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Background

This document summarizes the status of the ongoing HELCOM projects and external projects with HELCOM involvement, with a focus on their main achievements and outcomes during 2020.

Action requested

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

A. On-going projects within HELCOM

1. Specification of the implementation of the remaining tasks the HELCOM Project Operationalization of the nutrient reduction scheme follow-up system (MAI-CART OPER), 2015-2017 with extension until 2020 due to delayed funding.

The Project was accepted and considered as accomplished by the Pressure Working Group in May-June 2020. We are now in the process of publishing its final report.

The project will be accomplished in accordance with the initial terms of reference with minor modifications. The following remaining project tasks will be accomplished:

1. Finalizing of the module for statistical evaluations of trends and fulfilment.

Due to the complexity of the statistical methodology and involvement of manual operation e.g. data inspection and selection of parameter, full automation of the statistical evaluation of PLC data is not technically feasible. The following operations will be fully automated:

- Streamlined production of inputs to the statistical tool from the data handling tools (2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) excluding any manual operations;
- Production of assessment graphics and tables combining time-series from the data handling tools and the results from the semi-manual statistical operations.

2. Integration of the modules into a software tool to enable their use in a single context.

The task is partly performed. The remaining modules will be integrated into the software tool, except for the Module for statistical evaluations of trends and fulfilment. As long as statistical evaluation procedures imply manual operations the module will be integrated to the extent which is technically feasible.

3. Technical documentation.

The documentation will include description of elaborated procedures and produced codes as well as descriptions of user interfaces and tools. Publication of useful routines as open-source resources, e.g. GitHub.com or other relevant homepages, is also possible.

The contract on implementation of the above-listed tasks was signed in November 2018.

The project was accomplished in 2020. The final report including description of elaborated procedures and produced codes as well as descriptions of user interfaces and tools was submitted to the Pressure Working Group and approved via correspondence.

2. The Seventh Baltic Sea Pollution Load Compilation (PLC-7), 2017-2020

Project Manager: Mr. Lars Svendsen, Denmark

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Dmitry Frank-Kamenetsky, Professional Secretary

Pollution load data are an integral part of the HELCOM assessment system, focusing on annual and periodic assessments of inputs of nutrients and selected hazardous substances. The overall objective of the assessment is to follow up implementation of the HELCOM nutrient reduction scheme through regular update of pressure indicator reports on progress towards fulfilment of Maximum Allowable Inputs of nutrients (MAI) and an assessment of progress towards implementation of Country Allocated Reduction Targets (CART). Nonetheless, the PLC-7 assessment also has a specific focus on source apportionment and effectiveness of measures to reduce input of nutrients and selected hazardous substances. The PLC-7 assessment will be made in 2019 based on the monitoring data from 2017, which will also serve those

Contracting Parties that are EU Member States for their next generation river basin management plans under WFD in 2019/2020.

The expected results are:

- The PLC assessment data set based on annual and periodic reports of water- and airborne inputs of nutrients and selected hazardous substances from 1995 to 2017 (periodic for 2017);
- The updated HELCOM Core Pressure Indicator on nutrient inputs (update of MAI fulfilment follow-up) covering data from 1995 to 2017;
- The updated scientific report on follow-up progress toward national reduction targets for nutrients, CART follow-up assessment, covering data from 1995 to 2017;
- A thematic report on sources of nutrients;
- A thematic report on effectiveness of measures to reduce nutrient inputs to the Baltic Sea;
- A thematic report on input of hazardous substances;
- Executive summary of Seventh Baltic Sea Pollution Load Compilation (PLC-7) including policy messages (also on CART);
- A report on intercalibration on heavy metals and nutrients between at least 1-2 laboratories from each Contracting Party conducting chemical analysis;
- Updated PLC guidelines on nutrients and selected heavy metals, including updated statistical methodologies used for PLC and MAI/CART assessments.

The PLC-7 project was launched in June 2017. Six project meetings have been organized since launching of the project.

The following project tasks have been recently accomplished:

- A report on intercalibration on heavy metals and nutrients between at least 1-2 laboratories from each Contracting Party conducting chemical analysis;
- Updated PLC guidelines on nutrients and selected heavy metals, including updated statistical methodologies used for PLC and MAI/CART assessments were approved by HELCOM 40-2019.
- Annual update HELCOM Core Pressure Indicator on nutrient inputs (update of MAI fulfilment follow-up) covering data from 1995 to 2017;
- Update of the report on follow up progress toward national reduction targets for nutrients, CART follow-up assessment, covering data from 1995 to 2017;

In addition, a scientific paper "[Statistical aspects in relation to Baltic Sea pollution load compilation](#)" has been recently published by DCE – Danish Centre for Environment and Energy.

Since September 2020, the major project activities have been taken over by the PLC-8 project. The following thematic reports have been endorsed by the PLC-8 project implementation group and will be submitted to PRESSURE 14-2021 for acceptance:

- Thematic report on input of hazardous substances;
- Input of nutrients by 7 big rivers.

Delivery of the thematic reports on sources of nutrients and evaluation of effectiveness of measures to reduce nutrient inputs to the Baltic Sea are postponed to autumn 2021 due to the delay of national periodic data reporting. The same applies to the executive summary summarizing key messages from all thematic reports.

In addition to the major project deliverables, the PLC-7 project produces a background report, summarizing information on geographical and meteorological parameters affecting nutrient inputs and related human activities. A report on methodologies applied for the assessment will also be published to ensure transparency of the assessment data.

3. Operationalizing HELCOM core indicators (HELCOM CORE INDICATORS), 2018-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Owen Rowe, Project Coordinator

The HELCOM core indicators (as well as pre-core or those tested) form a vital part of the holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea. These indicators are included in the 2018 State of the Baltic Sea report, produced within the HOLAS II project. The indicators provide essential information for the report text and overall holistic assessment. Core indicators are used in the integrated assessments of biodiversity, eutrophication and hazardous substances, with other less developed indicators (e.g. pre-core or tested) included with a descriptive approach to support the overall report.

The indicators are based on regionally agreed threshold values, proposed by experts and endorsed at the higher levels of the HELCOM structure (e.g. via State and Conservation and at the Heads of Delegation). Currently there are 37 [indicators](#) which were used within the State of the Baltic Sea report, 15 of which address biodiversity, 9 of which address eutrophication, 2 of which address maritime issues, and 11 of which address hazardous substances. A number of these, for example the HELCOM indicator for metals, separately address multiple related compounds within a single indicator. Furthermore, there are several other indicator-related topics (i.e. pressure or status evaluation) that were addressed within the State of the Baltic Sea report, though data or agreed threshold values may not have been available to produce a defined and agreed operational indicator at that time.

