



Document title	OSPAR contribution to HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2018
Code	2-2
Category	DEC
Agenda Item	2 - 2018 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting
Submission date	06.02.2018
Submitted by	Executive Secretary
Reference	Outcomes of HOD 52A-2017, paragraphs 2.6-2.7 and HOD 52B-2017, paragraphs 3.1-3.2

Background

Following the HELCOM invitation, OSPAR has prepared the attached contribution to the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2018. The OSPAR letter has also been submitted to the Ministerial Meeting itself.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to consider the attached contribution provided by OSPAR and provide feedback, in particular on the proposed topics/themes for which further collaboration between HELCOM and OSPAR could be explored.



The Helsinki Commission

Chair of HELCOM – Ms Marianne Wenning

21 December 2017

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Dear Ms Wenning,

HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, 6 March 2018

The OSPAR Commission (OSPAR) reiterates its support to HELCOM's continued commitments to contribute to global efforts for protection of the marine environment, healthy and productive oceans and seas and welcomes the possibility to submit views and suggestion on areas of further cooperation between HELCOM and OSPAR in preparation of the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in March 2018. OSPAR thanks the HELCOM Parties and in particular the EU, the current chair of HELCOM, for inviting representatives of OSPAR to the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting.

HELCOM and OSPAR have a common vision of an ecosystem approach to managing human activities impacting on the marine environment as reflected by the joint adoption of the "Statement on the Ecosystem Approach to the Management of Human Activities" at the joint Ministerial Meeting held in Bremen in June 2003 (Annex 5 to the Report of the Joint Ministerial Meeting, 2003).

OSPAR congratulates HELCOM for the State of the Baltic Sea report HOLAS II and acknowledges the cooperation in relation to indicators that we have in common in both HOLAS II and the OSPAR Intermediate Assessment 2017.

OSPAR welcomes HELCOM's engagement in the global process of fulfilling the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially goal 14 'Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development'.

HELCOM and OSPAR have collaborated closely on a wide range of topics for many years. The cooperation between HELCOM and OSPAR during the last 4 years has led to efficiency gains and in some cases is a prerequisite for effective measures. Among the efficiency gains are joint requests to ICES, joint work on indicators, sharing databases and jointly developing measures under both Conventions on the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter. In the development of effective measures regarding invasive species, underwater noise and migratory birds, cooperation is an advantage.

OSPAR welcomes further discussions with HELCOM to identify new issues of common concern that will contribute to supporting the implementation of SDG 14 and in this regard welcomes further cooperation in existing work.

HELCOM and OSPAR also count on the particular role of some countries (Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden) that are Contracting Parties to both Conventions and have, from that position, contributed towards the enhancement of common knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, with the Kattegat the two Conventions share a particular transition area, where the North Sea and the Baltic Sea connect. It is in this transition area and the North Sea/Baltic Sea that the most opportunities for enhanced collaboration and cooperation exist.

Amongst a wider scope of opportunities for HELCOM and OSPAR to join efforts in the future, some of the steps already taken on specific areas of work can be further developed through cooperation at thematic, regional, European and global levels, along with opportunities for collaborative activities.

We would propose exploring further collaboration around the following topics/themes, in particular:

Biodiversity

Our two regional seas are directly connected and there has always been an exchange of biota between the two Convention areas in particular OSPAR Region II. In the past, concrete proposals for cooperation on biodiversity indicators by making best use of synergies between the two RSCs, have been made as a result of the joint meeting of the HELCOM and OSPAR expert groups working on developing indicators in October 2014. Several strands of cooperation have been developed. Building upon these, future possibilities for successful cooperation could include increasing efficiency by developing compatible monitoring procedures and data management (e.g. at sea bird surveys) or sharing databases (e.g. seabirds, marine mammals) as well as assessment of by-catch of seabirds and marine mammals.

This could build on the common indicators by the OSPAR-HELCOM-ICES Joint Working Group on seabirds (JWGBird). HELCOM would also be welcomed to join the OSPAR Seabird database, hosted by ICES. OSPAR has also developed a marine mammal database, hosted by ICES, which could become of future interest to HELCOM.

Future collaboration on the two respective MPA networks presents an opportunity for exploring connectivity, coherence and effective management of MPAs. Potential cooperation between HELCOM and OSPAR on relevant species which both Conventions have listed as declining or threatened could also be explored.

Possibilities also arise for synergies and for future cooperation in relation to managing and assessing seafloor habitats in both Convention areas. These activities could build on continuation of making joint requests by HELCOM and OSPAR to ICES for the development of regionally comparable data products.

Environmental Impact of Human Activities

OSPAR underlines the importance of joint and/or concerted action *i.a.* through regular informal meetings of Secretariats of European RSCs, on common aspects and synergies in the implementation of the respective Regional Action Plans on Marine Litter. OSPAR particularly proposes that the HELCOM and OSPAR Secretariats and the relevant task managers / RAP coordinators keep in contact in order to facilitate exchange and coordination in this important and developing field.

In relation to underwater noise continued sharing of information and methodological development as well as giving dedicated feedback on their respective agendas, is of relevance for harmonization and to avoid duplication of work. The jointly established registry on impulsive noise should be seen as an important first step for any further joint developments in this emerging issue.

Enhanced collaboration as regards knowledge and measures on invasive species could increase effectiveness and feasibility, in line with existing work on the jointly agreed regional recommendations concerning ballast water exchange. This joint HELCOM and OSPAR venture has continued within a dedicated joint expert group, which has resulted in joint harmonised procedure (JHP) covering all the necessary steps in granting exemptions under regulation A-4 of the IMO Ballast Water Management Convention.

Hazardous substances

Following HELCOM's utilisation of OSPAR's contaminants assessment tool for processing the data reported to ICES, as endorsed by Contracting Parties in HELCOM, the development of a joint HELCOM and OSPAR platform to operationalise the calculation of hazardous substances indicators, is an example of collaborative work. OSPAR believes that this platform, along with a common methodology, will improve the potential for both independent and collaborative work and will facilitate comparability of evaluations in the neighbouring regions.

European Union Marine Strategy Framework Directive

OSPAR, HELCOM and the European Commission also assist those Contracting Parties that are EU Member States to deliver their commitments under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The most recent examples are the OSPAR's Intermediate Assessment 2017 (<https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/intermediate-assessment-2017/>) and HELCOM's HOLAS II (<http://stateofthebalticsea.helcom.fi/>) that can be used by Member States for reporting purposes under MSFD if they so wish.

An opportunity for closer cooperation between EU MS in the two regions is the future work on the EU Commission decision 2017/848/EU. This work directly links to ongoing cooperation regarding indicator development.

Furthermore, HELCOM and OSPAR could look into opportunities to develop synergies and improve cross-regional coherence in our work to support the assessments, target setting and monitoring programmes of Contracting Parties that are EU Member States.

Emerging and horizontal issues

There are several emerging issues as well as more horizontal issues where HELCOM and OSPAR in future could explore synergies and efficiency for collaboration. One such issue is regional approaches to ecosystem based management as well as adaptation to climate change and ocean acidification

Another emerging issue is pharmaceuticals where HELCOM and OSPAR also could explore opportunities to share information, methodologies and data.

Global commitments

In conclusion and bearing in mind OSPAR's example of good collaboration between Regional Sea Conventions, OSPAR will endeavour to collaborate with HELCOM, and to draw from each other's relevant experience and support our Contracting Parties on the implementation of the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goal issues, addressing subjects of regional concern and common interest.

Yours sincerely



Laura Piriz
Chair of OSPAR