



Document title	Preliminary plan for the HOLAS III assessment and provisional timeline
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Category	DEC
Agenda Item	5 - Matters arising from the subsidiary bodies
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Submitted by	Executive Secretary
Reference	

Note that this document was submitted after the established deadline. It will be decided by the Meeting whether the document can be discussed or is postponed to the next meeting.

Background

HOD 57-2019 acknowledge the long-standing history of environmental assessment in the Baltic and the role of the HOLAS process in following up on the progress towards achieving the goals and objective set out in the Baltic Sea Action Plan and under other international commitments, as well as the role of the State of the Baltic Sea as a tool to support decision makers and guide regional policy. Early planning and preparation for the Third Holistic Assessment of the State of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III) process has been identified as important for its successful implementation. In the proposed timeline contained in the document development work takes place prior to the start of the assessment process, which strives to have assessment results and supporting material in place for approval to make them available also for national reporting purposes.

The overall provisional plan leading up to the publication of the State of the Baltic Sea divides the work into two main processes:

- **A preparatory phase** focusing on improving infrastructure to support the holistic assessment. The preparatory phase is structure along three distinct but interlinked projects: consolidation and development of indicators (approved at HOD 57-2019), establishing and improving data flows (in principle approved at HOD 57-2019, pending funding), and refining and further developments of the assessments. The preparatory phase is proposed to run from the beginning of 2020-to the end of 2021, in a staggered structure and this work is further outlined in document 5-11.
- **A HOLAS III assessment**, consisting of data collection, indicator evaluations, integrated assessments and report production, would begin in late 2021 and run to the end of 2023, with the bulk of results and supporting material ready and approved by the end of 2022.

The provisional plan for HOLAS III assessment process as well as the associated preliminary timeline, as included in this document, have been endorsed by GEAR 20-2019, STATE&CONSERVATION 11-2019 and GEAR 21-2019. HOD 57-2019 also welcomed the proposed provisional timeline and preliminary plan outlining work leading up to the publication of the State of the Baltic Sea report, and acknowledged that the plan is a living document and that changes might occur as the process is further refined

HOD 57-2019 took note that, while Poland in general supports the plans, they retained their study reservation on the proposed assessment period and that Russia placed a study reservation on the preliminary plan. The

meeting invited the Secretariat to be in direct contact with the respective Contracting Parties to find a constructive way forward, and for Russia and Poland to clarify their positions by end of January 2020, with the aim to submit the preliminary plan and associated documents for approval to HELCOM 41-2020, thus enabling the work to continue. Poland has since confirmed that they lift their study reservation.

The plan and timeline contained in this document retains the general overall structure of the work leading up to the publication of the State of the Baltic Sea report as presented at HOD 57-2019. However, to facilitate the work leading up to HELCOM 41-2020 and in the effort to accommodate the Russian position expressed at HOD 57-2029, the two phases proposed as part of HOLAS III have now been separated into two separate work processes. The direct mention of HOLAS III has been removed from the titles etc for the preparatory work process.

Following consultation with representative experts whom have expressed strong concern regarding possible difficulty in reporting 2021 data, as well as with the contracting party identified as having the most stringent timeline requirements regarding national consultation, the preliminary timeline presented in this document has also been slightly modified from the timeline presented at HOD 57-2019. This has been done to better accommodate for data collection as well as for extended approval periods of the results and products. Should the provisional plan be approved a more specific timeline for the HOLAS III assessment will be developed.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- approve the proposed provisional timeline and preliminary plan, noting that changes might occur as the process is further refined.

Background and provisional draft timeline

Early planning for the HOLAS III process has been identified as important for the successful implementation of the next holistic assessment, but also for a number of related HELCOM processes. These include consolidation and further development of indicators, improving dataflows, improvements and further developments of the cumulative impacts and economic and social analysis and to ensure the continued policy relevance of the work and the assessments. These preparatory work processes are outlined in document 5-11.

Some of the main points which have been identified and incorporated into the HOLAS III assessment are as follows:

- **Only one iteration of the assessment is to be done.**
- Ensure **clear structure and timelines for approval processes** to avoid iterative assessment runs.
- Prepare and approve the thematic assessments and supporting material prior to starting work on the summary report.
- Where possible **follow the general structure outlined under HOLAS II.**
- Consider the **timeline for MSFD** article 8 reporting.
- Consider the **need for national consultations** for CPs who are also EU member states.

Following the wishes expressed by the Contracting Parties the provisional plan contained in this document encompasses only one iteration of the assessment and follows the general structure agreed on under HOLAS II. This document outlines the proposed main steps of HOLAS III in more detail as well as some key points that need to be considered early in the planning process.

The Secretariat has prepared a draft preliminary timeline outlining the timing of the various stages of the planned work processes which links the work planned under the three support projects to that of the HOLAS III assessment (please see figure 1 in document 5-11).