The catalogue of HELCOM indicators (core, pre-core, candidate and tested) has been reviewed both by a pre-filling exercise against policy requirements, and from a technical perspective via expert groups that host them. This process was supported by two workshops, the second of which developed workplans per indicator theme (e.g. benthic habitats, hazardous substances, etc) and identified what could technically be achieved by HOLAS III based on the proposed policy priority areas.

The summarized outcome of the overall process was approved by HOD 57-2019 ([Document 4-20 Future work on HELCOM Indicators, Outcomes paragraph 4.46-4.51](#)). Technical development work is currently underway within the expert groups, in cases supported by HELCOM and external projects (e.g. Baltic Data Flows, MetDev, HELCOM BLUES), and developments will be reported to relevant HELCOM Working Groups.

The indicator manual developed as part of this project was approved for publication (HOD 59-2020, Outcomes paragraph 6.83) and is [now available online](#).

4. Updating of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP UP), 2018-2021

At the HELCOM Secretariat: Ms. Susanna Kaasinen, Associate Professional Secretary

The overall goal of the project is to support and facilitate the work of the Contracting Parties to update the BSAP in line with the Ministerial mandate and the guidance agreed by HELCOM 39-2018 and the [Strategic Plan for the BSAP update](#) agreed by HOD 54-2018. The work within the project is mainly carried out by the Secretariat as well as Contracting Parties taking lead roles for specific topics or themes. The progress is continuously reported to the HODs that provide the overall guidance for the BSAP update.

In 2020, the so called 'renaissance phase' began. The new actions proposed to be included in the updated BSAP were reviewed by the Working Groups and evaluated in dedicated BSAP UP workshops. Also, the Contracting Parties agreed in principle on the existing actions that are to be transferred to the updated Plan. The drafting of the introductory texts for the updated BSAP started in summer 2020 facilitated by the Ad hoc Drafting Group for the Updated Baltic Sea Action Plan and the Segment Teams.

The analysis of sufficiency of existing measures to improve the state of the Baltic Sea by the HELCOM SOM Platform and ACTION project was completed. The HELCOM SOM Platform, which guides the SOM analysis, held three meetings in 2020; [HELCOM SOM Platform 3-2020](#), [HELCOM SOM Platform 4-2020](#), [HELCOM SOM Platform 5-2020](#).

As part of the BSAP update the data base and associated visualisation of status of implementation of HELCOM actions was improved through the further development of the HELCOM Explorer. The changes to the updated Explorer were implemented by the Secretariat in spring and summer 2020 and the new [HELCOM Explorer](#) was launched in the beginning of autumn 2020.

5. Project for Baltic-wide assessment of coastal fish communities in support of an ecosystem-based management (HELCOM FISH-PRO III), 2018-2023

Project Manager: Mr. Jens Olsson, Sweden

At HELCOM Secretariat: Ms. Petra Kääriä, Associate Professional Secretary

This project continues the work of the latest HELCOM FISH-PRO II project, which was completed in 2018. FISH-PRO III aims to support ecosystem-based management of coastal fish communities in the Baltic Sea coastal countries by further developing regionally harmonized monitoring and assessment methodologies, conducting assessments of coastal fish and by proposing ecosystem-based management measures.

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 threshold and reference values;
- Recommendations: proposing ecosystem-based measures on management of coastal fish communities in the Baltic Sea for the consideration of HELCOM Fish and State and Conservation groups, as appropriate, and provide advice to national authorities and ongoing HELCOM work on implementation of coastal fish related actions in the BSAP.

During 2020 the project has *inter alia* completed the following activities:

- Second meeting of the project, 11-13 February 2020, Vilnius, Lithuania;
- Annual (data) updating of coastal fish core indicators for HELCOM coastal fish monitoring areas in the COOL database (<http://bio.helcom.fi/apex/f?p=108:5>);
- Continuation of the work on developing additional indicators for coastal fish (i.e. size-related indicators);
- Considering the need for developing indicators for the status and extent of suitable habitats for coastal fish, and potential use of alternative data sources for coastal fish assessments besides fisheries-independent coastal fish monitoring;
- Updating national information on the coastal recreational fisheries;
- Intermediate status assessment of coastal fish (to be presented at the FISH PRO III meeting 2021);
- Contribution to the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan;
- Preparation for the HOLAS III assessment, including updating the methodology for status assessment of coastal fish and developing size related indicators;
- Contribution to fish and fisheries-related parameters for the draft Climate Change Fact Sheet by EN CLIME;
- Dissemination of the work within HELCOM ACTION to the HELCOM FISH PRO III project.
- Input to the process of updating HELCOM monitoring program

During 2021 the work within the HELCOM FISH PRO III project will focus on the following activities:

- Third meeting of the project, online, 23-25 March 2021;
- Annual (data) updating of coastal fish core indicators for HELCOM coastal fish monitoring areas in the COOL database (<http://bio.helcom.fi/apex/f?p=108:5>);
- Contribution to the preparation for HOLAS III (agreeing on which indicators with associated thresholds to use and which areas to focus on);
- Inclusion of new possible monitoring areas currently not included in the work of the project;
- Considering the need for using alternative data sources for coastal fish assessments besides fisheries independent coastal fish monitoring;
- Starting the 4th Thematic Assessment for Coastal fish;

- Consideration of results of intermediate status assessment;
- Continuing the work on developing current and additional indicators for coastal fish (i.e. size-related indicators).
- Discussion on increasing predation pressure by seals on coastal fish;
- Updating information and presentation of national projects on coastal recreational fisheries;
- Contribution to HELCOM BLUES;
- Updating the coastal fish monitoring guideline with possible new Lithuanian and German data.

6. Revision of the HELCOM Response Manual, 2019-2020

At HELCOM Secretariat: Ms. Reita Waara, Project Researcher

The HELCOM Response Manual consists of three volumes and has been updated several times over the years. The present state of the Manual has been discussed during the meetings of the Response Working Group and its subsidiary groups, and the Contacting Parties have expressed the view that the Manual should be more operational and easier to use. The present Manual is almost 450 pages long and there is a certain overlap between the three volumes.

During the project, which was approved by HOD 55-2018 and financed by Finland and Sweden, the Manual was thoroughly revised and updated, and Volumes 1 and 3 of the Manual were combined. The work was carried out in liaison with national experts and the HELCOM Response Working Group.

The draft revised Manual was approved by RESPONSE 28-2020 and is expected to be adopted by HELCOM 42-2021.

