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Background

The 12th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (GEAR 12-2015) was held on 29-30 October 2015 in Warsaw, Poland. The Meeting was held back-to-back to the Gear IG PoM Workshop (28 October) and a joint session with IG PoM was organized on 29 October. This document contains the Outcome of the Meeting. Other meeting documents can be found on the [GEAR 12-2015](#) and [GEAR IG PoM WS 1-2015](#) Meeting Sites.

The Workshop focused on finalizing the proposal on topics for future regional coordination (“Actions still needed”) in the draft ‘Joint documentation on regional coordination on programmes of measures’ and Gear considered and agreed on the next steps in finalizing the documentation, which **will be submitted to the Meeting separately**.

The Meeting considered the further developed **follow-up system for HELCOM agreements** to cover agreements under the Baltic Sea Action Plan and 2010 and 2013 Ministerial Declarations as well as HELCOM Recommendations adopted since the BSAP. Based on the recommendation by Gear the Secretariat will test the follow-up system for regional level actions and prepare a test case of national level actions based on data already reported by Contracting Parties, for presentation for HOD 49-2015. **A separate document on the follow-up system will be submitted to the Meeting.**

The Meeting discussed the proposed time plan for preparing the first version of the 2nd holistic assessment (HOLAS II) by mid-2017 as well as the time needed for national consultations required for use of the assessment as a “roof report” for MSFD reporting purposes for those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States. A questionnaire will be prepared so that countries can clarify their national time lines and views on needed content and extent of the first version for national consultation purposes. Based on the information received, further consideration will be given to the need and options for adjusting national procedures.

The Meeting took note of ongoing work of the European Environment Agency and specifically the plans for a European marine assessment under MSFD Article 20.3 b and invited the Contracting Parties to provide their views on the European marine assessment and how the cooperation between EEA and HELCOM can be structured, taking into account the tentative resources needed for such cooperation.

The Meeting agreed to organize the next meeting of the GEAR group on 10-11 February 2016.

Action required

The Meeting is invited to:

- take note of the outcome of GEAR 12-2015,
- note considerations regarding national consultation processes of HOLAS II,
- approve organizing the next meeting of the GEAR group on 10-11 February 2016.



OUTCOME OF THE TWELFTH MEETING OF GROUP FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH (HELCOM GEAR 12-2015)

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OUTCOME OF THE TWELFTH MEETING OF GROUP FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH (HELCOM GEAR 12-2015)

Introduction

0.1 In accordance with the outcomes of HELCOM GEAR 11-2015 (par. 6.2) and HOD 48-2015 (par. 3.21), the 12th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (GEAR 12-2015) was held on 29-30 October 2015 in Warsaw, Poland, at the premises of the National Water Management Authority.

0.2 The Meeting was attended by delegations from Denmark, Estonia, European Union, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden, as well as Baltic Sea Advisory Council, CCB and Oceana as HELCOM Observer and EEA as invited guest. The List of Participants is attached as **Annex 1**.

0.3 The Meeting was welcomed by Ms. Heike Imhoff, Germany, Chair of the GEAR Group. Mr. Jerzy Zwoździak, Vice-President of the National Water Management Authority in Poland wished a successful Gear meeting when welcoming participants of the IG PoM workshop.

0.4 The Meeting was chaired by Ms. Heike Imhoff, Germany, Chair of the GEAR Group. Ms. Ulla Li Zweifel, Professional Secretary and Ms. Marta Ruiz, Associate Professional Secretary acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

0.5 The Meeting welcomed Marta Ruiz as new Associate Professional Secretary that will support the work of GEAR.

0.6 The Meeting thanked Petra Kääriä and Minna Pyhala for their previous support and hard work in assisting the GEAR Group.

Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

Documents: 1-1, 1-2

1.1 The Meeting adopted the Agenda as contained in document 1-1.

Agenda Item 2 Matters arising from other meetings of relevance to GEAR

Documents: 2-1, 2-2

2.1 The Meeting took note of the outcomes of recent HELCOM meetings of relevance to GEAR (**document 2-1 and 2-2**).

2.2 The Meeting took note of the information by EU on the EC request for ICES advice for interpretation of VMS data in relation to seabed damage.

2.3 The Meeting pointed out opportunities for complementarity of actions regarding marine litter at global, European and regional levels, including under G7 for which Germany is having the Presidency.

