



Document title	Draft proposed working structure of HOLAS III assessment phase
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Submitted by	Executive Secretary
Reference	

Background

This document contains the first draft proposal for the working structures associated with the third Holistic Assessment of the State of the Baltic Sea. The proposed working structure contained in this document is based on the agreed detailed timeline for the HOLAS III assessment, as approved by HOD 58-2020. No changes in timing have been made. Please note that there are still identified gaps and unclarities included in the structure presented in this document, these are expected to be filled as the process progresses (e.g. in relation to leads on the thematic assessments which in its current proposed format is partially dependent on project funding).

STATE&CONSERVATION 13-2020 considered the first draft of proposed HOLAS III working structure and noted the proposed nested approval structure.

The meeting took note of the information that where possible the proposed approval processes have been aligned with the existing meeting structures, however, if needed intersessional meetings could be included, e.g. an intersessional HOD back to back with HELCOM to move the approval of the thematic assessments from HELCOM to HOD.

The Secretariat was invited to clarify the role of the Pressure WG (e.g. in the approval of indicator reports) and Gear (e.g. at the strategic levels of review and approval and to check the content against other policy frameworks) groups in the HOLAS III assessment process and include this in the next version of the working structure document.

STATE&CONSERVATION 13-2020 considered the proposal for an ad-hoc small-scale expert platform consisting of relevant leads for the various work strands to be established to support the holistic aspect of the report by ensuring improved cooperation and integration between the thematic work strands. The meeting noted that this could be a way of more concretely involving expertise from e.g. Pressure in the overall process. It remains to be clarified in the document how the platform would be populated, the meeting noted the comment that it could be challenging to ensure the platform remains small scale while still ensuring participation from all CPs. There were differing views regarding the establishment of a platform and it was agreed that this needs further consideration at GEAR 23-2020.

The meeting further considered the proposal to set up a core team consisting of national focal points for HOLAS III, the task of which could include to support the management and coordination of the HOLAS III assessment phase work and agreed that this should be further explored.

GEAR 23-2020 considered the proposed setup of the HOLAS III assessment working structure and invited the Secretariat to further clarify in the document to HOD 59-2020:

- the function and structure of the two proposed ad hoc groups, especially regarding mandate, membership and role in the process;
- the role of GEAR in the process, as well as the division of focus between the WGs and EGs (technical and scientific), GEAR (policy steer) and HOD (approval) in the review and approval processes;
- clarify more clearly the role and tasks of PRESSURE under the HOLAS III process and ensure that each Working Group has an equal standing in the review and approval process.

GEAR 23-2020 discussed whether there is a need for overarching strategic steering of the HOLAS III assessment process, and if so, how this should be included in the structure. The meeting took note of the proposal that, should such steering be considered to be relevant, either GEAR or the proposed expert platform could be considered as appropriate for this task. The meeting also took note of the clarification that under the current plan the aim is to have agreement on several of the topics which require policy steering (e.g. rules for aggregation and integration) prior to the start of the assessment phase. This is both to avoid development taking place during the assessment phase, and to enable the use of the preparatory phase structures to support this work. However, the meeting noted that this is, to some degree, dependent on guidance under the CIS process becoming available in time, as this harmonised functioning is important for HELCOM Contracting Parties that are also EN Member States.

GEAR 23-2020 took note that Denmark does not support the establishment of any additional new expert groups for the HOLAS III assessment process, however, the meeting in principle supported the establishment of a time-bound, small scale, expert level platform to support the cross-pollination and holistic perspective of the HOLAS III assessment and the Third State of the Baltic Sea report, taking into account the Danish position.

In addition, the meeting supported the establishment of a correspondence group consisting of national focal points for the HOLAS III assessment, to support steer, management and information flow nationally, taking note of the clarification that the correspondence group itself will not have a mandate in the HOLAS III approval processes.

The meeting endorsed the submission of the proposed working structure to HOD 59-2020 for approval, however acknowledged that the question regarding the possible need for overarching, strategic steer of the process remains open.

