



Document title	Progress on filling gaps in knowledge for HOLAS III
Code	6-16
Category	DEC
Agenda Item	6 – Matters arising from the HELCOM Groups
Submission date	16.11.2020
Submitted by	Executive Secretary
Reference	

Background

State and Conservation 12-2020 discussed the potential need for additional structures to support work in newly identified themes that have no direct Expert Group coverage within the existing HELCOM structures (State and Conservation 12-2020, [Outcome paragraph 4J.61-2](#)). The outcome of State and Conservation 12-2020 was presented to HOD 58-2020 ([Document 5-14](#)) and the proposals made were endorsed (HOD 58-2020, [Outcome paragraph 5.17-21](#)). Consequently draft ToRs and time plans were provided to State and Conservation 13-2020 and GEAR 23-2020 and an intersessional commenting period agreed (State and Conservation 13-2020, [Outcomes paragraphs 4J.85-90](#)). In addition, the ToRs for the workshop on commercial fish were presented to the FISH Working Group for commenting, with an invitation to provide nominations jointly with State and Conservation. The comments received have been incorporated in this document. All the listed meeting expressed support for the ToRs and the time plans for submission to HOD 59-2020 for approval.

This document addresses the draft plans and ToRs for a HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food Webs (**Annex 1**), Workshop on Pelagic Habitats (**Annex 2**) and the Workshop on the topic of Commercial Fish (**Annex 3**).

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- take note of the progress towards addressing the gaps in knowledge for HOLAS III, in line with the endorsement of HOD 58-2020;
- review and approve the content of the draft ToRs and the provisional time plans;
- encourage national nomination of experts to populate the group and the planned workshop (including the preparatory work required in advance of them).

Annex 1. HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food webs

Draft Terms of Reference for HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food webs (CG FOODWEB)

Background

The HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food Webs (CG Food Webs) will operate predominantly via online communication. Intersessional work will be a key component of achieving the aims of the group and making progress on the topic within HELCOM. The group is time limited.

Validity of ToR

Autumn 2020 – autumn 2023.

The initial time frame of the group is limited to cover the period prior to and during HOLAS III, with an option to extend the mandate of the group and/or make the group a permanent part of the HELCOM structure, based on need and evaluation of performance.

Main aims and focus of the group:

- 1) Identify, collate and summarize existing Food Web information from the Baltic Sea region with relevance for status assessment;
- 2) Suggest how existing information can be utilized in the HOLAS III report (e.g. quantitative, qualitative, test cases);
- 3) Produce an assessment of Food Webs in the Baltic Sea for the HOLAS III report (descriptive report that is data driven, where possible, and reflects any limitations via a confidence in the assessment);
- 4) Based on experiences from points 1-3, propose viable and best options for longer term development towards an optimal assessment of Food Webs in the Baltic Sea post HOLAS III (taking into account available knowledge, data and other relevant factors);

The work in HELCOM on indicators and assessments is driven by the best available scientific knowledge and also considers aspects that may influence the design or application of assessment, including: the need for comparable and harmonized regional assessments, potential sub-regional variation, data availability and ecologically relevant assessments of status. These factors are key in the development of a solid assessment, and confidence evaluation, that offers the broadest and most inclusive regional coverage possible.

Organization of work

CG Food Webs will be guided by the State and Conservation Working Group. Information flow to State and Conservation is a key factor and timely exchanges will increase acceptance of the work of the CG for HOLAS III. State and Conservation may request that specific topics or issues are addressed. Chair(s) will be elected by the members of CG FOODWEB. The products will be handled at HELCOM Meeting Portal workspaces dedicated to this purpose.

The mode of work for the expert network will include correspondence and online meetings facilitated by the HELCOM Secretariat, with physical meetings and workshops taking place as needed in the build-up to the Third Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III), as approved by State and Conservation.