HOLAS III Assessment

Provisional timeline and preliminary plan for HOLAS III

The planning for HOLAS III needs to be done within the framework delineated by the BSAP and in accordance with the needs of the Contracting Parties with respect to other international commitments. This places some limitations on how dynamic the HOLAS III process can be and necessitates that some trade-offs be considered early in the process. It also sets hard deadlines which need to be met in order to optimize the added value and to make full use of the HOLAS III work. Efforts have been made to take these considerations into account when developing the provisional plan contained in this document.

One such consideration is the inclusion of 2016 (a data year which was already included in HOLAS II) in the assessment period for HOLAS III. This would be done in order to achieve the required 6-year assessment period while still ensuring that the results are made available for use to the CPs in a timely fashion and that only one iteration of the assessment is done. The repeated use of the year 2016 would be clearly indicated in any subsequent reporting. In relation to the use of 2016 also for HOLAS III the State and Conservation WG has invited GEAR WG to clarify whether, for those CPs that are also EU member states, there are any possible issues with reporting 2016 data to the EU Commission twice, both as regards MSFD requirements and as regards possible technical challenges. The State and Conservation WG also asked that the effect on the assessment of including the same year twice be explored during the assessment process, to properly account for any possible effects.

Another consideration is the likelihood that data for the year 2021 will only be available for a limited number of data-strands, due to the comparatively fast turnaround (approximately 1 year) from collection

to reporting in 2022. A detailed analysis based on national data streams and ICES and HELCOM procedure is needed in order to identify for which parameters it will be difficult to report data in time for the assessment in 2022. The Secretariat is looking into performing such an analysis and will invite the CPs to provide information regarding their national dataflow timelines for each strand, in the effort to obtain an overview of for what 2021 data barriers might exist, and plan accordingly. Another possible step to alleviate the data reporting constraints is to clearly identify and communicate the minimum requirements for supporting information needed for data reporting by e.g. ICES prior to data reporting taking place in order to speed up the reporting. Following discussion in STATE&CONSERVATION 11-2019 both of these strands have been included in the HELCOM Data Flow project plan provisionally approved at HOD 57-2019.

Input and information related to the HOLAS III process brought forward by the HELCOM Expert and Working Groups have, as far as possible, been included in the plan and timeline outlined in this document. More specific details raised under these processes will need to be considered throughout the HOLAS III process.

Proposed Timing and Work Strands

The proposed work strands under the HOLAS III assessment and their respective timing can be found in figure 1. This timeline has been elaborated based on input from the HELCOM experts and WG, as well as the timeline for reporting of Art. 8 under the MSF, for those Contracting Parties who are also EU Member States. The proposed timing of the work in the assessment phase has, as far as possible, been planned to ensure that the assessment results and supporting material are in place for approval in time to make them available for national consultation and reporting purposes under MSFD.

In the preliminary assessment timeline, data collection and approval take place prior to indicator evaluation, which in turn is planned to be approved prior to running the integrated assessments. The workflow is planned to focus on production and approval of thematic assessments and other supporting material prior to the work on the summary report commencing (for an overview see workflow chart in figure 2). The overall process strives to give as clear a structure and timeline for approval processes of the respective products as possible. Overall the project plan strives to have assessment results and supporting material in place for approval to make them available for national reporting purposes (see figure 1 for an overview of the provisional timeline).