7. HELCOM Data Flows, 2020-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Joni Kaitaranta, Data Coordinator

The project is targeted at improving the data flows so that the HELCOM data collection would better support core indicators and supporting assessments (e.g. Baltic Sea Pressure Index/Baltic Sea Impact Index and Economic and Social Analyses). The project builds on lessons learnt from the Second State of the Baltic Sea report (HOLAS II 2018 and 2017) and link to the work on consolidating and further developing indicators. The project will work closely together with HELCOM database hosting organizations, e.g. ICES for oceanographic, contaminant and biodiversity related data flows.

The aim of the Data Flows project is to carry out an in-depth gap-analysis of current reporting data compared to the commitments outlined in the Monitoring guidelines and the Monitoring manual and as required by indicator assessments, including also data flows feeding into cumulative impact assessments and economic and social analysis.

The project has developed a data flow plan for HOLAS III (including planned data call, approved in HOD 57-2020, and utilization of existing data flows) based on input received on optimal reporting deadlines as well as seeking solutions to reduce the need of ad-hoc data calls to minimum by seeking solution for regular and more frequent (annual or biannual where possible) reporting data flows.

The project also focuses on looking for options for developing flexible ways of making data available/reporting data to reduce the required workload of the national data providers. In addition, the project will further develop data management solutions in the Secretariat to reduce resources required for manual data processing.

8. Quality assurance of phytoplankton monitoring & assessment in the Baltic Sea (HELCOM PEG QAA), 2020-2022

Chair: Ms. Iveta Jurgensone, Latvia

At HELCOM Secretariat: Ms. Laura Kaikkonen, Associate Professional Secretary

The project is a continuation of Quality assurance of phytoplankton monitoring in the Baltic Sea (HELCOM PEG QA) which was implemented in 2017-2019.

The main target of the project is to ensure and maintain a high quality standard of the international Baltic Sea regional phytoplankton monitoring within the HELCOM COMBINE Programme. Furthermore, the project acts as a platform to bring the work on phytoplankton indicators forward. This should be achieved by: maintaining annual training courses (workshop), maintaining the phytoplankton biovolume list, participation in intercalibration, maintaining the HELCOM guidelines for monitoring of phytoplankton species composition, abundance and biomass.

The project serves as a forum for discussion of phytoplankton indicators being developed in HELCOM and the results of the indicator evaluation of future HELCOM holistic assessments.

The main activities within the project are carried out at the annual workshops. The venue of the workshops will be rotate between the Contracting Parties and their marine laboratories. In 2020 the annual physical PEG meeting was postponed due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and as a consequence the 2020 project budget was not utilized and will be moved so that the current project is extended by one year to the year 2023. Suggested host countries are: Poland in 2021, Sweden (Umeå University) in 2022 and in 2023 Denmark. Intersessional activities will be organized if needed. PEG held an online meeting on the 24 September which focused on issues considered to be of greatest urgency, e.g. issues regarding data reporting to ICES, indicator related work.

9. The Eighth Baltic Sea Pollution Load Compilation (PLC-8), 2020-2024

Project Manager: Mr. Lars Svendsen, Denmark

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Dmitry Frank-Kamenetsky, Professional Secretary

The HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy and inclusion of the nutrient reduction scheme in the Baltic Sea Action Plan have created demands for the major PLC products: a pressure indicator report on progress towards fulfilment of Maximum Allowable Inputs of nutrients (MAI) and an assessment of progress towards national nutrient input ceilings (NIC).

In addition to the above-mentioned products, the PLC project compiles unique data on sources and pathways of nutrients to the Baltic Sea. This information creates a background for the identification of measures to mitigate environmental pressure caused by nutrient loads on the marine ecosystem and prioritization of sectors where these measures are to be applied. The data compiled by the project also serve for evaluation of environmental effects of applied measures bridging programmes of measures developed under various policies and their contribution to achieving ambitious environmental targets set by the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan.

The expected results are:

1. The PLC assessment data set based on annual and periodic reports of water- and airborne inputs of nutrients and selected hazardous substances from 1995 to 2022 (periodic for 2021).
2. Four annually updated HELCOM Core Pressure Indicator on nutrient inputs (update of MAI fulfilment follow-up) (1995-2019, 1995-2020, 1995-2021 and 1995-2022)
3. Two reports evaluating progress towards fulfilling NICs based on 2020 (data 1995-2020) and 2022 (1995-2022)
4. Four annual BSEF on waterborne nutrient inputs (1995-2019, 1995-2020, 1995-2021 and 1995-2022)
5. Updated report on methodologies used to follow up the HELCOM nutrient input reduction scheme.
6. Updated PLC background report.

7. A thematic report on sources of nutrients.
8. A thematic report on effectiveness of measures to reduce nutrients inputs to the Baltic Sea.
9. A thematic report on input of hazardous substances.
10. A thematic report on nutrient inputs by the major rivers.
11. Executive summary of Eighth Baltic Sea Pollution Load Compilation (PLC-8).
12. A report on intercalibration on heavy metals and nutrients between at least 1-2 laboratories from each Contracting Party conducting chemical analysis.
13. Updated PLC guidelines on nutrients and selected heavy metals, including updated statistical methodologies used for the assessments and updated statistical methodology report.

PLC-8 project activities are focussed on two tasks: update of the HELCOM PLC-water guideline and intercalibration of labs involved in the related monitoring.

10. Holistic Assessment Methodology Development Project (HELCOM MetDev), 2021-2022

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Juuso Haapaniemi, Project Researcher, Mr. Andžej Miloš, Data Developer and Mr. Kemal Pınarbaşı Project Researcher

The MetDev project, which targets the third and final step of the preparatory phase of HOLAS III for those tools or methods which are not directly indicator-driven, such as cumulative impacts and methods used for analysis of economic and social aspects, which underpin the holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea environment. The aim of the project is to ensure that the tools and methods used are fit for purpose and fully operational for the Third State of the Baltic Sea Assessment (HOLAS III). The project will build on lessons learnt from the Second State of the Baltic Sea report (HOLAS II 2018) as well as link closely and contribute to the work done under the two already approved preparatory projects, HELCOM Indicators and HELCOM DataFlow.