Agenda Item 3 Coordination and information related to the implementation of the ecosystem approach and related policies

Documents: 3-1, 3-2, 3-3, 3-4

Programmes of Measures – Joint session with IG PoM

3.1 The Meeting took note of the information on progress on regional coordination of measures as well as of the outcome of the Workshop of the HELCOM Intersessional Group for

Programmes of Measures (GEAR IG PoM WS 1-2015) as informed by the Chair of IG PoM (**document 3-3** and **document 3-4, Presentation 1**).

3.2 The Meeting noted that 15 'actions still needed' were proposed as the result of the coordination efforts relating to national PoMs and the contribution from HELCOM Working Groups and the IG PoM workshop.

3.3 The Meeting recognized that the proposed 'actions still needed' are in many cases already reflected in the existing work plans of HELCOM Working Groups and that the intensified coordinating process that has taken place in the past year, under the Gear Group and with the contribution from HELCOM Working Groups, has made it possible to detail needed activities and propose how they could be taken forward in HELCOM. The 'Joint documentation on regional coordination of Programmes of Measures' is reflecting this process.

3.4 The Meeting agreed to add new tables to the Joint documentation, displaying a measure-matrix for each theme addressed that summarize the national measures instead of the current annex 1 in document 3-3. The Meeting acknowledged that empty cells in such table does not necessarily mean that the measure is not considered by a country since it may e.g. have been categorized as an 'existing measure' and thus not included as a new measure in the national PoM. The Meeting agreed to clarify such tentative issues and to ensure the correct interpretation by adding the following explanatory note to the Joint documentation:

"The following table is based on the information from Contracting Parties on the state of play of their planned measures by 28 February 2016. The table provides a general overview of themes that Contracting Parties are addressing in their PoMs, noting that some Contracting Parties have not yet finalised their programmes of measures and that changes to proposed planned measures may still occur. Contracting Parties' approach to considering a measure as new or existing in the context of the MSFD differs. This has resulted in an action being shared by HELCOM Contracting Parties is highlighted as a new measure only by some of the Contracting Parties but not by others. The crosses in the table only relate to the planned national measures for reporting; other Contracting Parties may still follow-up the action as existing measure which needs to be taken into account when assessing regional coherence. The commentary column provides insight into ongoing coordination processes in HELCOM, encompassing all HELCOM Contracting Parties".

3.5 The Meeting agreed on the following steps and timetable for finalizing the joint documentation:

- Editorial improvements and annex with Red Listed HELCOM biotopes will be done by the Secretariat and provided to the IG PoM Chair,
- IG PoM Chair will add a section on conclusions and summary,
- Three templates on eutrophication (as finished by the lead country Finland after the workshop) will be added to the joint documentation and one template related to an action on maritime risk assessment tool will be prepared by the Secretariat,
- The updated version of the Joint documentation will be prepared by **9 November 2015** and circulated to IG PoM and GEAR contacts,
- Comments on the Joint document by GEAR are to be submitted by **17 November 2015** to IG PoM Chair (andrea.weiss@uba.de) and the Secretariat (marta.ruiz@helcom.fi),
- The Secretariat will assist in preparing a cover page for the submission of the Joint documentation to HOD 49-2015 by **18 November 2015**.

3.6 The Meeting agreed on the following recommendation to HOD 49-2015 regarding the Joint documentation:

- To recognise the coordination undertaken by the Contracting Parties in relation to their Programmes of Measures and note that this process is reflected in the draft “Joint documentation of the regional coordination of the Programme of Measures”,
- To consider a proposal for four initiatives which have emerged from the Gear coordination effort and are not yet reflected in HELCOM work as contained in Outcome of the IG PoM WS 1-2015 (document 3-4) and decide as appropriate,
- To endorse the “Joint documentation of the regional coordination of the Programme of Measures” bearing in mind that Contracting Parties being EU Member States are invited to agree to make use of it when reporting their national Programme of Measures under Art. 13 of MSFD in order to communicate regional coordination efforts,
- To request the Gear working group to follow up finalization of national PoMs with a view to updating of the Joint documentation as may be needed by 28 February 2016 at the latest.

