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Background

The HELCOM Secretariat is planning to organize a HELCOM Stakeholder Conference on the Ecosystem Approach and Ecosystem-Based Management in March 2021, following up on the HELCOM Voluntary Commitments to the UN Ocean Conference 2020. Although that Conference has been postponed, the Commitments were still pledged and registered. For the outcomes of the event to be of possible relevance for the BSAP update, the HELCOM Stakeholder Conference is tentatively planned for Thursday, 11 March 2021, in the format of an online workshop. The Stakeholder Conference is planned to be held in cooperation with Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB) and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, SwAM (tbc).

A concept note on a workshop on ecosystem-based management was circulated to the HELCOM Heads of Delegation on 26 October 2020. The attached document contains the programme outline with minor adjustments. No comments were received by the deadline 9 November 2020.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to approve the organizing of an online HELCOM Stakeholder Conference on the Ecosystem Approach and Ecosystem-Based Management tentatively on 11 March 2021.

Workshop on the ecosystem approach and ecosystem-based management in support of the BSAP and UN Decade of Ocean Science

HELCOM Stakeholder Conference 2021 (HSC2021)

HELCOM plans to organize a workshop on the ecosystem approach (EA) and ecosystem-based management (EBM) in the Baltic Sea region on 11 March 2021 (tentative), in cooperation with Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB) and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, SwAM (tbc).

Both in light of current regional work arrangements and travel constraints as well as with a view to attracting a larger and more diverse audience, the workshop is planned to be held online as a HELCOM Stakeholder Conference.

In addition to fulfilling one of the HELCOM Voluntary Commitments to the UN Ocean Conference 2021 – approved by the 41st Meeting of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM 41-2020) in March 2020 – the workshop will also offer the possibility to gather considerations on EBM from stakeholders for possible input to the BSAP update process.

Core issues

Despite the fact that HELCOM has an established definition of the ecosystem approach ([joint HELCOM-OSPAR definition of 2003](#)), some confusion about its meaning and how it is to be integrated into regional and national processes does persist within the Baltic Sea region, also in light of other EA definitions such as the one outlined in the “[Malawi Principles](#)” of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) or in the [EU MSP Directive of 2014](#), as well as the confusion between “EA” and “EBM”.

The workshop would provide an opportunity to gather input from various stakeholders on the EA and EBM topics, assess the state of play, as well as identify potential barriers to and opportunities for the implementation of EBM, and promote a shared comprehension of the concept in the Baltic Sea region.

Furthermore, according to the Ministerial Meeting of 2018, the updated BSAP is to be “based on an ecosystem approach [...] and give due consideration to economic and social impacts of the measures to be taken to meet its objectives”. The workshop would be one of the last opportunities to gather meaningful input on EA for possible consideration in the updated BSAP.

Mandate (High level segment of HELCOM 41-2020)

At HELCOM 41-2020, the HELCOM Contracting Parties committed to “organise a joint workshop bringing together policy, management and science”, with a view to “strengthening ecosystem-based management in the Baltic Sea region”. The workshop is one of the five voluntary commitments HELCOM had planned to pledge at the High-Level UN Ocean Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG 14 2020, Lisbon, Portugal 2-6 June 2020 (UN Ocean Conference 2020). The HELCOM voluntary commitments were approved by HELCOM 41-2020.

Proposed focus of event

1. **What are the basic principles of EA and EBM:** A shared understanding (“what is the ecosystem approach, how can ecosystem-based management best be implemented”) between and across various sectors, narrowing down the EA concept to some key basic principles in order to facilitate its regional implementation through a common regional understanding and subsequent adherence

and integration in the work of various Baltic Sea stakeholders. The intention is not to get stuck in conceptual debates and elaborations;

2. **Bottlenecks and opportunities:** Key topics of the event could deal with bottlenecks to and opportunities for the implementation of ecosystem-based management, including suggesting concrete actions for successful implementation and proposing pilot areas and concrete use cases where implementation could be tested;
3. **BSAP update:** Furthermore, in addition to supporting the UN Decade of Ocean Science the results of the workshop could potentially be used to support the drafting and implementation of the updated HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Identified potential partners

Initially, in the HELCOM Voluntary Commitment, it was envisioned to extend the workshop to other actors such as ICES, national agencies involved in the implementation of marine policies as well as organizations designing these policies and organizations from beyond the Baltic Sea region such as OSPAR, UNEP/MAP and the Bucharest Convention, . The Baltic and North Sea Coordination and Support Action (BANOS CSA), addressing both the North and the Baltic Sea, could also be considered as a relevant partner.

In light of the current COVID-related travel restrictions, and given that online meetings can only accommodate a limited number of participants if a meaningful outcome is to be achieved, it is now proposed to maintain a Baltic Sea regional emphasis and focus on regional stakeholders.