Consequently, the HELCOM MetDev project consists of two distinct work packages, corresponding to the two work strands for which further development would be beneficial:

Work package 1: Cumulative Impacts Assessment

Based on the outcome of the scoping and technical work done in 2020 the following priorities and associated tasks for further development for HOLAS III were identified:

- A. Capacity for subset analyses of any activity/pressure/impact/ecosystem component combinations;
- B. Improve sensitivity scores and matrices;
- C. Improve links between pressures and change in state;
- D. Linking back proportion of impact to the relevant human activity/ pressures/ecosystem component;
- E. Differentiate between direct and indirect pressures;
- F. Include temporal resolution (e.g. retrospective changes over time/within a year);
- G. Explore inclusion of antagonistic/synergistic effects of pressures and activities;
- H. Improved confidence assessment and presentation of uncertainties and assumptions;
- I. Validation of results;
- J. Other tool development;
- K. Other data development.

The work on further development of the cumulative impact assessment approach is closely tied to data availability and as such Work Package 1 is especially tightly linked to the work done under the HELCOM DataFlows project and a dynamic and close cooperation between WP1 and a number of the activities under the DataFlows project are foreseen. The first step was initiated in 2020 through a dedicated State and Conservation Working Group meeting to review and prioritize the need to update the various existing data layers included in the tool, consider the inclusion of existing data layers previously not included in the analyses and to consider and propose new data which could be included.

Much of the work under WP1 utilizes development efforts already available or underway for the various national tools available in the region, and to ensure synergies and alignment where possible, it is foreseen that small, targeted meetings or workshops focused on technical issues, involving relevant national experts, will be needed in 2021.

Work package 2: Economic and Social Analyses

The aim of the work package on ESA within MetDev is to further develop regional methods and results for economic and social analyses (ESA) to support the holistic assessment of the marine environment by addressing some of the shortcomings and development needs identified in previous regional ESA work. It builds on previous HELCOM experiences and work on ESA for the State of the Baltic Sea report in HOLAS II ([TAPAS](#) and [SPICE](#) projects, 2016-2018), maritime spatial planning ([Pan Baltic Scope project](#), 2018-2019) and analyses of existing and new measures to support the BSAP update ([ACTION](#) project and SOM Platform, 2019-2020), as well as reflects the [ToR](#) for HELCOM EN ESA and [Roadmap](#) for continued HELCOM work on ESA. Implementing ESA for HOLAS III as proposed here would meet some of the aims of the ESA roadmap.

The economic and social analyses (ESA) for the State of the Baltic Sea report in HOLAS II covered the entire Baltic Sea region but were limited to selected human activities (use of marine waters) and environmental themes/ecosystem services (cost of degradation). Furthermore, although a conceptual framework for linking the use of marine water and cost of degradation analyses was developed, they were conducted separately in HOLAS II due to lack of suitable data, approaches and resources, and the link between the environmental status assessment and ESA was missing. An important development area is the improved integration within the components of ESA, and between ESA and environmental assessments, which enables a meaningful evaluation of how the marine environment affects human welfare and ensures improved relevance of the assessment for future management.

These have been identified as priority areas for ESA in under the MetDev project:

- A. Improved integration of ESA and environmental assessments;
- B. Improved implementation of the ecosystem services approach;
- C. Pilot assessment of the prospects of marine ecosystem accounting;
- D. Driver indicators.

Work has commenced on all tasks under the Work Package and communication established with both global and EU level entities working with similar topics to identify approaches and best practices. An initial proposal will be presented at meetings of the State and Conservation Working Group and the Gear Group in spring.

11. Third Holistic Assessment of the State of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III), 2021-2023

At HELCOM Secretariat: Ms. Jannica Haldin, Professional Secretary.

The HOLAS III project gives an update on the overall state of ecosystem health in the Baltic Sea. The assessment follows up on the goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and is developed so that the results can support reporting under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) by those Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention that are also EU member states. The project will commence in October/November 2021 with reporting of national data by the Contracting Parties. The work builds on the HOLAS II approach and on the development and improvement work taking place under the HELCOM Core Indicators, HELCOM DataFlow Project and HELCOM MetDev projects, the targeted expertise gap filling exercises, as well as the partially externally funded BalticData Flows, HELCOM BLUES and the PreEMPT projects.

Outputs of the project are foreseen to include

- Updated and expanded spatial pressure and impact tool;

- Updated integrated assessment tools;
- Updated and expanded methodology for economic and social analyses;
- Updated data and metadata for the relevant assessment dataflows;
- Indicator evaluation results and reports;
- Five thematic assessments (Biodiversity, Contaminants, Eutrophication, Economic and Social Analyses and Spatial Pressures and Impacts);
- Summary report, with improved holistic perspectives and strengthened links to policy work;
- Dedicated website

In 2020 a specified timeline was agreed for the work (HOD 58-2020) and an initial resource estimation produced, as well as a first proposal for the work process, presented to HOD 59-2020. The work process proposal has since been modified based on input from the Contracting Parties and submitted for approval to this meeting. This work process plan is intended to help guide preparations and implementation for the HOLAS III assessment phase, both at the national and regional level, including securing and timing the necessary resources for each of the steps of the process. It also functions as a basis for guiding work currently ongoing under the preparatory phase. An updated resource estimation will be prepared for HOD 60-2021.

B. Projects with HELCOM involvement

1. Development, promotion and sustainable management of the Baltic Sea Region as a coastal fishing tourism destination (RETROUT), 2017-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Henri Jokinen, Project Manager

RETROUT is a 3-year (10/2017– 3/2021) project focusing on sea trout rivers, sustainable trout fishing tourism and trout river restoration in the Baltic Sea area. The project has four Work Packages (WPs) addressing different aspects of the project scope, including the biological basis for trout fishing through stock and river habitat status assessment and management and river restoration practices, policy reform studies and dialogue, and actual development and promotion of coastal fishing tourism destinations. HELCOM is the lead of WP4 on status and management of sea trout rivers and stocks.

The project comprises 14 partners from the Baltic Sea countries (Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) including HELCOM as an intergovernmental organization. Stockholm County Administrative Board is the lead partner responsible for the overall project coordination. RETROUT is a flagship project of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Policy Area Bioeconomy. The 3.2 Meur project is co-financed by Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme under the Natural resources priority field.

The main aim of RETROUT Work Package 4 (WP 4), led by HELCOM, is to compile information on the status of sea trout rivers and stocks, evaluate different river restoration methods and solutions, and to recommend best practices and management options. The assessment of status of sea trout rivers and stocks will support national implementation of HELCOM Recommendation 32-33/1 “Conservation of Baltic salmon and sea trout populations by the restoration of their river habitats and management of river fisheries”. The work on river restoration best practices and recommendations will be synthesized in a HELCOM BSEP publication, and it can contribute to the updating of HELCOM Recommendation 32-33/1, with regard to addition of guidelines on restoration practices.