In the event that the ad-hoc groups should also be favoured by HOD 59-2020, GEAR 23-2020 invited the Secretariat to draft ToRs for the two ad-hoc groups in spring 2021 to support the further discussion on tasks, mandate and structure.

The Secretariat has strived to include changes and amendments in line with the input from STATE&CONSERVATION 13-2020 and GEAR 23-2020 in this document.

There are currently a number of indicators for which no lead is currently identified (e.g. beach litter, continuous noise, and oxygen debt). Should leads not be found for these indicators the evaluation for the HOLAS III process will be problematic, and it cannot be guaranteed that they can be included in the HOLAS III assessment.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

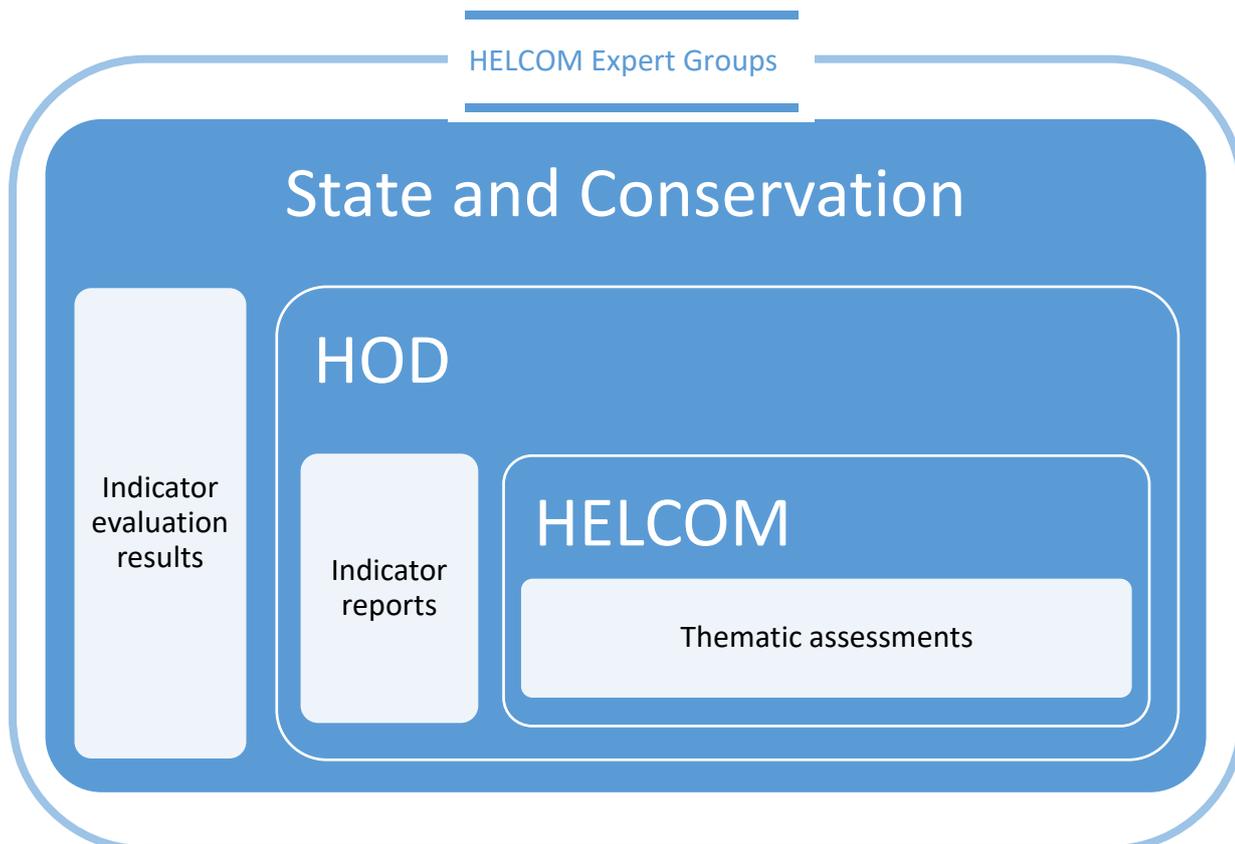
- consider the proposed setup of the HOLAS III assessment working structure, including proposal for which HELCOM meetings would be invited to endorse and approve the various deliverables;
- consider the establishment of a time-bound, small scale, expert level platform, as outlined in this document, to support the cross-pollination and holistic perspective of the HOLAS III assessment and the Third State of the Baltic Sea report;