3.7 The Meeting discussed exceptions under MSFD Article 14 and took note on the national plans to use exceptions as follows:

- Denmark: no final decision made yet. A preliminary assessment conducted indicates that there is no need for exceptions in the first MSFD cycle. The final decision will not be taken until the public consultation is conducted.
- Estonia: national PoM are under consultation and the aim is to finalize the PoMs by the end of 2015. Use exceptions has not been decided yet.
- Finland: PoM will be submitted to the Government 3 December. Exception e) related to ‘natural conditions which do not allow timely improvement in the status of the marine waters concerned’ will be used regarding eutrophication in the open seas (D5), and for hazardous substances in commercial fish (D9) for the whole marine area, as well as for targets related to nutrient load reductions and hazardous substances in commercial fish as well as populations of fish and game.
- Germany: DE is currently planning not to make use of exceptions in the first meeting cycle, but to give further consideration to Art. 14 MSFD in the second cycle.
- Lithuania: the PoM is under public consultation which will finish in March. Exceptions will be used for the eutrophication target, as well as on marine litter and underwater noise due to lack of information.
- Poland: to be considered during the elaboration of the PoM. There is a delay in the process and Poland is currently in the process of approving the environmental targets nationally. It is expected that this process ends soon. The aim is to finalize the PoMs by March 2015.
- Sweden: National consultations on PoMs have been carried out. The decision on tentative exception will be decided when drafting the final version of the PoM. The issue of exceptions under consideration are for eutrophication under category ‘a’ and ‘e’.

Follow-up system for HELCOM agreements

3.8 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 8-2014 considered the proposed revision of the BSAP follow-up system and endorsed the further development by the Secretariat of the system. The structure and substance of the follow-up system for HELCOM agreements have been reviewed by HELCOM Working Groups during 2015 (for Maritime group planned in their upcoming meeting) and was subsequently considered by HOD 48-2015. HOD 48-2015 requested the next meeting of the Gear Group to consider the proposal and stressed the importance of communication of results.

3.9 The Meeting took note of the clarification by the Secretariat that a BSAP follow-up system was agreed by HOD 48-2015 to be developed by the end of 2015 as part of the Roadmap for HELCOM activities, however, a reporting timetable remains open.

3.10 The Meeting took note of the presentation of the further developed follow-up system for HELCOM agreements made by the Secretariat (**document 3-1, Presentation 2**). The system is to cover agreements under the Baltic Sea Action Plan and 2010 and 2013 Ministerial Declarations as well as HELCOM Recommendations adopted since the BSAP. The aim is to create an implementation database with web-based presentation of results.

3.11 The Meeting discussed the presented evaluation system for follow-up of HELCOM agreements noting that the resulting presentation of results will provide a useful communication tool for the implementation of agreed actions. The Meeting was of the view that a more in depth assessment of effectiveness of measures as the next step of the follow up system, previously presented to GEAR 8-2015 and HOD 47-2014, is desired in principle.

3.12 The Meeting was of the view that it would be useful if information on national implementation of actions can be extracted in some form from the action database to support national assessment purposes. Regarding presentation of information on national implementation, the Meeting exchanged initial suggestions, however, it was proposed to develop additional visualization options for further consideration.

3.13 The Meeting noted that through the BalticBOOST project resources are available for the further development of the system by March 2016 and supported the further development of the system.

3.14 The Meeting considered the timetable for finalizing the next assessment of HELCOM agreements and concluded that several Contracting Parties were not able to commit to reporting national implementation of actions by mid-February 2016 as proposed by the Secretariat.

3.15 Gear recommended the following regarding the follow-up system:

- the Secretariat will test the follow-up system for regional level actions and prepare a test case of national level actions based on data already reported, e.g. to the HELCOM MPA database, for presentation for HOD 49-2015;
- Contracting Parties are invited to provide feedback at HOD 49-2015 regarding the suitability of the follow-up system to serve different purposes in the short- and long-term perspective (e.g. HOLAS II) and including national expectations on its primary use, considering e.g. internal HELCOM management purposes, transparency towards the general public, as a communication tool;
- for deciding on a timetable for reporting of national actions a step wise approach having national resources in mind can be considered:
 - I. BSAP and Ministerial Declarations agreements implemented at:
 - regional level
 - national level
 - II. HELCOM Recommendations.