Therefore, three partners have been identified: CCB, HELCOM and SWAM (tbc). Due to their complementarity, each partner could take charge of a specific thematic station.

Thematic stations

1. **EA and policy (HELCOM):** What is the policy relevance of the ecosystem approach, and how can ecosystem-based management be incorporated into policies and implemented more easily?) What are the barriers and opportunities? In particular, what should be considered for the BSAP update process, and what should possibly be included in the final updated BSAP?
2. **EA and science (SWAM - tbc):** what are the core principles of EA that are most relevant in the regional Baltic Sea context? How can science contribute to implementing EBM, how can EA concepts be applied to our sea-based activities, notably in maritime spatial planning. What new scientific questions need to be asked and priorities must be set, notably to accommodate EA visions and implemented EBM?
3. **EA and society (CCB):** where are the opportunities for successful implementation of EA, what possible organisational changes are needed to further ecosystem-based management within the BSR? How can EA be best applied across multiple sectors, and what are possible ways to increase actual implementation of EA in the Baltic Sea region. Who are potential drivers for EA implementation?

Participants will be asked to choose their station of preference according to their own expertise. During a first round, participants will lay the groundwork in each of the stations, adding their expert views.

In order to avoid working in silos, participants will then be asked to move between the stations and to provide additional comments on the work and findings already elaborated in the other stations.

The objective is to both familiarise participants with considerations on EA outside their own field of expertise and provide different and fresh views on the topics of the other stations that may lead to potential opportunities and help overcome current implementation barriers.

Format

The workshop could be held in the format of a HELCOM Stakeholder Conference which would offer the advantage of a wider Baltic Sea regional reach across a multitude of sectors including policy, academia, civil society and industry. Furthermore, planning an online event would not only anticipate possible travel constraints within the region but also allow a more diverse and broader participation. Available resources could be dedicated to an innovative and engaging online facilitation.

The conference will be held using Zoom, which has proven to be a very stable and easy to manage platform, especially for larger meetings. In addition, other workshop software will be used, such as [Mural](#), [Miro](#), [Padlet](#) or [Slido](#) (or a combination thereof) to facilitate scoping and online collaboration.

Pre-event “homework”

- Questionnaire
- Topics to be considered/prioritized

For the best possible outcome and to mitigate challenges stemming from the online format, participants should already be involved prior to the conference via a questionnaire, some simple “homework” tasks and/or other methods. This would not only permit to probe participants’ expectations and facilitate organization by allowing to prioritize topics of high interest, but also guarantee a minimum of upstream preparation by the participants, thus ensuring higher efficiency during the online event.

On the event day

- Opening plenary session;
- Icebreaker sessions introducing tools and participants;
- Parallel sessions where participants are split up into several groups of manageable size for an online workshop, with participants being asked to move between sessions (or “stations”) (topics?);
- Closing plenary session

Outcome

- To be presented to HELCOM 42-2020;
- To be presented to HELCOM GEAR and DG BSAP for possible consideration for the BSAP update process.

Foreseen resource needs

The planning phase will involve identifying objectives and expected outcomes of the workshop to facilitate developing the content. During that phase, potential participant groups – and to the best ways to reach them – will also be identified, as well as the best format for such an event, in light of the overall objectives to be achieved and challenges from changed working environments.

The workshop organization will also need to be backed by administrative support such as maintaining correspondence with all parties involved, keeping track of resources and accounting, and any other, general administrative tasks.

A visual identity and communication toolbox will also be developed to guarantee a coherent overall visibility and to facilitate the development of any material in support of the event, ranging from promotional material to workshop material.

Promotion and publicity activities are also planned, both before and after the event, to attract participants and to communicate the outcomes. Activities will include setting up a dedicated event website and the development of a communication strategy.

If held online, suitable digital tools (and/or licenses) will need to be acquired. For the event itself, facilitation fees and speaker compensation will also need to be considered.

Participants

To guarantee a meaningful outcome for this online event, the number of participants will be limited. HELCOM Contracting Parties and event partners will each be allocated a fixed number of seats (number to be confirmed).

Timing

- **Event: Thursday, 11 March 2021 (tentative).**

Organizational timing

- Monday, 26 October 2020: intersessional submission of programme outline to HELCOM HODs for comments;
- Monday, 9 November 2020: HOD feedback deadline;
- Tuesday, 10 November 2020 (onwards): approaching possible moderators and contributors;
- Monday, 16 November 2020: final programme outline to HOD 59-2020 (DEC);
- Monday, 14 December 2020: Save-the-date to stakeholders/participants;
- After Christmas holidays: technical/organisational planning.