- consider the establishment of a core team consisting of national focal points for the HOLAS III assessment, to support steer, management and information flow nationally;
- take note of that there are a number of indicators for which there are currently no leads and consider taking lead on the indicators;
- provide comments to the draft working structure as needed; and
- approve the proposed working structure, noting that modifications may be needed as the process progresses.

Draft proposed working structure of HOLAS III

Approval processes

For the working structure of the HOLAS III assessment a nested approach for approval, capitalizing on the existing meeting schedule and structure, is proposed. This implies that for each product the approval moves increasingly higher in the HELCOM hierarchy, while still allowing the relevant underlying groups the possibility to provide input and comments, within the same process. It also means that to the extent possible each process builds on already approved results from the previous process. This should significantly reduce redundancy within the approval process. An overview of the approval process as presented in the timeline is available in Annex 1.



To ensure that the all relevant expertise is harnessed, and equal treatment of the Working Groups, at each step of approval relevant WG's and EG's are invited to intersessionally review and provide input to the products from a technical and scientific perspective.

From step 2.4, the first step where information of strategic relevance is generated (see section Structure of HOLAS III assessment work), and onward the GEAR group will join in the review process and review the products from a policy/strategic perspective. This review will also take place intersessionally, simultaneously with the technical/scientific review of the WGs and EGs. At each approval step the products will be made available to all reviewers at the same time, thus ensuring that all parties are reviewing the latest version of the documents and aiming to avoid overlapping but disjointed review processes. In order to maintain the integrity of the timetable and process information from the review (technical/scientific and policy/strategic) is to be made available to the meeting designated to approve the product(s) as outlined under the various approval steps under the *Structure of HOLAS III assessment work* to be considered for inclusion.

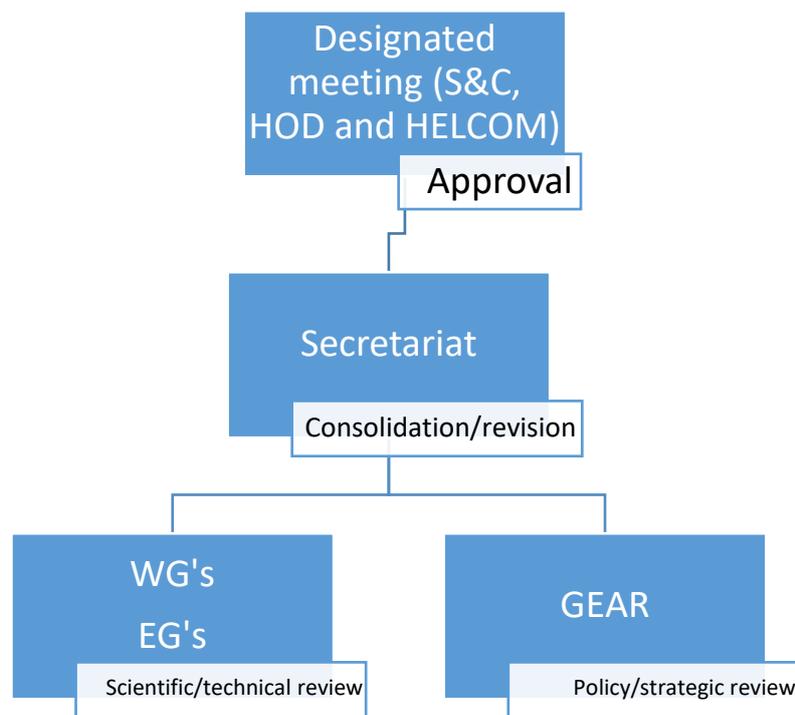


Figure 2. Process of simultaneous scientific/technical and policy/strategic review, consolidation of input and approval

Structure of HOLAS III assessment work

This section outlines the plan for each of the steps of the HOLAS III assessment process as indicated in figure 3, which in turn is built on the process approved by HELCOM 41-2020 (as available in figure 2 in [document 5-12](#) to that meeting) and the [specified timeline for HOLAS III](#) approved by HOD 58-2020.