The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the correspondence group. The indicator coordinator (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) and the Professional Secretary responsible for State and Conservation (Jannica.Haldin@helcom.fi) will act as contact points to support the work of the CG.

The group, with the help of the Secretariat, shall ensure good information flow between the relevant Expert Groups, such as: PEG, ZEN, EN BENTHIC, IN EUTROPHICATION, FISH and EG MAMA.

Reporting

The Chair(s) will report back to the State and Conservation WG on the activities of the correspondence group. For State and Conservation WG this will take the form of an agenda item at WG meetings.

Membership

It is anticipated that this Correspondence Group will predominantly consist of experts already nominated to existing HELCOM Expert Groups that currently address specific independent components of the Baltic Sea food web. Additional nominations are anticipated where Experts have knowledge related to the assessment of food webs as an entity (e.g. simulations, models, or field/experimental studies). The nomination of relevant Experts, from existing HELCOM Groups or other sources, is carried out at the discretion of the Contracting Parties.

Nominations should be submitted to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) by **Friday 30 October 2020**.

Annex 2. HELCOM Workshop on Pelagic Habitats

Draft Terms of References for HELCOM Workshop on Pelagic Habitats (HELCOM Pelagic WS1-2021)

The HELCOM Workshop on Pelagic Habitats (HELCOM Pelagic WS1-2021) will be a single event to bring together regional experts on the topic and synthesise information into a solid plan ahead, the ultimate goal of the process being an improved and functional assessment of pelagic habitats for the Third Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III).

Validity of ToR

Single event Workshop planned for late February 2021 (Period of validity for the overall work: Autumn 2020 – autumn 2023).

This Workshop will be a single event and further extension of the work or further meetings or Workshops will be carried out via discussion with, and decisions made by State and Conservation.

Main aims and focus of the group

- 1) Review the topic specific work plan generated in the Second HELCOM Indicator Workshop ([Pelagic Habitats work plan](#)) and any relevant regional projects addressing the topic;
- 2) Review policy requirements for an assessment of pelagic habitats;
- 3) Review the updated 'zooplankton mean size and total stock (MSTS)' HELCOM indicator;
- 4) Review the updated 'seasonal succession of dominating phytoplankton groups' HELCOM indicator;
- 5) Devise possible approaches to integrate the two existing indicators into an assessment of pelagic habitats;
- 6) Identify key components of an assessment of pelagic habitats (i.e. missed by these two indicators alone);
- 7) Discuss and identify alternative and improved pelagic habitat assessments and their viability for use in HOLAS III;

The work in HELCOM on indicators and assessments needs to be driven by the best available scientific knowledge, but should also consider aspects that may influence the design or application of assessment, including: the need for comparable and harmonized regional assessments, potential sub-regional variation, data availability and ecologically relevant assessments of status. These factors are key in the development of a solid assessment, and confidence evaluation, that offers the broadest and most inclusive regional coverage possible.

Organization of work

A core team, including Chair(s) for the workshop, will be identified to plan the agenda and preparatory work for the workshop.

The Workshop will be guided by the State and Conservation Working Group. Information flow to State and Conservation is a key factor after the workshop to maintain information flow, discuss future developments and gain approval on the proposed work ahead towards HOLAS III. Where relevant national or regional projects may also offer relevant input to the Workshop and work ahead.

The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the workshop. The indicator coordinator (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) and the Professional Secretary responsible for State and Conservation (Jannica.Haldin@helcom.fi) will act as contact points to support the preparation and running of the Workshop.

The Secretariat will ensure good information flow between the relevant expert groups, such as PEG, ZEN, EN BENTHIC, IN EUTROPHICATION, FISH and EG MAMA.

Reporting

The Chair(s) of the workshop will report back to the State and Conservation WG on the activities of the workshop. For State and Conservation WG this will take the form of an agenda item at WG meetings.

Membership

Nominations for the core team to plan the workshop will be provide by CPs.