Activities and progress within WP4 during 2020: Due to the pandemic since spring 2020, all project meetings have been held online, including monthly WP 4 working group meetings as well as the project’s annual partnership meeting. During summer 2020 the project was granted a 6-month prolongation in implementation time to help overcome the challenges caused by the pandemic. The project duration was

thus prolonged until the end of March 2021. Recent activities and progress have been reported to FISH 11-2020 (document 7-2) and FISH 12-2020 (document 7-1). The RETROUT final conference “Blue Growth in Practices – connecting sustainable fishing tourism and healthy environments” was held on 17 February as an online event. The main activities during 2020 were the following:

- In general, and especially regarding activities planned as or depending on active physical participation, the project’s advancements has suffered from the ongoing pandemic resulting in various changes of plans and inevitable delays complicating the project work.
 - HELCOM has continued to lead and coordinate the work of WP 4, including strategic planning, implementation, and external and internal communication.
- All tasks and deliverables have advanced towards finalisation by the end of the project in end-March 2021. The fourth annual RETROUT partnership meeting was held in in November 2020.

2. Completing management options in the Baltic Sea Region to reduce risk of invasive species introduction by shipping (COMPLETE), 2017-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Ms. Marta Ruiz, Associate Professional Secretary and Project Researcher: Mr. Manuel Sala Perez

[COMPLETE](#) (2017-2021) is an EU INTERREG Baltic Sea Region project aimed at delivering knowledge and tools to implement HELCOM’s roadmap for regional implementation of the outstanding issues on the BWMC in the Baltic Sea and also assist relevant authorities in implementing Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council, aiming to protect native biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The project consists of six work packages:

- WP1 Project Management and Administration;
- WP2 Guidelines for surveillance and monitoring program of non-indigenous species;
- WP3 Ballast water risk assessment and management systems;
- WP4 Evidence-based options for biofouling management in the Baltic Sea Region;
- WP5 Databases and user-friendly information support;
- WP6 Stakeholder involvement and strategy development processes.

HELCOM leads Activity A3.2: Advanced risk assessment tool under the HELCOM-OSPAR Joint Harmonised Procedure. Additionally, HELCOM is also involved in the following Activities (A):

- A2.4: Integrated monitoring system of non-indigenous species introductions by shipping and other vectors;
- A3.1: Target species selection criteria and risk assessments;
- A5.1: Information system on non-indigenous species and harmful aquatic organisms and pathogens;
- A6.2: Engaging stakeholders into development and use of project products;
- A6.3: Roadmap proposal for harmonized biofouling management in the Baltic Sea Region.

Activities in the project are evolving as planned with minor changes resulting from the pandemic situation. In 2020 the project informed MARITIME 20-2020 ([document 4-3](#)) of its status providing also a proposal for a HELCOM Regional Baltic Biofouling Management Roadmap ([document 4-1](#)). The project also reported to TG Ballast 11-2020 in connection to (i) the further development of the Early Warning System ([document 3-1](#)), (ii) the previously mentioned proposal for a Biofouling Roadmap ([document 7-2 Rev.1](#)), and (III) the final version with the technical updates and modifications to the online decision support tool ([document 5-1](#)) which has now replaced the previous version. In addition, the project presented a proposal for a HELCOM monitoring programme on NIS to STATE & CONSERVATION 12-2020 ([document 3MA-13-Rev. 1](#)).

In 2020 and the beginning of 2021, the project consortium moved the project meetings to online due to the pandemic situation. Several on-line meetings were held among involved partners to discuss specific activities within the project. Moreover, the final conference was held online as a webinar on 9-10 February 2021. In

addition, the project continuation (COMPLETE +), which will implement outcomes of the COMPLETE project, will start on April 2021 with a nine months duration, and the kick-off meeting will be held online on 21 April 2021.

3. Clean Shipping Project Platform (CSHIPP), 2018 - 2020

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Florent Nicolas, Project Coordinator

The Clean Shipping Project Platform (CSHIPP) project brought together projects and organisations focused on enhancing clean shipping in the Baltic Sea Region. The objective of CSHIPP was to increase the impact of and connect the dots between the six projects working for clean shipping. CSHIPP synthesises the project results to provide a more holistic perspective in a concise and easily comprehensible format.

The activities of CSHIPP revolve around two key themes: the environmental effects of shipping and the business potential of clean shipping in the BSR. By discussing these themes both separately and simultaneously, CSHIPP emphasises that environmentally friendly shipping and profitable business support rather than exclude one another.

HELCOM led the work related to drafting policy recommendations from the outputs of the different projects involved in the platform. The topics of the draft recommendations were discussed during a dedicated policy workshop held back-to-back to the second international Shipping and Environment Conference in Gothenburg on 4 and 5 September 2019. The draft recommendations were submitted to the Maritime Working Group. HELCOM was also involved in building an online dissemination tool that will provide great amount of information and data to users such as researchers, students or general audience about clean shipping in the Baltic Sea Region.

- In 2020, the HELCOM Secretariat published outputs of the project. The [document 12-8](#) submitted to the Maritime Working Group summarized these outputs: An [animated clip](#) and a [story map](#) on CSHIPP and clean shipping in the Baltic Sea Region (Group of activities 3.1 “Online dissemination of the clean Shipping Data”);
- The policy guidance (Group of activities 5.2 “Influencing policies and policy makers”) on [scrubber wash waters](#) and on [shore power](#).

A policy webinar “International clean shipping policies – implementation, enforcement and environmental consequences” was held online on 27 November 2020. An information document about this webinar as well as on a policy brief on research gaps will be submitted at a later stage to GREEN TEAM 5-2021 and MARITIME 21-2021.

4. Horizontal Action "Spatial Planning" Support 3 (HASPS 3), 2018-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Florent Nicolas, Project Coordinator – Data Expert and Mr. Riku Varjopuro, MSP adviser (until end of 2020)

HASPS 3 aims to support objectives assigned in the Horizontal Action “Spatial Planning” of the EUSBSR and is co-funded by the EU Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme. It is co-led by HELCOM and VASAB and it builds on the coordination activities started within the previous HASPS projects: HASPS (2015/2016) and HASPS 2 (2016/2018).

The main focus of the project is to improve coordination, stakeholder involvement and achievements of the strategic targets of the HA Spatial Planning by enhancing the links between the HA and implementation of the Regional Baltic MSP Roadmap and the EU MSP Directive (for EU Member States), strengthening an outreach and integration of the HA to other regional and European activities, and promoting and enabling future flagship projects.