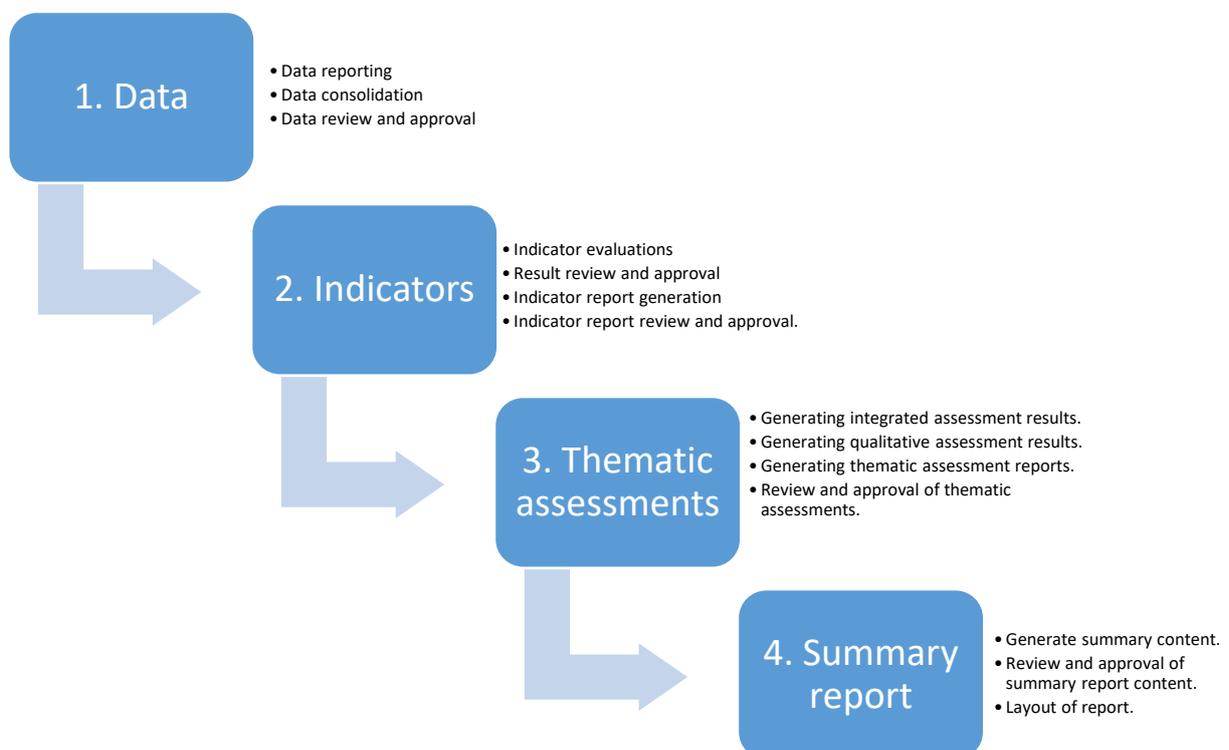


Figure 3. Structure and flow of HOLAS III assessment

1. Data



1.1. Data submission

Preparatory data calls issued by Secretariat in 2020, possible specifications to data calls provided in autumn 2021. Divided into “speeded up” data reporting of existing functional dataflows needed to meet HOLAS III deadlines and ad-hoc data call for non-existent or not fully functional dataflows.

Data to be submitted by national experts.

