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Submitted by	Executive Secretary
Reference	

Background

At the 2018 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, the Baltic Sea Ministers of Environment and the EU Commissioner Vella agreed to strengthen the coordination and cooperation mechanisms with fisheries bodies. In June 2018 HELCOM Chair Ms. Marianne Wenning (European Commission, EC) sent a letter to the BALTFISH Presidency (Denmark), the upcoming HELCOM Chair (Finland) and the upcoming BALTFISH Presidency (Sweden), suggesting a meeting between HELCOM and BALTFISH regarding closer cooperation between management of fisheries and the marine environment.

A senior level meeting between HELCOM and BALTFISH was organized on 29 January 2019, in Tallinn, Estonia. This first meeting between HELCOM and BALTFISH was attended by the Chair of HELCOM Ms. Saara Bäck (Finland), BALTFISH Presidency representative Ms. Marianne Goffeng Raakil (Sweden), the Chair of HELCOM GEAR Ms. Heike Imhoff (Germany), as well as the HELCOM Executive Secretary Ms. Monika Stankiewicz and HELCOM Professional Secretary Mr. Markus Helavuori.

The meeting recognized a number of commonalities between HELCOM and BALTFISH, including coherent goals, and agreed on ways forward in future cooperation as further specified in the attached note.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the HELCOM-BALTFISH meeting, as further specified in the attachment.

HELCOM-BALTFISH meeting for improved cooperation between management of fisheries and the marine environment, 29 January 2019, Tallinn, Estonia

Background

Both HELCOM and BALTFISH have at ministerial level underlined the importance of good cooperation, transparency and information exchange between BALTFISH and HELCOM. In June 2018 the HELCOM Chair Ms. Marianne Wenning (European Commission, EC) proposed a meeting between HELCOM and BALTFISH. Following an exchange of letters, a senior level meeting between HELCOM and BALTFISH was consequently organized on 29 January 2019, in Tallinn, Estonia.

This first meeting between HELCOM and BALTFISH was attended by the Chair of HELCOM Ms. Saara Bäck (Finland), BALTFISH Presidency representative Ms. Marianne Goffeng Raakil (Sweden), the Chair of HELCOM GEAR Ms. Heike Imhoff (Germany), as well as the HELCOM Executive Secretary Ms. Monika Stankiewicz and HELCOM Professional Secretary Mr. Markus Helavuori. Ms. Goffeng Raakil conveyed the regrets of BALTFISH Chair Ms. Sara Colliander (Sweden) for not being able to attend the meeting.

Introduction

In considering the background and need for arranging this meeting, the Meeting recalled the letter sent by the HELCOM Chair to the BALTFISH Presidency in June 2018 as well as the [Plan for closer cooperation between marine environment and fisheries management in the Baltic Sea](#)", which HELCOM HOD 51-2016 had supported, and the positive reply from the BALTFISH Presidency. The Meeting also recalled the BALTFISH Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2013 by the Baltic Sea Ministers responsible for Fisheries where it is stated that BALTFISH relies on good cooperation, transparency and information exchange with HELCOM as well as other relevant Baltic Sea bodies.

The Meeting took note of the mandate, organization structure and ways of working of HELCOM and BALTFISH, respectively. HELCOM cooperation is based on a legal treaty (Helsinki Convention), and nowadays covers a wide range of issues that need to be addressed to achieve a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea (www.helcom.fi).

The Meeting noted that BALTFISH cooperation is based on a MoU signed in 2013 by the Baltic Sea Ministers responsible for Fisheries and that the activities of BALTFISH is based on the principles for regionalization as provided in article 18 of Regulation (EU) 2013/1380 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Common Fisheries Policy. BALTFISH constitutes a forum for exchanging ideas, views and information to facilitate joint actions and concrete projects aiming at achieving for the Baltic Sea the objectives and targets in the Common Fisheries Policy of a biological, and socio-economical long-term sustainable use of the marine resources.

The Meeting noted that all Baltic Sea States that are EU members are members of BALTFISH, and meetings are also attended by the European Commission. The meeting noted that the same Baltic Sea States are parties to the Helsinki Convention, and the Russian Federation and European Union are Contracting Parties as well. The presidency of BALTFISH rotates annually with Sweden as the present Chair and Finland as the upcoming Chair in summer 2019. In HELCOM, the chairmanships rotates biannually with Finland as the present Chair and Germany taking over in summer 2020.

The Meeting noted that the BALTFISH High-Level Group is composed of the Member States Fisheries Directors or other senior officials and invited officials from the European Commission. In addition, meetings of the BALTFISH Forum are held and open for attendance by representatives of the Member States, the European Commission, the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) and other interested stakeholders including intergovernmental organisations such as HELCOM and ICES. The Meeting further noted that BALTFISH also has sub-groups, such as the Control Experts Group and technical working groups (on specific topics).

The Meeting noted that the working structure of HELCOM consists of the meetings of the Helsinki Commission, the Heads of Delegation, and the eight main groups. The Group on ecosystem based sustainable fisheries (Fish) is one of HELCOM's eight main working groups, focusing on fisheries in relation to the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach. The Chair of GEAR introduced the work of the HELCOM Group on the implementation of the ecosystem approach (GEAR), which is linking together science and policy as well as the work of HELCOM with the MSFD framework. Several intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations have an observer status within HELCOM, with standing invitations to all meetings.

Priorities within HELCOM and BALTFISH

The Meeting took note of the overall goals and priorities of HELCOM and BALTFISH. The Meeting noted that the primary objective for BALTFISH is, within its area of competence, to strengthen and improve cooperation and coordination in fisheries management in the Baltic Sea, as well as to develop cooperation with other key stakeholders relevant to the Baltic Sea fisheries. That HELCOM in parallel is working to improve the environmental status and to achieve a healthy Baltic Sea was seen by the Meeting as key for healthy fish habitats and fish stocks in the Baltic Sea.