HELCOM is involved in the tasks of facilitating coordination and communication related to the work of the HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG and potential links with other HELCOM Groups and sub-Groups. HELCOM will also coordinate the work to describe possible approaches for understanding coherence of Maritime Spatial Plans and to identify the minimum requirements for preparing and implementing MSP across the borders. These are tasks described in the work plan of the HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG for 2020-2021.

5. Sustainable manure and nutrient management for reduction of nutrient loss in the Baltic Sea Region (SuMaNu), 2018-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Ms. Susanna Kaasinen, Associate Professional Secretary, Ms. Kaisa Riiko, Project Coordinator

The SuMaNu project platform gathers and synthesizes the best practices and recommendations on sustainable nutrient management from the following projects: Manure Standards (MS), Baltic Slurry Acidification (BSA), GreenAgri (GA) and PROMISE (PR). Also, the results of previous manure-related projects are used.

Based on the project outcomes, joint policy recommendations are created. The recommendations can be used nationally and they will feed into Baltic Sea region-wide cooperation in HELCOM to promote sustainable nutrient management and enhance nutrient recycling. The joint policy recommendations are made in cooperation with the target groups to make sure that they are useful for policy making and on the farm level. The SuMaNu project platform is co-financed by Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme.

HELCOM is leading the work package 3 "Policy recommendations for sustainable nutrient management and recycling". The outcomes of the work package support the elaboration of the Baltic Sea Regional Nutrient Recycling Strategy by 2020 and the update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan beyond 2021.

In 2020, the project continued drafting the policy recommendations on nutrient recycling to support the elaboration of the strategy and finalized the compilation of a synthesis of good agricultural practices from previous projects which were submitted to AGRI 10-2020. The project co-organized three international workshops, including the HELCOM Workshop on nutrient recycling measures, as well as a series of national workshops to present the draft policy recommendations and acquire feedback from the target groups.

6. Platform on Integrated Water Cooperation (BSR Water), 2018-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Dmitry Frank-Kamenetsky, Professional Secretary, Ms. Kaisa Riiko, Project Coordinator

BSR Water aims to enhance continuous cross-sectoral cooperation in the water management field that lasts beyond the time frame of a single project, providing a possibility for transnational exchange of experience, sharing of good practices and solutions, as well as a comprehensive overview of the current and future policy contexts and how they influence the situation in the BSR countries.

One of the goals of the BSR Water project is to create an interactive online water management platform called Baltic Smart Water Hub for international knowledge and expertise exchange. The other goal is to utilize the outcomes and practical findings of the contributing projects to facilitate the long-term development of regional environmental policy and recommendations which will further serve to strengthen the policy-practice link in implementation of advanced water protection measures.

HELCOM is responsible for the implementation of the WP4 of the project aimed at developing regional policy recommendations on nutrient recycling and developing recommendation on hazardous substances.

The project consortium consist of 8 partners: Union of the Baltic Cities, Sustainable Cities Commission c/o City of Turku; Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission (HELCOM); Berlin

University of Technology; University of Tartu; Gdansk University of Technology; SYKLI Environmental School of Finland; Riga City Council; City of Helsinki.

The project report on solutions for nutrient recycling in wastewater sector was submitted to PRESSURE 13-2020 and endorsed for publication. Project recommendations laid the basis for revision of HELCOM Recommendation 23/5 on storm water management, which was endorsed by PRESSURE 13-2020 and is pending adoption by HELCOM 42-2021.

In 2021 project will continue drafting policy messages for nutrient recycling in the wastewater sector and report on micropollutants in WWTP effluents.

7. The Baltic and North Sea Coordination and Support Action (BANOS CSA) ‘Towards a Baltic and North Sea Research and Innovation Programme’, 2018-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Jannica Haldin, Professional Secretary

The [consortium](#) of the Baltic and North Sea Coordination and Support Action (BANOS CSA) represents the leading research and innovation funders of 12 EU member states and associated states surrounding the Baltic Sea and the North Sea whose representatives form both the highest decision making body, the BANOS CSA Steering Committee, as well as the 'tasks' oriented Forum of Programme Managers. The work is led by Baltic Organisations' Network for Funding Science (BONUS EEIG), and HELCOM functions as a third party in the form of one of four identified strategic partners who work in close collaboration with the Consortium and are observers in the BANOS CSA Steering Committee and Forum of Programme Managers.

HELCOM has provided direct input to the BANOS Strategic Research Agenda through taking lead on drafting topics identified as relevant for HELCOM, contributed to project meetings and conferences etc. In 2021 it is foreseen that HELCOM will provide contribution to the BANOS final conference.

8. Western Mediterranean Region Marine Oil and HNS Pollution Cooperation (WestMOPoCO), 2018-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Markus Helavuori, Professional Secretary

The West MOPoCo project supports the West Mediterranean countries in strengthening their cooperation in the field of preparedness for and response to oil and Hazardous and Noxious Substances (HNS) marine pollution and in improving the quality and interoperability of their response capacities.

The Project is implemented through an inter-regional effort, including the participation of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC), the Bonn Agreement for the North Sea and the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) for the Baltic Sea. The project benefits from the technical support of expert partner institutions such as Cedre, ITOPF and the Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale (ISPRA).

West MOPoCo works towards three objectives: update of decision support tools, assessment of national oil spill contingency planning and strengthening of emergency procedures.

HOD 53-2017 agreed on HELCOM engagement in the joint project application to DG ECHO. As part of the work on updating decision support tools, HELCOM has been involved in the development of the draft Multi-regional Marine HNS Response Manual, which is expected to be adopted by HELCOM 42-2021. The HNS response Manual will replace the current HELCOM Response manual Volume 2.

9. Actions to evaluate and identify effective measures to reach GES in the Baltic Sea marine region (ACTION), 2019-2020

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Owen Rowe, Project Manager

The ACTION project is a HELCOM-coordinated project that is co-financed by the EU. The project started in January 2019 and ran for two years. The project is designed to contribute to the update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021 and could also be used by HELCOM Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States in updating and implementing their MSFD Programme of Measures.

The project evaluated the effectiveness of existing measures, focusing on several pertinent topics, such as: by-catch of mammals and birds, impacts on the seabed, marine protected areas, and eutrophication. These topics have been chosen based on identified priorities in the region, for example some of the main pressures on the Baltic Sea ecosystem identified in the [HELCOM State of the Baltic Sea report](#). In addition, the project analyzed the natural conditions that influence the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) in the Baltic Sea region, including impacts of projected changes in climate. Furthermore, the project developed an approach for regional sufficiency of measures (SOM) analysis to identify potential gaps in achieving GES, and estimate cost-effectiveness of tentative new measures to fill these gaps. The project aimed to utilize data driven analyses wherever possible, but expert based evaluations complemented existing data where required.