1.2 Data consolidation

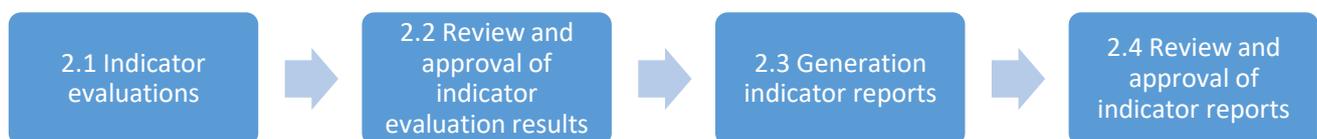
Data consolidated by Secretariat and provided for review by national experts in an online workspace, approved by correspondence through State and Conservation WG.

Metadata will be provided and included, depending on the dataflow, either by the data submitters or by the HELCOM Secretariat.

1.3 Data review and approval

Review and approval will be done by nominated national experts and will take place intersessionally online as indicated in the timetable in Annex 1.

2. Indicator evaluations



2.1 Generating indicator results

The indicator evaluations are performed by the respective indicators leads.

2.2 Review and approval of indicator results

The results of the indicator evaluation will be presented for approval by the State and Conservation Working Group as indicated in Annex 1.

Results will be submitted to the PRESSURE WG and Expert Groups (EGs) for review concomitantly with submission to State and Conservation, comments by WGs and EGs representatives to be provided to Secretariat 10 days prior to the State and Conservation WG meeting, for consolidation by Secretariat. Comments and input will be shared with the State & Conservation and indicator leads by information deadline for the meeting. Indicator leads invited to provide clarifications and corrections to the Meeting, as needed.

2.3 Generating indicator reports

Indicator reports will be prepared by the indicator leads, with intersessional review and support from the relevant EGs. The Secretariat will provide leads with an indicator report template ahead of time, which will be presented to State and Conservation and Pressure WGs in advance for review. The template will be provided to indicator leads at the start of the indicator evaluation process and the common template will be used for all indicator reports.

Where deemed appropriate linking the pressure indicators with information on sources and loads will be explored jointly by relevant experts under the auspice of the Holistic Expert Platform.

2.4 Review and approval of indicator reports

Indicator reports, including the approved evaluation results, will be presented to Heads of Delegation in December for approval.

The reports will be submitted to EGs, WGs and GEAR for intersessional review concomitantly with submission to the Heads of Delegation meeting, input from the review process to be provided to Secretariat 10 days prior to the Heads of Delegation meeting. The Secretariat will consolidate the input and share it with the Meeting and indicator leads by information deadline for the meeting. Leads will be invited to provide clarifications and corrections to the Meeting, as needed.

3. Thematic assessments

Thematic assessments are foreseen to consist of both data driven and qualitative assessments. Qualitative assessments cover mainly those topics for which no indicators or established assessment methods under HOLAS III are available, but which have been lifted as relevant to ensure the holistic perspective of the assessment. The Thematic assessments will focus on presenting the method used and the topic results in detail as well as include discussion of the HELCOM indicator evaluations and the broader scientific knowledge of relevance to provide additional context for the results. The information contained in the reports will function as the basis for compiling the summary report.

A majority of the Thematic assessments are foreseen to be published as individual supplementary information for the Summary report, however some of the assessments, especially the qualitative assessments which are expected to be shorter, may be included in the summary report in their entirety and thus not be published as individual reports. These will however be generated and presented for approval as part of the general Thematic Assessment process so as to be available for the Contracting Parties who are also EU member states should they find them useful for their national reporting purposes under Art. 8 MSFD.

Some topics, for which relatively recent assessment results were available for HOLAS II (e.g. spatial conservation and threatened species) no new information will have been generated prior to 2023 and thus these topics will need an update through dedicated processes if they are to be included in the summary report.



3.1 Generating data driven thematic assessment results (including integrated assessments)

Data driven thematic assessments (including integrated data assessments of the approved indicator results), is proposed to be taken forward as indicated in the list below. Information presented in square brackets is provisional and either remains open or is dependent on ongoing processes.

- Biodiversity: Secretariat/partner;
- Eutrophication: Automated, via ICES;

- Hazardous substances: [automated, via ICES];
- Litter: [possibly through HELCOM BLUES, seafloor litter still open];
- Noise: [possibly through HELCOM BLUES];
- Pressure and impacts: Secretariat;
- Economic and social analyses: [Secretariat, possibly through HELCOM BLUES];
- [Commercial fish:?]
- [Bycatch: HELCOM BLUES/Indicator leads]
- [Pelagic habitats: ?]
- [Benthic habitats: ?]