3.16 The Meeting agreed for the Gear Group to convene an online meeting, date still to be decided, to discuss the test cases that have been prepared for HOD 49-2015 with the view of providing feedback to the HOD meeting.

3.17 The Meeting took note of the information on ongoing cooperation and coordination between the OSPAR and HELCOM Regional Seas Conventions as contained in **document 3-2**.

Agenda Item 4 Activities of relevant HELCOM projects and processes

Documents: 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 4-4

4.1 The Meeting was informed on the EU co-funded project HELCOM BalticBOOST that started in September 2015 (**Presentation 3**).

4.2 The Meeting took note of the application for a direct grant from the EU to support the HOLAS II project. The project, HELCOM TAPAS, aims at further development HELCOM tools and approaches required for the Second Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea (**document 4.2** and **Presentation 4**).

4.3 The Meeting appreciated the funding from the European Commission to support HOLAS II and other activities in HELCOM.

4.4 The Meeting took note of the progress of the EUTRO-OPER project (**document 4.3**) and congratulated EUTRO-OPER team for the work conducted, in particular the data flow arrangement and development of the eutrophication manual. The Meeting appreciated that the eutrophication manual will be published separately from the planned reporting of test assessments carried out in the EUTRO-OPER project.

4.5 The Meeting regretted that the calculation of the oxygen debt indicator developed in the TARGREV project is not compatible with the data flow arrangement for eutrophication assessments. The Meeting encouraged the Secretariat to find a solution for the long-term use of the oxygen debt indicator in HELCOM assessments.

4.6 The Meeting took note of the progress in preparation of the 2nd HELCOM holistic assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea as presented by the Project coordinator (**document 4.1** and **Presentation 5**).

4.7 The Meeting took note of the ongoing development of the ESA framework in HOLAS II and that its development is a precondition for addressing social and economic consequences in the 2nd HELCOM holistic assessment. The Meeting noted that the extent of the ESA component in the holistic assessment report is still to be decided, noting that the HOLAS II core team has proposed that the presentation of status of and pressures on the Baltic Sea should be the major components of the assessment report. The Meeting recognized the importance to increasingly cover ESA in HELCOM assessments.

4.8 The Meeting took note of the information from EEA that the European Seas report, published in 2015, has developed an ESA framework and that components from the European scale concepts could be potentially useful for the work of HOLAS II and that this may support the alignment of concepts across regions in relation to the MSFD as well as the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

4.9 The Meeting noted that the holistic assessment will be based on HELCOM core indicators and acknowledged that further development of HELCOM core indicators with GES-boundaries is a key component for successful implementation of HOLAS project II. The Meeting noted that at this time the assessments of Favourable Conservation Status under the Habitats Directive (HD) are not planned to be used in HOLAS II since HELCOM core indicators are providing higher spatial resolution than HD assessments and are based on a quantitative approach. The Meeting recalled that a test using assessment criteria under HD and the MSFD regarding the abundance and distribution of seals will be carried out as part of the BalticBOOST project and that results will be ready by end of 2016.

4.10 The EU informed that a new version of the "pizza and satellites" scheme will be available for the consideration by HOLAS II by the end of 2015 and that a revised proposal for revision of MSFD Annex III will be available in mid-November 2015.

4.11 The Meeting took note of the information from EEA that EEA cooperates with ICES on the development of indicators for commercial fish.

4.12 The Meeting acknowledged that the HELCOM Baltic Sea Impact Index (BSII) is not currently directly linked to the assessment of GES and core indicators, although the classifications of elements in both assessments can likely be aligned, e.g. based on MSFD CIS guidance documents.

4.13 The Meeting discussed the proposed time plan for preparing the first version of the 2nd holistic assessment by mid-2017 and the necessary time required for national consultation of the report (Annex 2 of document 4-1). The Meeting took note that:

- Finland foresees the need for a 6 month period for the national consultation processes, including consideration of the national comments.
- Germany: The national public consultation is foreseen by national law to run for six months starting at the latest on 15 October 2017 (finish 15 April 2018). While the availability of the Draft HOLAS report for public consultation purposes by June 2017 would fit with this national timetable, there is a timing issue for finalising the HOLAS II report in 2018. Therefore, Germany cannot agree to the proposed timetable. Further clarification is needed on the timing of Contracting Parties for the Art. 8 MSFD report and how Contracting Parties intend to use the HOLAS II assessment for their national purposes before solutions on timing issues can be developed and Germany can commit to any timetable.
- Denmark has taken the proposed timelines of the HOLAS II project into account and aims to start consultation by mid-2017 and the national consultation process will extend for 12 weeks.
- Sweden is planning for consultation of the HELCOM 2nd holistic assessment in the second half of 2017.

