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Background

The draft Guidelines on transboundary consultations, public participation and co-operation calls for engaging and cooperating with other pan-Baltic organizations on a continuous basis. More specifically it says that “Cooperation with industrial and other interests’ sectors is a prerequisite of proper and successful MSP. Their stakeholders/representatives may become increasingly involved in transboundary as well as pan-Baltic MSP processes in future, through active co-operation at national and pan-Baltic level. Furthermore they may also be represented within expert groups.” The Guidelines list a number of recommendations how such cooperation can be taken forward by the HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG.

Currently over 50 Intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations have observer status to HELCOM. When applying for observer status, an organization must show that it can contribute to matters dealt with by HELCOM, that it has a membership in a wide number of the Baltic Coastal States and an organized internal structure. [“Guidelines on granting observer status to intergovernmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations to the Helsinki Commission”](#) are followed when applying and deciding on observership.

Being Observer in HELCOM means access to information and involvement: official correspondence related to both meetings in HELCOM and intersessional work by the HELCOM working groups is also sent to the Observers. Observers are given access to the meeting documents (note: all documents are public after the meetings have been held), may submit their documents (information, proposals) for consideration by the Contracting Parties as well as intervene in the meetings. Only Contracting Parties have the right to vote though.

Observers choose themselves HELCOM topics of their specific interests they wish to follow.

HELCOM Observers greatly contribute to the work towards achieving the goals of the Helsinki Convention. Beyond the obvious benefit of HELCOM work and its decision-making gaining transparency, the organized and formalized cooperation with other organizations/governments, and stakeholder interaction in general, has the advantage that the organizations provide structured and official input on a matter in HELCOM meetings on behalf of their constituency.

The Network of HELCOM Observers represents stakeholders that could in principle be engaged in considering issues related to the transboundary/pan-Baltic MSP. It is yet to be explored which specific and real-life issues would be of mutual interest and how closer and structured cooperation could be initiated and maintained in the framework of the HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information on HELCOM Observers and use the information as appropriate.