Work package 6 (SOM) developed an approach for assessing the sufficiency of measures across the region and a report on the cost-effectiveness of new measures. In addition to summary reports on these major topics a number of supporting and more detailed reports have also been developed covering specific topics (e.g. benthic habitats, input of nutrients, hazardous substances). Other work packages focused on more specific issues: WP1 – with one report on By-catch: identification of high-risk areas and mitigation measures, WP2 – with three reports addressing coastal restoration measures, spatial fisheries management approaches and an overview of current knowledge related to the assessment of benthic habitats and the seafloor, WP3 – resulting in one report that provides a methodology and proof of concept for assessing the management effectiveness of marine protected areas (MPAs), WP4 – resulting in three reports covering test cases and approaches to identify best measure, trends in nutrient inputs and a comparison between Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) nutrient targets, and WP5 – providing a report that evaluates natural conditions that cause lags in recovery towards GES, focusing on selected aspects of eutrophication, biodiversity and hazardous substances, and aiming to provide policy support for HELCOM Contracting parties that are also EU Member States.

The project project partners include: Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE), Technical University of Denmark (DTU), Aarhus University (AU), Tallinn University of Technology (TTU), The Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM), Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), University of Tartu (UT), and Klaipėda University, Marine Research Institute (KU).

The project will finalise its reporting at the end of March 2021.

10. Initiatives to remove microplastics before they enter the sea (FanPLESStic-sea), 2019-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Ms. Marta Ruiz, Associate Professional Secretary, and Ms. Matleena Vuola, Project Coordinator

FanPLESStic-sea is an EU INTERREG Baltic Sea Region project aimed at decreasing and removing microplastics in the Baltic Sea.

FanPLESStic-sea envisaged outputs are:

- A model to map, understand and visualize microplastic pathways that will be applied to the partners' cities and/or regions;
- Piloting of new technology i) for filtering out microplastics; ii) sustainable drainage solutions as means for removal of microplastics; and iii) to remove microplastics from storm water;
- Defining innovative governance frameworks and engaging a large range of players for the implementation of coordinated and cost-efficient measures resulting in locally adapted investment proposals/plans for each partner's region;
- Dissemination of project results, including reports on barriers and ways forward, to increase institutional capacity on up-stream and problem-targeted methods to remove microplastics.

In 2020, due to the difficulties and delays caused by COVID-19, mainly linked to envisaged microplastic sampling, the project was granted a prolongation of six months. Thus, it will end in December 2021. Therefore, the event to be organized by HELCOM, showing the outputs of the project has been postponed to November 2021 (tbc).

During 2020, the project had two online project partner meetings (23-24 March and 13 October), two steering committee meetings (25 March and 14 October) and two extraordinary steering committee meetings dealing with COVID-19 and the related prolongation (28 May and 10 June).

Following the required data compilation, work is progressing on the development of a microplastic flow model for the case scenario of a city.

Two outputs were made available in 2020: a [Review](#) on existing policies and research related to microplastics together with a [Policy brief](#) on the matter (available also in [Lithuanian](#) and [Russian](#)).

In addition, two policy briefs are in preparation based on information compiled and pilot testing in the project on microplastic removal technologies and traffic- related microplastics.

Finally, it is to point out the work done on project communication, which can be found in the [newsletters](#) (also a HELCOM [news item](#)) as well as a promotional [video](#) produced.

11. Strengthening the capacity of MSP stakeholders and decision makers: Project platform Capacity4MSP, 2019-2021

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Florent Nicolas, Project Coordinator – Data Expert and Mr. Riku Varjopuro, MSP adviser (until end of 2020)

The INTERREG-funded Project Platform aims to strengthen the capacity of maritime spatial planning stakeholders, policy- and decision-makers through intensified dialogue activities and amplifying gained knowledge in maritime spatial planning. Capacity4MSP builds on the results of the current and recently completed MSP projects and ongoing MSP processes in the Baltic Sea Region.

Capacity4MSP will create a practically oriented and interactive collaboration platform for knowledge exchange and intensified dialogue between MSP practitioners, policy- and decision-makers and stakeholders. It will increase the visibility and impact of projects, build up potential synergies, deepen and widen gained know-how by synthesizing, amplifying and transferring the project outcomes to new practical solutions. By collecting and discussing lessons learned in previous MSP projects and national MSP processes, project will ensure efficient and value-added knowledge-transfer within and outside the Region and across various sectors and governance levels.

The main project outputs:

1. Synthesis report based on outcomes of relevant MSP-related projects in correlation with ongoing MSP processes and activities in the BSR countries
2. Identified support mechanisms for the implementation of the MSP including:
 - 2.1. Report on identified support mechanisms for the implementation of MSP encompassing conclusions
 - 2.2. User guide and visualization material of BASEMAPS available for MSP data providers
 - 2.3. A proposal of an institutionalised tool for a regular follow up of the regional MSP commitments in the BSR
 - 2.4. MSP roadmap for Russia
3. Thematic multi-level and cross-sectoral workshops
4. Planners Forum meetings
5. Integrated report on MSP stakeholder involvement engagement
6. Final conference jointly organised with the 4th Baltic MSP Forum

The HELCOM Secretariat leads the tasks related to data for MSP and the regular follow-up of MSP commitments and also takes part in the work of the Planners Forum. In 2020, the Secretariat hosted the online thematic workshop on BASEMAPS to support the BSR MSP Data ESG for making available input and output data. The Secretariat continued to work on the BASEMAPS user guides, which will be finalized in 2021. The project also supported the Secretariat in coordinating the activities among the BSR MSP Data ESG (preparation of meetings, etc.). The Secretariat staff involved also worked on the follow-up elements in the updated of the Regional MSP Roadmap and on the elaboration of the criteria for assessing cross-border coherence of the MSP plans.

12. Baltic Data Flows, 2020-2023

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Joni Kaitaranta, Data Coordinator and Mr. Matthew Richard, Project Coordinator

The Baltic Data Flows project, co-financed by the Connecting Europe Facility of the European Union, seeks to enhance the sharing and harmonisation of data on the marine environment originating from existing sea monitoring programmes, and to move towards service-based data sharing.

In particular, open datasets will be made available by HELCOM to a wider community, such as European open data ecosystem, researchers, NGOs and private sector, in order to benefit from the availability of harmonised environmental data.