Nominations for the workshop will be provided by CPs. It is anticipated that this Workshop will be dominantly formed of experts already nominated to existing HELCOM Expert Groups (e.g. the Zooplankton Expert Network (ZEN) and the Phytoplankton Expert Group (PEG)) that currently address specific independent components of the Baltic Sea pelagic system. Additional nominations are anticipated where Experts have knowledge related to the assessment of pelagic habitats as an integrated/single entity.

Nominations should be submitted to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) by **Friday 30 October, 2020**.

Provisional time plan and proposed workflow

Step 1: Nominations to populate the CG – 30 October 2020

Nominations of national Experts will be made by State and Conservation Contacts to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) by **Friday 30 October, 2020**.

Step 2: Identify preparatory work required – by 30 November 2020

Known preparatory work includes: 1) Identify a core team to plan the agenda and preparatory work; 2) update of the zooplankton and phytoplankton indicators to include full coverage and threshold value application; 3) Gather key reference material to share in preparation for the Workshop;; 4) Gather short presentations on national approaches used for pelagic habitats; 5) Identify key presenters and preparatory work for the Workshop.

Step 3: Workshop – late February 2021

The following topics will be addressed at the Workshop:

- Aims of Workshop (short introduction);
- HOLAS III and indicator development deadlines (short introduction);
- Topic specific indicator work plan (short introduction);
- Policy requirements (short introduction);
- Updated zooplankton indicator (short overview);
- Updated phytoplankton indicator (short overview);
- Data availability for pelagic indicators (ICES, COMBINE database, follow up on data flows workshop);
- Other aspects of relevance (e.g. bacterioplankton);
- National approaches (short presentations from Contracting Parties, where applicable);
- Possible integration of existing HELCOM indicators (presentation/discussion);
- OSPAR tied approach and life-form index (presentation and discussion);
- Define plan ahead for HOLAS III
 - What will be done for HOALS III (existing indicators, new approach)
 - Link between indicators and anthropogenic pressures
 - Will these be test cases, a generic overall assessment, or a form of indicator assessment
 - Explore the potential of developing a more nested approach (assessment on different levels for species, functional groups and at higher level as proxy for biomass/abundance) comparable to OSPAR
 - Will threshold values be applied, if so on what basis

- Possibilities for alignment of baselines/threshold value setting between the different indicators to support integration
 - What abiotic factors should be included and how
 - Scrutinize how information of related indicator assessments (other components, certain pressures, e.g. eutrophication) can be used in the assessment of pelagic habitats
 - What information is needed to support the assessment of pelagic habitats in the HOLAS III report
 - What will be the required work ahead to achieve the assessment at HOLAS III and who will take it forward
- Outcome to be provided to State and Conservation (circa April 2021).

Annex 3. HELCOM Workshop on Commercial Fish

Draft Terms of Reference HELCOM Workshop on Status Assessment of Commercial Fish (HELCOM ComFish WS 1-2021)

The HELCOM Workshop on Commercial Fish (HELCOM ComFish WS 1-2021) will be a single event to bring together regional experts on the topic and synthesise information into a solid plan ahead, the ultimate goal of the process being an improved and functional assessment of commercial fish for the Third Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III).

In addition to nominations from HELCOM Contracting Parties the Secretariat will contact ICES to directly invite participation in the Workshop and preparatory work and thereby ensure that relevant experts and knowledge are incorporated. The 'commercial fish' to be addressed under this process will be aligned to meet the needs, under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), for HELCOM Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States.

This Workshop will also establish plans for intersessional work required to achieve the improved assessment and, should the participants deem it necessary, will have the option to propose to State and Conservation that further Workshops would be valuable to achieve the planned work.

Validity of ToRs

Single event Workshop planned for March 2021 (Period of validity for the overall work: Autumn 2020 – autumn 2023). The period of overall work reflects the need for intersessional work to implement the strategy defined at this Workshop.