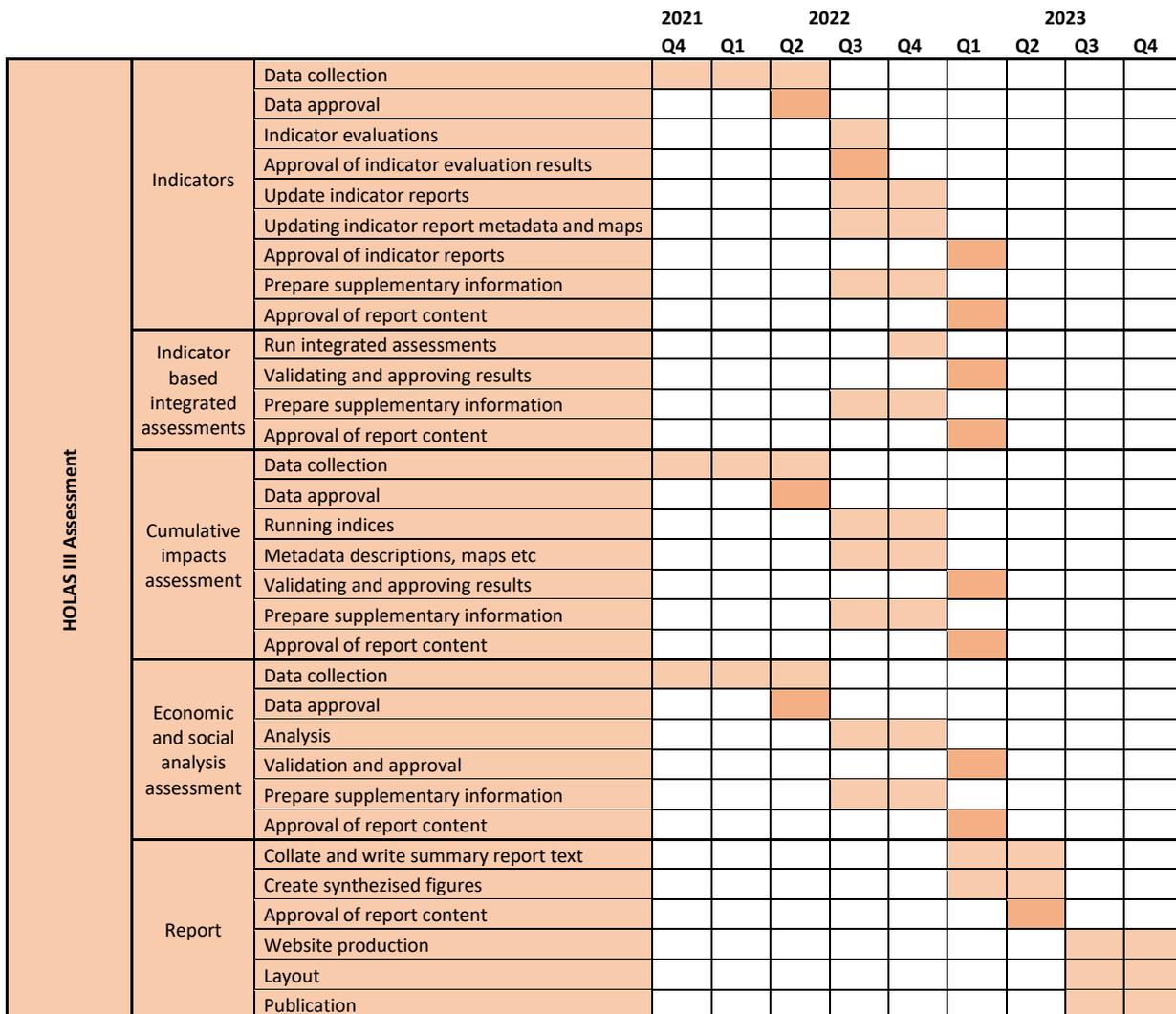


Figure 1. Gantt chart of HOLAS III assessment. Darker shades denote approval processes under each workstrand.

Proposed Process and Workflow of the HOLAS III assessment

The proposed process and workflow of the HOLAS III assessment is illustrated in figure 4. Each stage of the process is followed by an approval step, with the aim to minimize the risk for ripple effects from changes in one stage affecting consecutive stages and the subsequent need for repeated assessments. It also gives each consecutive stage a firm basis to build on and gives more freedom for e.g. national consultations for those Contracting Parties who are also EU Member States and might wish to use results in their national reporting.

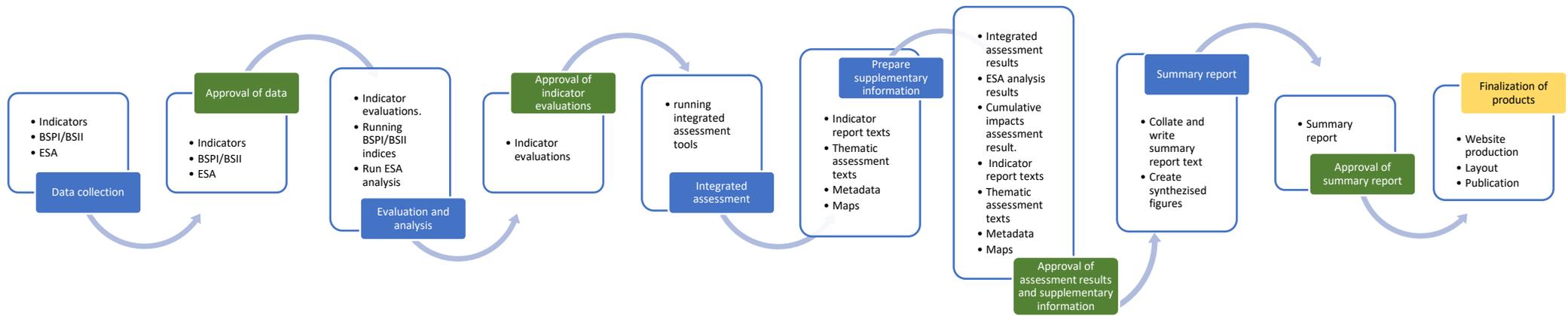


Figure 2. Proposed process and workflow for HOLAS III