Baltic Data Flows will improve the capacity building of the national environmental data hosting organisations and providers of the consortium, in terms of quality control and solutions to make harmonised environmental data available. Members of the consortium will build and enhance their ICT infrastructure to support better the data sharing process.

Furthermore, data harvesting systems based on Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) will be developed with the aim to automate reporting process of oceanographic, contaminants and biological community data to ICES. As a result of the project, harmonised and quality assured pan-Baltic monitoring data that is usable for research purposes, environmental assessments, sustainable maritime spatial planning and blue growth will be made accessible.

Furthermore, Baltic Data Flows will provide tools for creating and disseminating more general data products suitable for communicating status of marine environment to the general public and decision-makers.

The project, coordinated by the HELCOM Secretariat, runs from October 2020 to October 2023. Project partners include ICES, LHEI, SMHI, Spatneo inc., Stockholm University, and SYKE.

13. Evaluation, Control and Mitigation of the Environmental impacts of shipping Emissions (EMERGE), 2020-2024

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Joni Kaitaranta, Data Coordinator

EMERGE is an innovative 4-year research project funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 programme. The “EMERGE” acronym is short for “Evaluation, control and Mitigation of the Environmental impacts of shipping Emissions”. The project started in February 2020 and is coordinated by Finnish Meteorological Institute, FMI.

The objectives of EMERGE are (i) to quantify and evaluate the effects of potential emission reduction solutions for shipping in Europe for several scenarios, and (ii) to develop effective strategies and measures to reduce the environmental impacts of shipping. EMERGE objectives will be achieved through real-world test cases involving measurements and modelling on actual vessels, along main shipping routes and in sensitive European marine regions.

The EMERGE consortium will model real world emissions of shipping to air and water for the whole of Europe. The project will collect and synthesize experimental evidence on waste streams to water and emissions to air originating from ships, for different emission control technologies. The measurements will focus on abatement techniques and will include emissions to, and concentrations in water, air and marine biota. The project will especially investigate how effectively available scrubbers reduce the effects of key pollutants.

EMERGE includes five geographical case studies, in different ecologically vulnerable regions, and a mobile onboard case study. The case study regions are (i) Eastern Mediterranean (ii) Northern Adriatic Sea, (iii) the region surrounding the Lagoon of Aveiro, (iv) the Solent Strait and (v) the Öresund Strait. The mobile onboard case study will be deployed in various European sea regions.

EMERGE will develop an integrated modelling framework to assess the combined impacts of shipping emissions on the aquatic and atmospheric environments, and the effects on marine ecosystems. The assessment will include the benefits and costs of control and mitigation options affecting water quality, air pollution exposure, health impact, climate forcing and bioaccumulation of pollutants. EMERGE will provide recommendations and guidance for stakeholders and decision-makers on cost-beneficial options for sustainable use of shipping in the medium and long term.

As a project partner, HELCOM will be involved in the work packages on hosting and publicizing spatial data outputs such as emission maps stemming from developed modelling framework and based on different management scenarios. HELCOM will furthermore participate in developing online tools for disseminating the outcomes and associated data to stakeholders, decision-makers and to the general public.

14. Pre-EMPT: Pre-empting pollution by screening for possible risks, 2021-2022

At HELCOM Secretariat: Mr. Owen Rowe, Project Manager

The Pre-EMPT project was recently awarded funding by NEFCO (Nordic Environment Finance Corporation) under the Baltic Sea Action Plan Fund. The project details remain to be finalised once the grant agreement and finance aspect has been completed.

The project itself aims to improve the assessment of hazardous substances in the Baltic Sea region and in doing so directly support the aims of the Baltic Sea Action Plan. A major focus of the project will be to carry out a large scale and spatially distributed screening of hazardous substances. The screening will apply non-target screening to provide a semi-quantitative overview of as many as 65,000 substances in the marine environment.

The project includes one or more partners from each Contracting Party and is supported by the NORMAN Network that offer expertise in this field.

15. HELCOM biodiversity, litter, underwater noise and effective regional measures for the Baltic Sea” (HELCOM BLUES), 2021-2023

At HELCOM Secretariat: Ms. Jana Wolf, Project Coordinator

The aim of the HELCOM BLUES project is to support regional capacity, coordination and cooperation with regard to developing effective measures to secure good status of the marine environment. This includes provisioning, and making available of, necessary knowledge to advance the development and implementation of joint measures addressing common pressures, as well as providing concrete support to the decision-making process within the Baltic Sea region. The project specifically focuses on the development of effective regional measures to reduce existing pressures on the Baltic Sea, considering the state of play of HELCOM’s sufficiency of measures (SOM) analysis. This is taken forward through the project work on improving the analyses to support effective regional measures, which functions as the overarching theme of the project as a whole.

As the development of measures is dependent on information on the state of the environment and pressures, the priorities within the BLUES project are biodiversity, marine litter and underwater noise in relation to supporting the regional assessment of the extent to which GES has been achieved and are, thus, included as integral Activities in this project. Assessment of state and pressures for the identified priority topics requires operational assessment methods, indicators and threshold values. Thus, the further development of regional assessment methodologies and indicators for biodiversity, marine litter and noise are targeted by the HELCOM BLUES project. All the tasks included under the Activities are clearly linked to gaps identified following the work on the ‘State of the Baltic Sea’ report (HELCOM 2018), and priorities identified during the planning and preparatory work building up the Third Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III), which will cover the assessment period 2016-2021 and will take place in the interval 2022-2023.

Accordingly, the improvements and further developments included in the work under HELCOM BLUES support the overall implementation of the BSAP and the MSFD (and the implementation of the 2017 GES Decision) by providing needed improvements to the regional assessment of status as well as improved analyses to identify in the future new effective regional measures to fill gaps where good status has not yet been achieved.

The BLUES project will specifically address the following issues, via designated activities (A):

- A1: Analyses to support effective regional measures and policies;
- A2: Improved regional assessment of biodiversity;
- A3: Support for, and harmonisation of, regional work on Descriptor 10: marine litter;
- A4: Support for, and harmonisation of, regional work on Descriptor 11: underwater noise;
- A5: Data accessibility;
- A6: Dissemination;
- A7: Project coordination

Since the start of the project (25 January 2021), a three day joint kick-off event was held online (2-4 February 2021), which included an introduction to the project and its seven activities, with individual tasks,

connections to HELCOM processes (such as HOLASIII) and other important processes (BASP, MSFD). The link to the openly accessible meeting site for the BLUES project is available [here](#). Furthermore, more detailed next steps of the project and its methodology have been planned, and a tentative meeting list has also been established to facilitate the project's work and overall objectives are fulfilled in a timely manner.