



Document title	Ecological coherence assessment of the Baltic Sea MPA network
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Agenda Item	4 - Matters arising from the HELCOM Groups
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Submitted by	Executive Secretary

Background

The status of the Baltic Sea MPA network has been assessed regularly to follow up improvement in ecological coherence of the network ([HABITAT 8-2006, document 5.2/5](#), [Piekäinen & Korpinen 2007](#), [BSEP 124B](#)). The previous HELCOM MPA assessment was published in 2010 and it concluded that the MPA network was not ecologically coherent at that time. The next assessment is currently being carried out by the HELCOM Secretariat under guidance from the MPA Task Group and with financial support from the Nordic Council of Ministers with the view of submitting it for an intersessional review to State and Conservation in January 2016. If endorsed by State and Conservation the report will be finalized and submitted for adoption at HELCOM 37-2016. It will build on the same principles as the previous HELCOM MPA assessments (e.g. [BSEP 124B](#)), with methodological improvements as agreed at State and Conservation 3-2015 ([Outcome of S&C 3-2015 paragraphs 3N.15-29](#) and documents [3N-3](#) and [3N-3-Add.1](#)) and information reported by Contracting Parties to the modernized [HELCOM MPA database](#).

Action required

The Meeting is invited to take note of the ongoing ecological coherence assessment of the Baltic Sea MPA network and the planned report to be finalized by HELCOM 37-2016.

Background

The ecological coherence of the Baltic Sea MPA network is being assessed as decided by the HELCOM Copenhagen Ministerial meeting 2013 ([Ministerial Declaration 2013](#), paragraph 7(B)). It will build on the same principles as previous HELCOM MPA assessments (e.g. [BSEP 124B](#)), with methodological improvements as agreed at State and Conservation 3-2015 ([Outcome of S&C 3-2015 paragraphs 3N.15-29](#) and documents [3N-3](#) and [3N-3-Add.1](#)) and information reported by Contracting Parties to the modernized [HELCOM MPA database](#).

This document presents outline of the report and selected preliminary results of the ongoing ecological coherence assessment. The draft report of the ecological coherence assessment will be circulated to State and Conservation Contacts for an intersessional review period in January 2016, and the final report will be presented for approval at HELCOM-37 2016. The report will also cover the updated basic information on HELCOM MPAs and results from follow up of Recommendation 35/1. Please see **Annex 1** for the draft table of contents of the report.

Outline of the ecological coherence assessment

The ecological coherence assessment will be based on four main criteria: representativity, replication, adequacy and connectivity.

- **Representativity** evaluates presence of conservation features (such as species or biotopes) in the MPA network.
- **Replication** evaluates the number of copies of these conservation features in the MPA network.
- **Connectivity** evaluates the linkage between the MPAs where these copies exist.
- **Adequacy** evaluates whether the individual MPAs are adequate as building blocks for the entire MPA network.

Each of these criteria are further divided into subcriteria, which are evaluated with spatial analysis (GIS). Please see figure 1 in document [3N-3 from S&C 3-2015](#) for an overview of the assessment design. The same main criteria were used in the previous HELCOM ecological coherence assessment in 2010 ([BSEP 124B](#)), but some of the more detailed subcriteria have been further developed and targets for assessing their accomplishment have been agreed on ([Outcome of S&C 3-2015 paragraphs 3N.15-29](#)). All evaluations are based on areal coverage, distribution maps and information provided by countries in the HELCOM MPA database.

The assessment will cover the HELCOM MPA¹ network and where data is available also the marine parts of the Natura 2000 network, as stated by [Recommendation 35/1](#).

¹ Former BSPAs.

Annex 1. Draft table of contents of the assessment report

Executive summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Purpose of assessing HELCOM MPAs
- 1.2. The concept of coastal and marine Baltic Sea protected areas (HELCOM MPAs)

2. Current status of the network

- 2.1. Overview of the HELCOM MPAs in numbers
- 2.2. Developments of HELCOM MPA network since the previous report

3. Assessment of ecological coherence of the Baltic Sea MPAs

- 3.1. Representativity
- 3.2. Replication
- 3.3. Adequacy
- 3.4. Connectivity
- 3.5. Current data gaps and proposal for improvements to the assessment
- 3.6. Conclusions

4. Recommendation 35/1 Coastal and marine Baltic Sea protected areas (HELCOM MPAs¹)

- 4.1 Current status of implementation
- 4.2 Next steps for improving the network of HELCOM MPAs

5. References

¹ Former BSPAs.