



Document title	Outcome of GEAR 23-2020
Code	6-21
Category	DEC
Agenda Item	6 - Matters arising from the HELCOM groups
Submission date	16.11.2020
Submitted by	Executive Secretary
Reference	

Background

The 23rd Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (GEAR 23-2020) was held on 9-11 November 2020 as an online Meeting. An informal session on informal exchange of Contracting Parties' national experiences in EU MSFD implementation took place as part of the first half day of the meeting (9 November). The meeting was attended by Delegations from all Contracting Parties except Russia. The Meeting was also attended by an Observer from the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers as well as invited guests from the HELCOM ACTION project.

This document contains the Outcome of GEAR 23-2020. The complete Outcome including Annex 1 can be found [here](#).

Please note that all issues related to the updating of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) will be discussed under Agenda Item 5 (Update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan).

Please note that the following issues will be considered in separate documents:

- Approval of the publication of the HELCOM Indicator Manual;
- Proposal for HOLAS III assessment phase working structure;
- Approval of HELCOM data call for HOLAS III;
- Approval of project proposal for HELCOM Holistic Assessment Methodology Development Project (HELCOM MetDev), 2021;
- Approval of ToRs for Correspondence group on Foodwebs and Workshops on pelagic habitats and commercial fish respectively, to fill gaps in expertise for HOLAS III, in line with what has been endorsed by HOD 58-2020.

Joint Documentation of Measures

GEAR and CG MSFD have been working on preparation for joint documentation in support of MSFD Art. 13 reporting on programme of measures by Contracting Parties who are also EU Member States. The purpose of the documentation is to develop a common understanding on main challenges, where actions should be taken, identifying topics where transboundary efforts would bring most added value and as support for national reporting. The content should be as concrete, concise and precise as possible. The meeting agreed that Joint Documentation should function as a compilation and summary of existing information, rather than aim to present new information. Work on the Joint Documentation will continue intersessionally under CG MSFD.

Roadmap on HELCOM activities on ecosystem approach

The meeting considered the need to update the Roadmap on HELCOM activities on the ecosystem approach and agreed to align the update with the BSAP update, so as to ensure that the actions of relevance stemming from the updated BSAP can be included. In line with this the meeting agreed to work on an updated Roadmap at GEAR 24-2021 with the aim of finalizing the update at GEAR 25-2021 (9-11 November 2021) and submit the updated roadmap to HOD 61-2021 for approval. The meeting suggested that the document could also include, in its next version, areas of actions which are of high priority for implementing the ecosystem approach, but which lack a process and/or resources. This would facilitate identifying gaps in implementation. The meeting discussed the benefit of considering HELCOM work in relation to the principles of the ecosystem approach (the Malawi principles) and assess to what degree HELCOM work fulfils the principles and identify possible areas for improvement. The meeting welcomed the offer by Finland and Sweden to prepare a document on the topic for GEAR 24-2021 for further consideration.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the outcome of GEAR 23-2020 and consider it as appropriate. Specifically, the Meeting is invited to:

- consider and agree to align the update of the Roadmap on HELCOM activities on ecosystem approach with the BSAP update, as outlined in the Outcome.;
- to agree to hold GEAR 26-2022 on 24-26 May 2022 (c.f. paragraph 6.8).



Outcome of the 23rd Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (HELCOM GEAR 23-2020)

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Outcome of the 23rd Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (HELCOM GEAR 23-2020)

Introduction

0.1 In accordance with the outcome of GEAR 22-2020 (Paragraph 6.1) and HOD 57-2019 (Paragraph 4.34), the 23rd Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (GEAR 23-2020) was held on 9-11 November 2020 as an online Meeting. An informal session on informal exchange of Contracting Parties' national experiences in EU MSFD implementation took place as part of the first half day of the meeting (9 November).

0.2 The Meeting was attended by Delegations from all Contracting Parties except Russia. The Meeting was also attended by Observers from the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers as well as invited guests from the HELCOM ACTION project. The List of Participants is contained in **Annex 1**.

0.3 The Meeting was chaired by Ms. Andrea Weiss, Germany, Chair of the GEAR Group. Ms. Jannica Haldin, Professional Secretary and Ms. Marta Ruiz, Associate Professional Secretary acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

1.1 The Meeting adopted the Agenda as contained in **document 1-1** and noted the annotated Agenda in **document 1-2**.

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

2.1 The Meeting took note of the outcomes from meetings of relevance for the Gear Group (**document 2-1** and **Presentation 1**).

Agenda Item 3 Regionally coordinated implementation of MSFD

3.1 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 22-2020 postponed the informal session dedicated to regional MSFD coordination for those Contracting Parties who are also EU Member States and matters related to the MSFD were considered under the umbrella of CG MSFD.

3.2 The Meeting further recalled that GEAR 20-2019 agreed on a general work plan on MSFD coordination for GEAR 21-2019 and GEAR 22-2020 and to establish a drafting group (CG MSFD) to prepare documentation and discussion points for the GEAR meetings ([Outcome of GEAR 20-2019](#), para. 3.27-3.31). Input for discussions under this agenda item has been prepared by CG MSFD.