3.2 Generating qualitative thematic assessments

Qualitative assessments is proposed to be taken forward as indicated in the list below. Information presented in square brackets is provisional and either remains open or is dependent on ongoing processes.

- [Harbour porpoise: HELCOM BLUES/Indicator leads/EG MAMA harbor porpoise team]
- [Threatened species: Secretariat/?]
- [Spatial conservation: Secretariat/TG MPA]
- [Foodweb: CG Foodweb/Secretariat]
- [Climate change: Secretariat/EN CLIME]

3.3 Thematic assessment reports

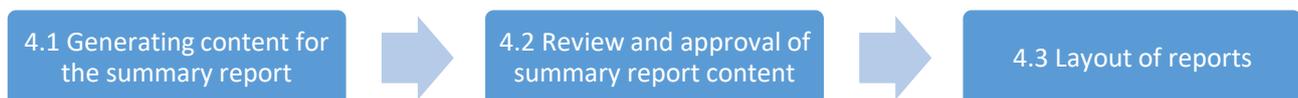
Thematic assessment reports will be prepared by the relevant lead as listed above, with the exception of the automated assessments, for which the IN EUTRO and EN HAZ will be responsible, supported by the Secretariat. The responsible party for the Thematic Assessment of Biodiversity remains open and will depend on the hosting of the BEAT tool.

3.4 Review and approval of thematic assessments

The thematic assessment reports, including the results of the assessments themselves and relevant contextual information, will be presented for approval to HELCOM 44-2023.

The reports will be submitted to EGs, WGs and GEAR for intersessional review concomitantly with submission to the HELCOM meeting. Input from the review process is to be provided to Secretariat by the end of January/beginning of February 2023, as indicated in the detailed timeline (see Annex 1 for overview). Input will be consolidated by Secretariat and shared with the authors, who will be invited to provide clarifications and corrections as needed. A table with proposed amendments, together with prepared revised drafts will be provided to CPs prior to the HELCOM meeting, to provide an overview of changes and function as the basis for further input and approval at the meeting.

4. Summary report



4.1 Generating content for the summary report

The summary report is envisioned to be prepared by the Secretariat.

The summary report will be based on the information and results presented in the various approved thematic assessments and indicator reports. The content will be supported by contextual information generated under other thematic assessments (e.g. biodiversity element specific pressure and impact maps, possible driver

indicators to support the status assessments etc.) and where relevant information from the HELCOM Climate Change Fact Sheets, implementation information from the HELCOM explorer etc.

In addition, the topics for which full thematic assessments or indicator reports are available, there are a number of topics to be included in the summary reports where the assessment for HOLAS III is foreseen to still be more qualitative in nature, e.g. foodweb, commercial fish, threatened species, and management efforts.

4.2 Review and approval of summary report content

The summary report content will be submitted to EGs, WGs and GEAR for intersessional review concomitantly with submission to the HOD meeting for approval (June 2023). Input from the review process is to be provided to Secretariat 10 days prior to the meeting (see Annex 1 for overview). Input will be consolidated by Secretariat and shared with any relevant authors. Clarifications and corrections will be prepared as needed. A table with proposed amendments, together with prepared revised drafts will be provided to CPs at the HOD meeting, to provide an overview of changes and function as the basis for further input and approval at the meeting.

2.4 Layout of report

Layout of the reports will be done in-house at the Secretariat.

Ad Hoc working structures

Holistic Expert Platform

While the HOLAS strives to present assessment results for all the major topics of relevance to elucidate the current state of the Baltic Sea, to improve the holistic view, and thus increase the ecological and policy relevance of the work, there is a need to further improve consideration not just within themes but across topics and themes and identify linkages. This is where the Summary report, as opposed to the individual thematic assessments, provides concrete added value. It offers the possibility to show the results in a more accessible way, but it can also, by presenting all topics together, be used to show the links and effects between the topics. Due to the holistic nature of the State of the Baltic Sea report it is not possible for one or two experts to cover the range of topics included in the work and hence it is proposed to establish a time-bound platform of experts, mainly utilizing existing expertise within HELCOM to strive to improve the holistic perspective of the report.

