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Background

The HELCOM HOLAS II project is tasked with producing the 2nd HELCOM Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea. The first version of the assessment report, with the short name 'State of the Baltic Sea', was published in mid-2017. The report assesses environmental pressures and impacts from human activities, the state of the ecosystem, as well as social and economic aspects of ecosystem health.

This document contains an outline of the contents of the report and information on how it was developed.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the release of the first version of the "State of the Baltic Sea" report.

The Meeting might wish to provide feedback on report.

Release of the first version of the HOLAS II report

The second HELCOM holistic assessment of ecosystem health in the Baltic Sea, under preparation since 2014, covers the environmental status of pressures and biodiversity based on the latest available data. It also gives insight on cumulative impacts, introduces regional social and economic analyses, and considers measures taken so far for improving the status of the sea.

The first version of the assessment, released in July 2017, is available on a [dedicated website](#) and downloadable as a PDF document via that website.

The assessment provides a comprehensive basis for taking further steps to reach good environmental status for the Baltic Sea and strengthen the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021. The assessment may also serve as a regional baseline for implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and serve purposes of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive for those countries around the Baltic Sea that are EU Member States. Furthermore, the report provides background information in preparation of the next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, to be held on 6 March 2018, in Brussels.

The assessment provides information at various levels of detail (Figure 1, and below).

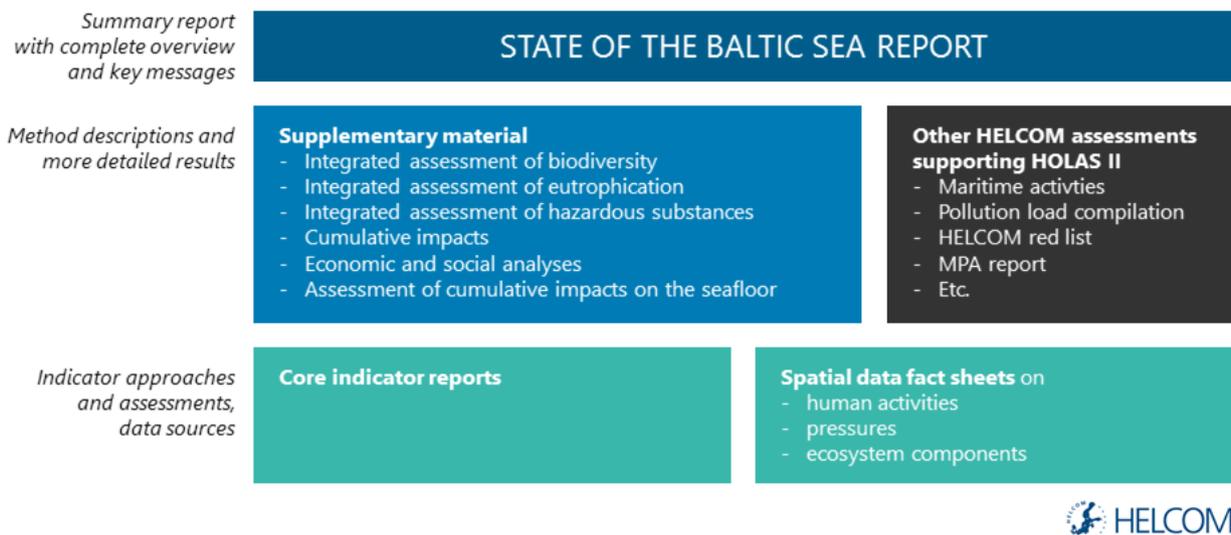


Figure 1. Overview of publications produced within or supporting the HELCOM second holistic assessment; State of the Baltic Sea. The ‘State of the Baltic Sea’ is the summary report with stand-alone information on all aspects covered by the assessment. The supplementary reports provide more detailed results and technical information on the assessment methods. The core indicator reports are produced as part of other HELCOM activities but coordinated to provide the holistic assessment with updated data and indicator assessments. Other HELCOM assessments supporting HOLAS II include for example the HELCOM report on Maritime activities, to be released in 2017, the most recent [Pollution load compilation](#), and HELCOM reports on [red list of threatened species and habitats](#) (2013) and [marine protected areas](#) (2016).

The State of the Baltic Sea report is a summary report providing key messages from all parts covered by the assessment.

The pressures assessed in the report are eutrophication, hazardous substances, marine litter, underwater noise, fishing, hunting, and seabed habitat loss and disturbance. The biodiversity components assessed are benthic and pelagic habitats, fish, marine mammals, and birds. The summary focuses on the time period 2011–2015. An overview of the integrated results of pressures and biodiversity status is presented in Figure 2, as an example of results available in the report.