The Meeting noted that HELCOM's vision for the future is a healthy Baltic Sea environment with diverse biological components functioning in balance, resulting in a good ecological status and supporting a wide range of sustainable economic and social activities. The UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 14, are important to HELCOM work. The Meeting noted that the different action areas of HELCOM are all interlinked, and that fisheries are strongly dependent on the good environmental status of the Baltic Sea.

Cross-sectoral cooperation on the regional level was deemed to be important and the Meeting recognized that involving the Member States, although mainly the same, is instrumental in this regard. The Meeting agreed that while socio-economic matters have so far not been discussed between HELCOM and BALTFISH, doing so could be a way of adding value/improve cooperation and could also send an important signal to the fisheries sector that both HELCOM and BALTFISH acknowledge these matters in addition to ecological matters.

Recognizing similarities and differences between the organizations

The Meeting recognized that both HELCOM and BALTFISH are based on international agreements on intergovernmental cooperation within the Baltic Sea region. The various groups and sub-groups and the rotating chairmanships are other common features. In particular, the overall goals of the work of HELCOM and BALTFISH are coherent, as HELCOM looks to ensure a good environmental status for the Baltic Sea, while BALTFISH, within its area of competence, looks to ensure sustainable fisheries in the Baltic Sea and coherence with the environmental legislation of the European Union. The Meeting noted that BALTFISH does not have a secretariat, nor any budget, as HELCOM does. In view of identifying similarities, the role of ICES was also highlighted since both HELCOM and BALTFISH make use of ICES advice.

Experience regarding ongoing information exchange between HELCOM and BALTFISH

The Meeting recalled that HELCOM FISH 7-2017 had tasked the HELCOM Secretariat to, on a regular basis, share information on HELCOM Fish work plans, provisional agendas and outcomes with the BALTFISH Presidency. Likewise, the BALTFISH Presidency shares BALTFISH Forum meeting documents (incl. Minutes from the Forum), provisional agendas, work programmes and joint BALTFISH recommendations with the HELCOM Secretariat. HELCOM also has a standing invitation to attend the BALTFISH Forum meeting. The Meeting agreed that this reciprocal sharing of information is useful and should be continued. The Meeting further agreed that the sharing of information could be improved by some level of refinement of the information shared, e.g. by including a message or other communication, summarizing the key decisions, or by including a request for comments or instructions.

Possible ways forward for increased cooperation

In the light of the environmental status of the Baltic Sea and how the environmental status affects the fish stocks, their habitats and fisheries, the Meeting identified added value in an appropriate level of regional coordination and cooperation between BALTFISH and HELCOM, especially in matters where there may be overlapping efforts.

The Meeting agreed that there could be an added value in organizing regular meetings between HELCOM and BALTFISH as deemed appropriate by the current chairmanships in HELCOM and BALTFISH, especially considering the rotating chairmanships of both organizations. The Meeting agreed that the HELCOM Secretariat should liaise with each new BALTFISH Presidency, to consider the benefits and needs of arranging such a meeting during their term and thereby strive towards increased cooperation. The HELCOM Secretariat would be able to support preparations for any future meetings.

The Meeting agreed that consideration should be given to inviting each other to meetings and events where areas of common interest are being discussed. In this respect, the HELCOM Executive Secretary expressed appreciation for the invitation by the BALTFISH Chair for HELCOM to attend a BALTFISH symposium on seal-

fish and seal-fisheries interactions to be held 19-20 March in Sweden. The Meeting noted that HELCOM is also planning a workshop on seal-fisheries interactions and that synergy has already and will continue to be sought between these workshops. The Meeting further noted that the HELCOM Secretariat attended the previous BALTFISH Forum meeting in September 2018 as an observer.

The Meeting agreed that when HELCOM wishes to invite BALTFISH to meetings or events, the contact point for such an invitation should be the Fisheries Director from the country of presidency, together with another relevant contact person for the BALTFISH Presidency. In this respect, the Meeting agreed that HELCOM and BALTFISH should inform each other of new presidencies and contact points as soon as the presidency/chairmanship changes.

The Meeting noted that BALTFISH is planning an eel workshop on 7-8 May 2019 in Gothenburg, Sweden, both on control issues but also to coordinate national eel management plans and discuss best practices. The Meeting noted that representatives from HELCOM will be invited to attend, and that the organizers of the event are familiar with the outcome of the 2017 HELCOM Regional Workshop on Eel and the Baltic Sea (FISH-M 5-2017) and is considering how to take that into account as appropriate.

The Meeting noted information by the HELCOM Executive Secretary on the biannual global meetings of the UN Sustainable Oceans Initiative (SOI) on fisheries and environment cooperation. The SOI is directly relevant to the work of both organizations and brings together regional seas organizations and regional fisheries organizations from around the world. The Meeting agreed that the HELCOM Secretariat would share information on upcoming SOI meetings with BALTFISH, with a view for the country of BALTFISH Presidency to consider possible participation.

[Note from the Meeting](#)

The note from the Meeting was prepared by the HELCOM Secretariat and reviewed by all participants. The Meeting agreed that the current Swedish BALTFISH Presidency will report on the note of this meeting to its members, while the HELCOM Secretariat will submit it to HELCOM 40-2019, to which BALTFISH was also invited to attend by HELCOM. HELCOM Working Groups will also be informed of this note, as appropriate. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to the Estonian Ministry of the Environment for arranging the venue, back-to-back with HELCOM FISH 9-2019 (30-31 January 2019) in Tallinn, Estonia.