) by:

- updating the 5th Pollution Load Compilation (PLC-5) and the updated PLC report submitted to the 2013 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting (PLC-5.5), including information on nutrient inputs via air and water, as well as their sources;
- further updating the PLC Guidelines and extending them with new standardized methods, standard values, statistical assessment for improving data quality and quantifying uncertainty on national datasets to ensure more complete, consistent and comparable data between Contracting Parties, and complying with new requirements for follow-up of the fulfilment of nutrient input reduction targets agreed upon within HELCOM.

Project workshops were held on 24-26 February 2014, 2-4 June 2014 and 15-17 December 2014. Main outcomes of the project during 2014 included further elaboration of the PLC-6 guidelines, which were adopted in principle by HOD 46-2014. A few open issues still remain with the guidelines related to the reporting of industries (to be streamlined with EU reporting) and the periodic reporting requirements.

The project has collaborated closely with the PLUS project by giving input to the new PLC data base structure and the reporting templates.

## 6. [Operationalization of the nutrient reduction scheme follow-up system \(MAI-CART OPER\), 2015-2017](#)

**Project implemented by: Bo Gustafsson, Baltic Nest Institute Sweden in cooperation with Lars Moeslund Svendsen, Danish Centre for Environment and Energy Denmark**

The aim of the project is to improve the currently laborious and manual production of the assessment of implementation of the nutrient reduction scheme (Maximum Allowable Inputs and Country-Allocated Reduction Targets) and automate as many steps in the assessment as feasible and possible. Expert judgment will always be indispensable part of the assessment process, as in case of other HELCOM core indicators and their assessment, however, partial automation can save time and resources.

The main steps foreseen to be operationalized and automated will be the establishment of the assessment data set comprising of PLC and EMEP data, performing basic data processing such as normalization and link to the statistical analysis, and from the results production of standard tables and graphics with the assessment results.

A project workshop was held in December 2015 to elaborate the procedures and technical solutions for the operationalization of MAI and CART assessments while ensuring the involvement of the Contracting Parties in the assessments and making the assessment data accessible, and to check the availability of recent national data for the assessment.

## 7. [Agri-environment coordinator in the HELCOM Secretariat \(HELCOM AGRI-ENV\), 2015-2017](#)

**Agri-environment coordinator: Ms Susanna Kaasinen, HELCOM Secretariat**

To support the work of the HELCOM Group on Sustainable Agricultural Practices in implementing its work programme and the lead countries in their specific topics as well as to contribute to the overall theme of nutrient recycling, Agri-Environment Coordinator ( has been employed in the HELCOM Secretariat.

In autumn 2015, the Agri-Environment Coordinator facilitated establishing a network of national experts within the Baltic Sea region dealing with standards for nutrient content in manure as well as helped the lead country Finland to prepare a workshop on the topic. The HELCOM Workshop on manure nutrient content in the Baltic Sea countries was held on 19-20 November 2015 in Vantaa, Finland. The workshop participants identified a need for a regional project to support developing national manure standards. After the workshop, the coordinator helped the proposed lead partner for the regional project, National Resources Institute Finland (Luke), to find potential project partners and support from the administration in the Baltic Sea countries.

## 8. [Project on Maritime Assessment \(2016-2017\)](#)

**Coordination: Mr. Hermanni Backer, HELCOM Secretariat**

The Maritime Assessment project was approved by HOD 49-2015. The project will enable supporting the production of the HELCOM Maritime Assessment 2016 experts as well as production of a summary brochure of the main contents.

The specific expertise and issues where project support is needed will be selected according to need but likely include traffic statistics, shipping accidents, submerged hazardous objects, interactive online visualisation of compiled data as well as lay-out and printing costs of a summary/brochure.

The maritime assessment will rely heavily on statistics, figures and maps and less on text. A key source of this information is the AIS data on ship movements collected in the region during 2005-2015. Due to this, one of the most work-intensive part of the assessment will be on compilation of reliable datasets.

The main assessment document will cover all maritime activities and uses of the sea. The main focus will be on the developments during the period 2005-2015. In addition to the main assessment document the aim is to produce a summary publication which will be printed. This publication will try to crystallise the messages emerging from the main document in easily understandable format.