Mandate: Time-bound platform, no approval or process decision mandate.

Task: To support and further strengthen the holistic aspect and the ecological relevance of the work by, at the expert level, ensure improved cooperation and linkage between the thematic work strands. The conclusions to be incorporated into the products.

Membership: technical/scientific experts representing the various topics included in HOLAS III. It is envisioned the platform would consist of relevant leads for the various work strands (chairs/leads from relevant WGs and EGs), the indicator leads and Secretariat representatives.

Mode of working: It is envisioned that the platform would be dynamic (i.e. relevant experts contribute in various constellations dependent on the topics and question) and meet as necessary (likely online) to explore linkages, synergies across segments and how to best include and present these aspects in the reporting. The Chairs would provide a direct link to the WGs and EGs and have the possibility to consult their experts on specific topics as needed.

Correspondence Group of national HOLAS III focal points (CG HOLASIII)

In order to ensure clear, transparent and directed flow of information between the Secretariat, the CPs and national experts within the HOLAS III process it is proposed to establish a time bound correspondence group of national HOLAS III focal points as outlined below.

Mandate: Time-bound CG, the group would not have a mandate to approve any products.

Task: functioning as support with regards to management and coordination of the HOLAS III related activities at the national level (e.g. data reporting, review processes etc.) to ensure that the integrity of the process is maintained. Would also function as the natural communication point for the information flow to and from the Secretariat (and would be included in all relevant HOLAS III correspondence) and would help to ensure that CP can stay informed on progress of the overall work. Should clearly conflicting input be provided as part of the review processes, by experts either representing the same CP or different CPs, the relevant focal points can be contacted and informed by the Secretariat and invited to clarify the position nationally and thus facilitate the approval process.

Membership: consisting of one or two national focal points for HOLAS III. The focal point is envisioned to be a person who manages the national coordination of HOLAS III work (e.g. engages experts in the various processes, organises reviews, collates input etc.), and who would thus benefit from a more in depth overview of the progress of the HOLAS III process as a whole.

Mode of working: The CG would be a formalized communication channel between the Secretariat and the CPs regarding the practical processes surrounding HOLAS III. It is not foreseen that the CG would have any meetings, however, should any major changes in the agreed process occur the focal points may jointly be briefed on the proposed way forward, to ensure structured and direct flow of information.

Annex 1. Proposal for approval processes for HOLAS III

		Approval of data	Approval of indicator results	Indicator report approval	Approval of thematic assessments and assessment result	Approval of summary report	Proposed approval process
2022	23						
2022	24						
2022	25						
2022	26						Online approval process, approval by national experts through State and Conservation WG
2022	27						Summer holiday
2022	28						Summer holiday
2022	29						Summer holiday
2022	30						Summer holiday
2022	31						
2022	32						
2022	33						
2022	34						
2022	35						
2022	36						
2022	37						
2022	38						
2022	39						
2022	40						
2022	41						Approval at State&Conservation
2022	42						
2022	43						
2022	44						
2022	45						GEAR
2022	46						
2022	47						
2022	48						
2022	49						Approval at HOD
2022	50						
2022	51						Christmas
2022	52						Christmas
2023	1						Christmas

		Approval of data	Approval of indicator results	Indicator report approval	Approval of thematic assessments and assessment result	Approval of summary report	Proposed approval process
2023	2						
2023	3						
2023	4						Mid-way comments
2023	5						
2023	6						
2023	7						
2023	8						
2023	9						Approval at HELCOM 44-2023
2023	10						
2023	11						
2023	12						
2023	13						
2023	14						
2023	15						
2023	16						
2023	17						
2023	18						
2023	19						S&C
2023	20						GEAR
2023	21						
2023	22						
2023	23						
2023	24						Approval at HOD