This Workshop will be a single event and any extension of the work or further meetings or Workshops will be carried out via discussion with, and decisions made by State and Conservation.

Main aims and focus of the group:

- 1) Review the topic specific work plan generated in the Second HELCOM Indicator Workshop ([Fish work plan](#));
- 2) Devise and review a list of species of relevance in the Baltic Sea – including review of ICES recommendations and national species lists;
- 3) Review policy requirements for an assessment of commercial fish;
- 4) Review the data available through ICES;
- 5) Devise a full assessment of commercial fish (including in ecological terms) to provide a improved status assessment in HOLAS III;
- 6) Identify if the proposed assessment would have financial implications (e.g. new data needs such as collecting, processing and analyzing) and sources for these resource requirements;
- 7) Establish valid indicators/assessment approaches that can be viable long-term components of HELCOM assessments;

The work in HELCOM on indicators and assessments needs to be driven by the best available scientific knowledge and should also consider aspects that may influence the design or application of assessment, including: the need for comparable and harmonized regional assessments, potential sub-regional variation, data availability and ecologically relevant assessments of status. These factors are key in the development of a solid assessment, and confidence evaluation, that offers the broadest and most inclusive regional coverage possible.

Organization of work

A core team, including Chair(s) for the workshop, will be identified to plan the agenda and preparatory work for the workshop.

The Workshop will be guided by the State and Conservation Working Group. Information flow to State and Conservation is a key factor after the workshop to maintain information flow, discuss future developments and gain approval on the proposed work ahead towards HOLAS III. Where relevant national or regional projects may also offer relevant input to the Workshop and work ahead. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the workshop. The indicator coordinator (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) and the Professional Secretary responsible for State and Conservation (Jannica.Haldin@helcom.fi) will act as contact points to support the preparation and running of the Workshop.

Reporting

The Chair(s) of the workshop will report back to the State and Conservation WG on the activities of the workshop. For State and Conservation WG this will take the form of an agenda item at WG meetings.

Membership

Nominations for the core team to plan the workshop will be provided by the CPs.

Nominations for the workshop will be provided by the CPs. Where possible the Workshop will be formed of experts already active in HELCOM processes. Additional nominations are anticipated where Experts have knowledge on the assessment of commercial stocks and experience with ICES stock assessment processes for the relevant Baltic Sea stock.

Nominations should be submitted to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) by **Friday 27 November 2020**.

Provisional time plan and proposed workflow

Step 1: Nominations to populate the WS – 27 November 2020

Nominations of national Experts will be made by State and Conservation Contacts to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) by **Friday 27 November, 2020**.

The Secretariat will directly invite ICES to participate in the preparatory work and the Workshop.

Step 2: Identify preparatory work required – by 15 January 2021

Known preparatory work includes: 1) Identify a core team to plan the agenda and preparatory work, 2) Prepare a list of species including those listed as priority species for assessment or monitoring under relevant policy documents, 3) Summary of data available through ICES, 4) Summary of existing assessment approaches applied or previously developed/discussed (under HELCOM and ICES).

Devise a plan for the preparatory work to be available in advance of the Workshop.

Step 3: Workshop – March 2021

The following topics will be addressed at the Workshop:

- Aims of Workshop (short introduction)
- What was used in HOLAS II.
- HOLAS III and indicator development deadlines (short introduction)
- Topic specific indicator work plan (short introduction)
- Policy requirements, e.g. BSAP, MSFD D1 and D3 (short introduction)
- Species lists (presentation and discussion)
- Data availability through ICES (overview)
- Define plan ahead for HOLAS III
 - What will be done for HOLAS III, what is needed for the assessment
 - What indicators make an overall assessment
 - Define and document the threshold values to be applied in selected indicators, including for their approval via State and Conservation and at HOD

- How is ecological status assessed by the proposed indicators
- What will be the required work ahead to achieve the assessment at HOLAS III and who will take it forward
- Outcome to be provided to State and Conservation (circa April 2021).