During spring 2016 the project will focus on compiling the needed datasets and writing initial drafts, during summer-early autumn the focus will be on writing and adjusting the draft with comments from the Contracting Parties. The publication will be finalized in early spring 2017.

## 9. [Second holistic assessment of Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea \(HELCOM HOLAS II\), 2014-2018](#)

**Project Coordinator: Ms. Lena Bergström, HELCOM Secretariat**

**Project Manager for continued development of HELCOM Core Indicators (2015-2016): Lena Avellan, HELCOM Secretariat**

HOLAS II started in 2014 and will continue until June 2018. The project will produce an update of the overall environmental status of the Baltic Sea and evaluate progress in relation to the goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP). The outcome of the project will be developed so that it can also be used in reporting under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

Methods and tools for the status assessment are developed as part of the project. The HELCOM core indicators form the basis for the assessment of environmental status. Aggregated results are produced using

assessment tools, which are developed and tested as part of HOLAS II and the supporting projects BalticBOOST and TAPAS (see separate descriptions).

The main components of the assessment are:

- Distribution of human activities and pressures in the Baltic Sea. Cumulative impacts are assessed using the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact Index.
- Assessment of good environmental status using core indicators, and integrated assessments of Biodiversity, Eutrophication, Hazardous substances and Maritime Activities.
- Economic and social analyses to support regional assessments of the use of marine waters and cost of degradation.
- Measures to reach good environmental status

The project is guided through a Core team with nominated participants from the Contracting Parties. The project held three meetings in 2015, and three Workshops to support the developments of the biodiversity assessment tool, the assessment of human activities and pressures, as well as the Economic and social analyses. The work in 2016 will be focused on data collation and on finalizing the assessments methods to be applied.

The further development of HELCOM Core Indicators is part of HOLAS II preparation. This process, continuation to [CORESET II](#), is to ensure that a comprehensive set of core indicators are operational for use in the 2<sup>nd</sup> HELCOM holistic assessment. The indicators will be presented for review at relevant working groups in 2016 and at the latest for endorsement by HOD to be held in December 2016.

Indicators are to be developed jointly by Lead and co-lead countries, with Lead countries taking initiative for the continued work, and reviewed and agreed by the Contracting Parties in relevant HELCOM groups (as agreed at HOD 48-2015 para 3.64). Lead Country offers have been received for the continued development of some 30 indicators and co-Lead country offers were received for all indicators. However, lack of Lead country offers are notably on indicators related to benthic communities and hazardous substances.

One of the key tasks of the HELCOM expert groups will in the future include carrying out the regular updates of indicator reports and to provide timely indicators evaluations for HELCOM assessments, firstly the 2<sup>nd</sup> HELCOM holistic assessment. Updated indicator evaluations are needed in early 2017 and early 2018 to provide for finalization of the first results of HOLAS II by mid-2017 and of the updated HOLAS II by mid-2018.

10. [Baltic Sea project to boost regional coherence of marine strategies through improved data flow, assessments and knowledge base for development of measures \(BalticBOOST\), September 2015- December 2016](#)

**Overall coordination by the HELCOM Secretariat (Ulla-Li Zweifel, Professional Secretary)**

This is a HELCOM project financed through a grant by the EU

Total budget: 792.065 €, EU-co-financing 633.652 €;

Project partners: HELCOM (lead), SYKE (Finland), NIVA DK (Denmark), EMI Utartu (Estonia), SLU Aqua (Sweden), FOI (Sweden), LFN (Latvia), NRM/SMNH (Sweden), TI-OF (Germany), DTU Aqua (Denmark), IOW (Germany) and ICES.

BalticBOOST is a EU co-financed project with the main goal to support indicator-based assessments of the state of and pressures on the Baltic Sea, as well as propose principles for joint environmental targets for pressures affecting seabed habitats. The project supports the development of a joint report that documents regional coordination of actions agreed in HELCOM and MSFD Programmes of Measures for those

Contracting Parties to HELCOM that are EU Member States. In addition to HELCOM, 10 partners from seven countries participate in the project.