3.3 The Meeting took note that during the informal MSFD session Contracting Parties which are EU Member States exchanged their views on the following questions as prepared by CG MSFD:

- experiences with HOLAS II / expectations of HOLAS III for MSFD purposes;
- HOLAS III and EU reporting (Art. 8 MSFD);
- exchange on Art. 14 MSFD;
- exchange on national planning of MSFD measures and regional coordination.

3.4 The Meeting noted further the ongoing discussion on geographic scales of assessments and EU-reporting as well as discussions at OSPAR ICG-MSFD of “cookie-cutter” solution (means to clip regional level assessment results to national waters / marine reporting units) and “parallel” solution (regional assessments at national and regional/ecologically relevant scales) to allow Member States to report coherent results for their national waters within regional assessments and to use HOLAS III work for informing management of national waters. The Meeting agreed to follow the OSPAR scoping approach and asked the Secretariat to adapt the scoping table, provided by the EU Commission, to the HELCOM context by **27 November 2020** and

each Contracting Party to complete the information on intended scales of HOLAS III assessments (indicator and thematic assessment) in relation to MSFD features and Member State's intended reporting approach (cookie-cutter or parallel approach) by **22 January 2021**. The Meeting requested CG MSFD to review the results, identify implications for HELCOM assessment and presentation work and prepare a proposal by **23 April 2021** for conclusion at GEAR 24-2021 so that identified needs can still be implemented in the HELCOM context. The Meeting requested CG MSFD to assess in this context proposals by the EU Commission for completion of EU reporting sheets for Art. 8 MSFD at regional level and prepare a proposal for conclusion by GEAR 24-2021.

3.5 Regarding the application of exceptions, the Meeting noted a need for a transparent EU process on how to deal with the 2020 goal of the MSFD to achieve GES and consequent application of Art. 14 MSFD to ensure a level-playing field among Member States. The Meeting agreed that the exchange on Art. 14 MSFD should continue.

3.6 The Meeting noted preliminary summaries presented by the ACTION project (WP 5) on conditions that influence GES and asked Contracting Parties to give feedback by **20 November 2020** to the project (Mr. Urmas Lips, urmas.lips@taltech.ee) on the presented tables and any expectations on contents and format for presenting the results of WP 5 to ease use and uptake of the results by EU Member States in the Joint Documentation (document 3-7 to this Meeting).

National timetables

3.7 The Meeting took note of the updated overview of national timetables for MSFD implementation as presented by the Contracting Parties also being EU Member States (**document 3-2 and 3-2 Rev. 1**).

INSPIRE

3.8 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 20-2019 discussed possibilities in providing coordinated HELCOM input to INSPIRE data model process based on the two options presented by EU TG DATA and agreed that more consideration by TG DATA is needed to identify the correct approach for how to involve the RSCs, as well as the legal implications of delegating the services, including regarding data ownership, obligations, and accountability and invited the EU-Commission to bring the concerns of the CPs for consideration at TG DATA ([Outcome of GEAR 20-2019](#), para. 3.6-3.8).

3.9 The Meeting took note that as the TG DATA meeting will take place 12 November and thus no further information was available at GEAR 23-2020.

Revised Commission Decision

3.10 The Meeting took note of the input to the EU MSFD CIS work in spring and autumn 2020 provided by the HELCOM Contracting Parties who are also EU Member States (**document 3-4**).

3.11 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 20-2019 commented the strategic follow-up to Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848 and agreed to come back to the questions raised at GEAR 21-2020 ([document 3-4](#) and [Outcome of GEAR 20-2019](#), para. 3.19-3.22). However, due to time constraints GEAR 21-2019 did not consider the issue and agreed to come back to the issue following the WG GES workshop on cross-cutting assessment issues to be held in September 2020, online ([document 3-2](#) and [Outcome of GEAR 21-2019](#), para. 3.25 respectively).

3.12 The Meeting took note that the WG GES Horizontal Issues Workshop on the topic of threshold values was held online, on 30 September 2020.

Update of monitoring programmes

3.13 The Meeting took note of the finalization of the revision of the HELCOM Monitoring Manual which is available in the [HELCOM website](#) (**document 3-3**).

Programmes of measures

3.14 The Meeting welcomed information from Contracting Parties on the national planning of measures and approaches to setting up MPAs under MSFD.

3.15 The Meeting took note of the overview of threatened and declining species occurring in the waters of more than one CP as prepared by the Secretariat (**document 3-1**) and noted that Lithuania provided updated input to the document.

3.16 The Meeting encouraged Contracting Parties to use the list of species for further work in State & Conservation to improve coherence of spatial protection of species and habitats across borders and welcomed information on initiatives of supporting bilateral cooperation to this end.

Programmes of measures - Joint Documentation

3.17 The Meeting took note of the draft structure of the Joint Documentation and the current drafts of the Table 4 content based on GEAR, CG MSFD and intersessional input (GEAR 21-2019, CG MSFD 6-2020, CG MSFD 7-2020 and CG MSFD 8-2020) (**document 3-6**).