4.14 The Meeting noted that the preparation of the first version of the assessment report by mid-2017 seems to suit the national time-tables, but also raised concern that due to the length of national consultation periods and national decision making processes it may be difficult to finalize the assessment report in time for the required MSFD reporting by October 2018.

4.15 The Meeting recognized the need to agree as soon as possible on the content and extent of the first version of the holistic assessment and to clarify the national consultation processes. The Meeting agreed that the Secretariat will circulate a questionnaire to the Contracting Parties requesting information e.g. on the length of national consultation process including the time expected for consideration of national comments, the legal requirement for national consultations, proposals on what should/needs to be included in the first version of the assessment report that goes for national consultation, and the national view on a potential role of a regional consultation process. Based on the received information, further consideration can be given to the need and options for adjusting national procedures and, if appropriate, to consider options for regional consultation. The Meeting underlined the importance of all Contracting Parties providing their national responses to the questionnaire and agreed to consider the issue at the next meeting of Gear.

4.16 The Meeting took note of the comparison of indicators included in **document 4-4** prepared based on the latest available lists of indicators under development in HELCOM and OSPAR aiming to form the basis for upcoming assessments.

Agenda Item 5 Upcoming and emerging issues

Document: 5-1

5.1 The Meeting took note of the presentation of ongoing work of the European Environment Agency by Ms. Trine Christiansen (**Presentation 6**) and specifically the plans for a European marine assessment under MSFD Article 20.3 b (document 5-1).

5.2 The Meeting discussed the scope and purposes of the EEA in 2019 in view of the requirement of Article 20.3 b and national obligations and RSCS “roof reports” under Art. 8. The Meeting took note that the intention of the EEA is to document where marine regions are regarding achieving GES.

5.3 The Meeting took note that EEA has identified an 'MSFD information base' building on RSCs indicators, EEA indicators, outputs from research projects, and the MSFD reporting under Articles 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13.

5.4 The Meeting noted that EEA has compiled a list of indicators in marine regions with the view of using the list as a basis for selecting indicators for the European marine assessment. The drafting of the European assessment is planned to begin in 2017, a final draft to be prepared by 2018, and an update of the assessment will be made in 2019 as possible based on the Article 8 reporting.

5.5 The Meeting welcomed the participation of EEA in this GEAR meeting and invited the Agency to attend future meetings as well.

5.6 The Meeting invited the Contracting Parties to provide their views on the European marine assessment as presented to the meeting and how the cooperation between EEA and HELCOM can be structured, taking into account the tentative resources needed for such cooperation.

5.7 The Meeting took note of the information on the proposed content of the Article 8 assessment discussed at the WG DIKE (5-6 October 2015) and that the guidance on aggregated assessments under the MSFD is being prepared to present at the upcoming MSCG meeting on 5 November 2015 with the aim of finalization by mid-2016.

5.8 The Meeting agreed to postpone the agenda items related to next cycle of implementation of the ecosystem approach and on national plans and approaches for revising environmental targets to the next meeting of the Gear Group.

Agenda Item 6 Future work and any other business

Documents: 6-1, 6-1-Rev.1

6.1 The Meeting agreed to organize the next meeting of the GEAR group on 10-11 February 2016, and invited offers for hosting the meeting.

6.2 The Meeting agreed that the meeting should focus on clarifying the national consultation processes on the 2nd HELCOM holistic assessment, and the next cycle of implementation of the ecosystem approach.

6.3 The Meeting updated the contact information for GEAR as contained in document 6-1-Rev.1.

6.4 The Meeting thanked Poland for excellent arrangements and hosting of the Meeting.

Agenda Item 7 Outcome of the Meeting

Documents: Outcome

7.1 The Meeting adopted the draft outcome of the Meeting. The final Outcome of the Meeting, together with the documents and presentations considered by the Meeting are available in the [HELCOM Meeting Site](#).

Annex 1

List of Participants

Representing	Name	Organization	E-mail
Chair			
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