The project is structured around five themes:

**Theme 1, Biodiversity**, focuses on development of a biodiversity assessment tool and improving data arrangements for the biodiversity elements where this is limited (e.g. coastal fish, birds and seals) so that a comprehensive assessment of biodiversity in the Baltic Sea can be carried out by 2018. The status of seal populations will be used as a case study to explore the possibility to align assessments under the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, MSFD and the Habitats Directive.

**Theme 2, Hazardous substances**, will refine an existing HELCOM tool for assessing the status of hazardous substances. Key components for adequate assessment of hazardous substances are to agree on matrices for indicators and to have access to quality assured data.

**Theme 3, Physical loss and damage to seabed habitats** is closely linked to the HOLAS II process and followed by FISH and GEAR/State and Conservation groups. It focuses on ways to determine how much disturbance from different activities specific seabed habitats can tolerate while remaining in Good Environmental Status (GES). A tool for assessing the impacts of fishing gear on specific habitat types and species, as well as an arrangement for regular collection of data and information on pressures and activities that affect the Baltic Sea, will also be developed. On this basis, the project will propose joint principles for defining environmental targets for pressures affecting seabed habitats.

**Theme 4, Noise**, focuses on underwater noise aiming at: (i) defining reporting requirements for development of a regional registry of impulsive activities; (ii) identifying spatial and temporal distribution of sound sensitive species and habitats in the HELCOM area and subsequent development of a synthesized spatial-temporal biological calendar for the identified species, including sensitive biological areas (spawning, nursery areas) based on e.g. HELCOM maps; (iii) exploring and recommending principles for defining environmental targets for noise; (iv) surveying possible measures to manage and mitigate relevant impacts on the Baltic Sea; (v) carrying out a workshop with all HELCOM Contracting Parties on principles for defining environmental targets for noise.

**Theme 5, Joint documentation of PoMs**, will support the development of a joint document on regional coordinated Programmes of Measures and a system to follow-up actions agreed by HELCOM. The follow-up system will include actions from the BSAP and Ministerial Declarations 2010 and 2013 and will present an assessment of the status of implementation with online visualisations.

Implementation of all themes has started. Notably theme 1 and 2 are holding HELCOM workshops in January and February 2016 to guide the development of the assessment tools while theme 3 is planning a workshop in early June. Theme 4 on noise has convened partner meetings and agreed on a workplan and theme 5 that develop a follow-up system for HELCOM agreement will be finalized in spring 2016.

#### [11. Development of HELCOM tools and approaches for the Second Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea \(TAPAS\), Jan 2016- June 2017](#)

##### **Overall coordination by the HELCOM Secretariat (Ulla-Li Zweifel, Professional Secretary)**

This is a HELCOM project funded through a direct EU grant.

Total budget: 418.221 €, EU-co-financing 250.000 €

Project partners: HELCOM (lead), SYKE (Finland), NIVA DK (Denmark), EMI TU (Estonia), ICES and SEI Tallinn (Estonia).

HELCOM TAPAS aims to support the [HOLAS II project](#) in its development of the Second Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea which will be prepared mid-2018. HELCOM TAPAS will specifically further develop four themes required for the successful development of the HOLAS II project.

Theme 1 - Baltic Sea pressure and impact indices (BSPI/BSII). These indices, firstly developed as part of the Initial HELCOM holistic assessment published in 2010, will be further developed, including improvements to the consideration of temporal and spatial aspects of pressure as well as improvements to the impact weight scores that estimate the potential impact of each assessed pressure on specific ecosystem components.

Theme 2 - Spatial information on ecosystem components. The development of the BSPI/BSII as well as other HELCOM activities (e.g. Red list assessment, indicator development) requires availability of data on spatial distribution of specific ecosystem components. In TAPAS, Baltic-wide distribution maps of benthic species and habitats as well as mobile species will be developed. Under this theme a HELCOM indicator for assessing the distribution, pattern and extent of benthic biotopes will also be further developed.

Theme 3 - Framework for economic and social analyses (ESA) in the Baltic Sea region. This TAPAS theme will contribute to the development and testing of a common conceptual framework for economic and social analyses in the Baltic Sea. The outcome will be presented as part of the HOLAS II outcome.