SUMMARY OF THE ASSESSMENT OF PRESSURES AND STATE FOR THE WHOLE BALTIC SEA



Figure 2. Summary of the assessment of pressures and status for the Baltic Sea, showing number of sub-basins in good/not good status, with the exception of commercial fishing, which shows the number of stocks. For seals and birds, the squares represent both coastal and open-sea areas without distinguishing between them, whereas for the other components, squares represent open-sea areas. For eutrophication and fish, coastal areas are presented as stacked bars. Note that non-indigenous species and commercial fishing have been assessed in two classes (good/not good), whereas eutrophication, hazardous substances and state components have been assessed in five categories, with two categories representing good status and three representing not good status. In both scales, an empty area indicates that the status has not been assessed quantitatively.

The focus of the assessment has been to show results of relevance at the regional scale, and large-scale patterns between geographic areas. Data showing temporal developments have also been provided, in order to understand long-term trends and evaluate their direction.

The importance of the Baltic Sea marine environment to society is shown by economic and social analyses. The results illustrate the contribution from the use of marine waters to the economies and the impact of the state of the marine environment on the welfare of citizens. Recreation in and around the Baltic Sea, for example, is worth around EUR 15 billion annually. It is estimated that up to EUR 2 billion more could be gained in recreation value each year if the marine environment were improved.

Associated [supplementary reports](#) provide information from a more technical perspective on how the assessments have been carried out, to provide transparency on methods and data used. The supplementary reports can be accessed on the ‘State of the Baltic Sea’ [downloads page](#) and include the following:

- Integrated assessment of biodiversity
- Integrated assessment of eutrophication
- Integrated assessment of hazardous substances
- Economic and social analyses in the Baltic Sea region
- Assessment of cumulative impacts using the Baltic Sea Pressure Index and Baltic Sea Impact Index
- Assessment of cumulative impacts on the seafloor (in progress).

The most detailed information is contained in [core indicator reports and spatial data fact sheets](#), to provide a specific understanding of how the indicator evaluations and data going into the assessment were derived. A set of 28 HELCOM core indicators form the basis of the status assessments in the ‘State of the Baltic Sea’ report, assessing selected elements of biodiversity and human-induced pressures on the Baltic Sea against regionally agreed threshold values. Core indicators on biodiversity, eutrophication and hazardous substances are also used in the integrated assessments. For marine litter, underwater sound, and seabed

loss and disturbance, the assessment is descriptive since HELCOM core indicators are still under development. The most recent core indicator reports can be found on the [core indicator page of the HELCOM website](#). In addition to the core indicators, the assessment relies on spatial data about species, habitats, human activities, and pressures.

Elaboration of the report

The report has been produced under the HOLAS II project with the support of associated projects co-financed by the EU (BalticBOOST, TAPAS, SPICE¹) and reviewed at HELCOM workshops in 2017 ([HELCOM SPICE Eutro WS 1-2017](#), [HELCOM SPICE Biodiv WS 1-2017](#), [HELCOM SPICE HZ WS 1-2017](#), [HELCOM SPICE BSII WS 1-2017](#), [HOLAS II ESA WS 2-2017](#)). The indicator evaluations, data on human activities and pressures, and results of integrated assessment have undergone a series of reviews and approval processes in HELCOM during 2016–2017.

In June, the HELCOM Heads of Delegation meeting 52-2017 approved this first version of the report, with the understanding that a final consolidated report will be prepared by June 2018, and recognized it as an important scientific assessment of the state of the Baltic Sea and an achievement of HELCOM.

Update and regional consultation

The assessment will be updated in early 2018 to include monitoring data from the year 2016. During the updating process, comments received through the national consultations and a regional consultation will also be considered, and decisions on threshold values and new core indicators during 2017 will tentatively be included.

The regional consultation, carried out from October to December 2017, aims to encourage HELCOM Observers and selected stakeholders, i.e. international and intergovernmental organizations, to give feedback on the 'State of the Baltic Sea' report through a dedicated and structured consultation activity. A secondary objective is to use the opportunity to increase visibility of the results as well as to improve communication of HELCOM assessments. VASAB has also been approached with invitation to participate in the regional consultation.

The updated report will be ready in June 2018.

¹ Referring to the three HELCOM coordinated, EU co-financed, projects: BalticBOOST (Baltic Sea project to boost regional coherence of marine strategies through improved data flow, assessments, and knowledge base for development of measures, 2015-2016), TAPAS (Development of HELCOM tools and approaches for the Second Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea, 2016-2017), and SPICE (Implementation and development of key components for the assessment of Status, Pressures and Impacts, and Social and Economic evaluation in the Baltic Sea marine region, 2017).