Theme 4 - Workspaces for data and information access. The fourth specific objective is to establish and test workspaces on the HELCOM website as a possible technical means for making assessment data and information available online enabling open access and efficient reuse of the collected data. This technical solution is an extension to the existing HELCOM Map and Data service infrastructure, hosted by the HELCOM Secretariat.

The project is guided by the HOLAS II project core team, with representation from the Contracting Parties, and HELCOM Working Groups State and Conservation and Pressure. Dedicated workshops will be organized for experts from HELCOM countries to take part in the development of the project components and in their testing. The first workshop on the Pressure indices was held 28-29 January 2016, Helsinki, Finland.

## 12. [Assessment and guidance for achieving an ecologically coherent network of HELCOM MPAs in the Baltic Sea \(ECONET\), 2015-2016](#)

**Project Coordinator: Ms. Janica Borg, HELCOM Secretariat**

This is a HELCOM project funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Total budget: ca. 47,999€

The ecological coherence analysis of the Baltic Sea MPA network was initiated in fall 2015, the outcome will be presented for adoption at the HELCOM 37 meeting. The assessment uses four main criteria, representativity, replication, adequacy and connectivity, to evaluate the current status of ecological coherence. The assessment report presents a new calculative approach for aggregating the results from the subcriteria analyses into the main result of the assessment. The preliminary results indicate that ecological coherence of the Baltic Sea MPAs has not yet been reached.

*\*former acronym: HELCOM BSPAs*

## 13. [HA Spatial Planning Support \(HASPS\), April 2015-June 2016](#)

**Project Coordinator: Ms. Leena Laamanen, HELCOM Secretariat**

Funding for this activity has been granted through the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme.

Total budget (VASAB and HELCOM) 117.647 €, EU co-financing 100.000 €

The HASPS project aims to support objectives assigned in the HA Spatial Planning of the EUSBSR, co-lead by HELCOM and VASAB. The project involves related activities of both partners to improve coordination, stakeholder involvement and achievement of the strategic targets of the HA Spatial Planning. The project

supports implementation of the Regional Baltic MSP Roadmap 2013-2020 adopted by HELCOM and VASAB. The project adds capacity to the joint HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG (established in 2010) to act as a regional platform for coherent MSP activities. HASPS supports the work of the Baltic Sea Region MSP Data Expert Sub-Group, improve coordination and visibility of HA Spatial Planning.

During fall 2015 information and sources on regional spatial datasets and their potential use for MSP and assessment of human activities was collated. Together with information collation, activities enhancing visibility and visualisation of MSP relevant datasets has been undertaken. MSP data sharing has been promoted and supported through the Baltic Sea Region MSP Data Expert Sub-group. The project has also presented and promoted HA Spatial Planning in several meetings.

#### 14. [Towards coherence and cross--border solutions in Baltic Maritime Spatial Plans \(Baltic SCOPE\)](#), March 2015-September 2016

**HELCOM contact point: Mr. Hermanni Backer, HELCOM Secretariat**

This is an external project with HELCOM involvement, financed through a grant from EASME/EMFF.

Total budget 2.638.828 €, EU-co-financing 2.111.063 €, HELCOM share of EU grant: 124.401 €

Lead partner SWAM (Sweden), other partners (apart of HELCOM) BSH (Germany), UMS (Poland), DNA (Denmark), MoEPRD (Latvia), Estonian Ministry of the Interior, State Regional Development Agency (Latvia), HELCOM, Nordregio (Sweden) and SYKE (Finland).

The main purpose of the project is to find planning solutions to transboundary issues and improve Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) processes. HELCOM is one of the ten partners working on the two case studies of the project: one in the southwest Baltic Sea and the other between Estonia, Latvia and Sweden.

The HELCOM Secretariat contribution to the project is to explore more efficient use of HELCOM AIS data in Maritime Spatial Planning, including the production of statistics and high resolution data products on ship traffic and its environmental pressures/risks based on AIS signals received within the Baltic Sea region. In addition to MSP such information can be used in a more regular forms of regional risk assessments related to maritime traffic including risks of spills. During spring 2015, the HELCOM Secretariat carried out interviews with AIS users from the Contracting Parties, Norway and the European Marine Safety Agency. The aim of these interviews was to have a better understanding of the best available working procedures, software and hardware for processing AIS data. It was also the opportunity to gather ideas what type of products the HELCOM Secretariat could generate from the AIS data. The Secretariat has collected these experiences to an AIS best practices document which will also be submitted to the HELCOM AIS EWG Meeting in May 2016.

During May 2015- January 2016, the Secretariat has used these best practices and processed AIS data for SCOPE and also for other regular HELCOM activities. The Secretariat has also used this processed material in ship density maps for the partners according to specifications and needs. Statistics about shipping activities in the Baltic Sea will be generated based on this material. A data viewer for the output of this MSP relevant AIS map material is being developed in parallel in the HASPS project.

The SCOPE project has also started preparing material to be in the position to publish a section dedicated to MSP and maritime activities in the upcoming HELCOM Maritime Assessment (to be published early 2017).

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## Information on HELCOM projects finalized in 2015

### 1. [Baltic Sea pilot project: testing new concepts for integrated environmental monitoring of the Baltic Sea \(BALSAM\), 2013-2015](#)

**Project Coordinator: Ms. Johanna Karhu, HELCOM Secretariat**

BALSAM (October 2013 – March/May 2015) was an EU co-funded (0.46M €) project to enhance the capacity of the Baltic Sea states to develop their monitoring programmes by increasing and improving cross-border coordination and joint activities especially related to monitoring of biodiversity. The project activities were organised into six work packages. The project consortium included 19 partners (AquaBiota (Sweden), BEF-LV (Latvia), ELF (Estonia), EMI/UTartu (Estonia), BSH (Germany), SYKE (Finland), FGFRI/LUKE (Finland), IMGW (Poland), KUCORPI (Lithuania), LFN (Latvia), LIAE (Latvia), IOW (Germany), SMHI (Sweden), SMNH (Sweden), TUT (Estonia), UG (Poland), WWF Finland and AU (Denmark)) and was coordinated by the HELCOM Secretariat.

As a first deliverable, BALSAM contributed to the creation of the HELCOM online Monitoring Manual, which was published in October 2014, by gathering information on COMBINE monitoring as well as monitoring of fisheries (ICES as a subcontractor), seals and seabirds, non-indigenous species and benthic habitats. The project also wrote guidelines for the monitoring of seals in the Baltic, which were adopted in the State 1-2014 meeting. Similar guidelines were prepared for seabirds and benthic habitats. Seal abundance and distribution databases were also developed and made available online on the HELCOM website. A metadatabase for seabird monitoring in the Baltic was also prepared and a network/platform of seabird monitoring experts was established for coordinated monitoring of seabirds in the Baltic to ensure data for core indicators.

Updated information on environmental research vessels as well as planned cruises and cruise reports was gathered and made available on the HELCOM website to assist the Contracting Parties in further coordination.

A proposal to revise HELCOM Recommendation 12/1 “Procedures for granting permits for monitoring and research activities in the territorial waters and exclusive economic zones, fishing zones or continental shelves” was presented to HELCOM groups.

Proposals on ways to improve data infrastructure and data flows for HELCOM assessments and core indicators were gathered in an action plan, which was prepared together with ICES as a subcontractor. The focus of the action plan is on COMBINE data (except nutrients, which is covered in EUTRO-OPER) and fisheries data. For non-indigenous species, the Risk Assessment Tool under the HELCOM/OSPAR Harmonized Procedure on Exemptions under the Ballast Water Management Convention was updated and improved and made available online. Moreover, a user guide to help understand the tool has been developed. Regarding target species, the harmonized criteria for defining target species for the purpose for the ballast water decision support tool has been tested.

BALSAM was supervised by HELCOM Gear, and HELCOM State and Conservation provided technical guidance to the project. All project outcomes were presented to HELCOM groups for discussion and further action. A joint final conference of BALSAM with the two sister projects IRIS-SES in the Mediterranean and Black Sea, and JMP NS/CS in the North Sea and Celtic Sea, was held on 24 April 2015 in Brussels.

### 2. [Operationalization of HELCOM core indicators \(HELCOM CORESET II\), 2013-2015](#)

**Project Manager: Ms. Lena Avellan, HELCOM Secretariat**

HELCOM CORESET II worked to operationalize the HELCOM core indicators on biodiversity and hazardous substances. The project also supported the development of a small number of other pressure core indicators. The commonly agreed set of core indicators were operationalized by mid-2015 when up-dated core indicator reports were published online.

The core indicators are an integral part of the follow-up of the goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP). For those Contracting Parties that are also EU member states, the HELCOM core indicators will provide the means of achieving regional coherence in reporting on several articles of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The assessment results from the indicators will be included in the second holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II).

The kick-off meeting (CORESET II 1-2014) was held 15 -16 January 2014 in Berlin. The meeting was held back-to-back with a HELCOM MORE project meeting. The second meeting (CORESET II 2-2014) was held 29-30 September 2014 in Gothenburg. A joint meeting was held 1 October between HELCOM and OSPAR experts involved in developing biodiversity indicators to identify opportunities for cooperation that were documented in a Communication paper.

The finalization of core indicator reports was carried out in the first half of 2015 through physical thematic meetings as well as indicator specific teleconferences and correspondence.

### 3. [Establishment of a European Red List of Habitats \(EU Red List\), 2014-2015](#)

**Project Researcher/Working Group Lead: Ms. Janica Borg, HELCOM Secretariat**

Based on the agreement made by HELCOM HOD 45-2014 the Baltic Sea Working Group of the EU-project “Establishment of a European Red List of Habitats” was coordinated from the HELCOM Secretariat from April to September 2015. Two workshops were organized at the HELCOM Secretariat within the project, the first on 28-30 October 2014 and the second on 2-4 June 2015. The main aim of the whole project is to provide reliable and timely information on the status and trends of biodiversity across Europe to support the needs of the 2020 EU Biodiversity Strategy. A final European assessment workshop will be held on 9-10 February 2016. The final project outcomes will be online habitat fact sheets, two publications, two posters and a final report, which are scheduled to be ready by mid-2016.

### 4. [Development of HELCOM Pollution Load User System \(HELCOM PLUS\), 2012-2015](#)

**Project Manager: Mr. Sriram Sethuraman, HELCOM Secretariat**

The main purpose of the project was to modernize the HELCOM pollution load compilation (PLC) database in order to:

- facilitate the submission, correction, updating and quality assurance of national PLC data reported by Contracting Parties to HELCOM;
- improve and harmonize the quality and completeness of data in the database;
- ensure open access to up-to-date, quality checked PLC water data, and thus make it easier for interested users to access PLC data for viewing and downloading database contents via an application based on a well-defined internet-based interface, as well as facilitate the production of HELCOM assessments in a more timely and cost-efficient manner than is presently possible;
- develop a system which is user friendly, flexible and robust.

The final Ninth Meeting of the Project on Development of a HELCOM Pollution Load User System was held in Helsinki 29 October 2015. The meeting summarized the major deliverables of the project – migration of the PLC database to the new MS SQL based format with contemporary improvement of data and development of the reporting WEB application performing automatic data quality assurance procedures.

The work on the full operationalization of the database and related procedures continues as a regular activity, with the involvement of RedCore DG expert group and HELCOM consultants. An end-user manual for the WEB application and working technical documentation for the database will be elaborated by the end of

March 2016. In the first part of 2016 a tool for public access to the database will be installed missioned. The tool will integrate a set of filters for building queries to select the data and download them in csv format.

## 5. [Modernization of HELCOM Marine Protected Areas database, 2014-2015](#)

**Project Coordinator: Ms. Janica Borg, HELCOM Secretariat**

The modernized HELCOM MPAs database was published in October 2015. The new database contains a dynamic map viewer which displays the borders of the MPAs and enables overlay of relevant data such as the red listed species and biotopes. The structure and search tools of the database have been improved, and it is linked to all relevant databases in the field (such as World Database on Protected Areas, OSPAR Protected Areas database, Natura 2000 standard data forms). In addition, the database structure has been harmonized with existing equivalent databases, namely OSPAR Protected Areas database and Natura 2000 database. The modernized HELCOM MPA database is user friendly and has a dual function as an updating tool for the Contracting Parties and an information bank for anyone interested in HELCOM MPAs. Fine-tuning of the database functionalities is scheduled for early spring 2016.