3.18 The Meeting took note of the views in relation to the purpose of the documentation and on ensuring the usefulness of its contents, including its use to develop a common understanding on main challenges, where actions should be taken, identifying topics where transboundary efforts would bring most added value and as support for national reporting. The Meeting supported that the content should be as concrete, concise and precise as possible.

3.19 The Meeting discussed the content of the topic tables, using the marine litter table as an example.

3.20 The Meeting acknowledged that the Joint Documentation, and the tables in particular, should function as a compilation and summary of existing information, rather than aim to present new information.

3.21 The Meeting agreed to channel invitations for experts to provide specific comments/review the tables through the respective national CG MSFD contact, rather than approaching Expert Groups directly.

3.22 The Meeting recognized the benefits of progressing on the topic of environmental targets within HELCOM, especially under the auspice of BSAP, and identified marine litter as a particular topic where setting environmental targets could be considered.

3.23 The Meeting took note of the various activities going on in HELCOM (i.a. SOM analysis, ongoing work on Action Plans etc.) which could contribute to the tables of the Joint Documentation and acknowledged that harnessing this information for the topic tables from within the CG MSFD might be challenging as access and information is not always easily accessible. The Meeting invited the Secretariat to review the tables and provide input regarding links to ongoing or planned work within HELCOM, including a timeline for the work in question to indicate whether it will be available in time for inclusion in the Joint Documentation.

3.24 The Meeting agreed that Contracting Parties, through CG MSFD, will continue work preparing and consolidating the Tables. Further discussion on the Tables will take place at an online meeting of the CG MSFD to be held in February (date tbd) after which consolidated versions of the Tables will be provided to the Secretariat by **mid-February**. CG MSFD will then prepare a further elaborated Joint Documentation document for consideration at GEAR 24-2021.

Planning upcoming work related to the MSFD

3.25 The Meeting took note of the expectations regarding HOLAS III as provided by CG MSFD members (**document 3-7**) to support the discussions on HOLAS III at GEAR 23-2020.

3.26 The Meeting considered the proposals for MSFD related topics for inclusion on the agenda of GEAR 24-2021 and agreed that CG MSFD will facilitate at, or prior to, GEAR 24-2021:

- the exchange of information on planned additional national measures and opportunities for regional coordination;

- the exchange of information on planned exceptions under Art. 14 MSFD and opportunities for regional coordination;
- discussion of transboundary impacts of the planned additional measures under Art. 13 MSFD and any exceptions under Art. 14 MSFD;
- the procedural approach to transboundary strategic environmental assessment;
- the finalisation of HELCOM joint documentation in support of HELCOM EU Member States updating of Art. 13 and 14 MSFD reporting on POMs;
- the exchange on the preparation of the next reporting round under updates of Art. 8, 9 and 10 MSFD and linkages with HOLAS III; and
- the identification and preparation of exchange on EU MSFD CIS matters in need of regional coordination.

Agenda Item 4 Implementation and update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan

BSAP Update workplan

4.1 The Meeting took note of the updated Work Plan for the update of the BSAP as contained in **document 4-1 (Presentation 2)**.

4.2 The Meeting took note that HOD 58-2020 agreed on the year 2030 as the target year for implementing the BSAP. With regard to the target year for achieving good environmental status for the Baltic Sea, the meeting further agreed to include in the updated BSAP a reference to the 2007 BSAP and the HELCOM assessments.

Drafting of the updated BSAP

4.3 The Meeting took note of the guidance, detailed plan for drafting of the updated BSAP and the preliminary timetable (**document 4-3**, Presentation 2).

4.4 The Meeting took note of the segment specific introductions for the updated BSAP (**document 4-7, 4-7 Rev. 1 and 4-7 Rev. 2**).

4.5 The Meeting took note of a suggestion for an amended version of the first draft of the segment specific introduction for biodiversity, taking into account comments raised at State&Conservation 13-2020 (**document 4-9**), and supported that it can be used as the basis for the further drafting.

4.6 The Meeting took note of the Swedish comments to the segment specific introductions for the updated BSAP (**document 4-10**) with the understanding that they are aimed as a basis for further discussion, not representing a final Swedish view.

4.7 The Meeting reviewed the segment specific introductions for the updated BSAP and emphasized that the introductions should be aligned across segments, e.g. by using the same headings under each segment, the introductions should be shortened, e.g. by limiting the amount of background information. The text should further be easily accessible and focus on providing a link between the objectives, aspirations and actions.

4.8 The Meeting supported that wherever possible redundancy and repetition within and across segments should be avoided.

4.9 The Meeting took note of the proposal to move the section focusing on current state to the Introduction, as opposed to be included in the Operative section where it is currently placed.

4.10 The Meeting noted that there is a need for more guidance on what to include under the heading "action areas" as well as considerations for whether there is a need to reflect the information intended for the figure also in the text (e.g. climate change parameters and links to SDG goals and targets).

4.11 The Meeting noted the views by some Contracting Parties that the segment introductions should be refocused to ensure that the text provides stronger support for implementing the measures, have a stronger focus on aspirations and strategic decisions.

4.12 The Meeting supported the discussion in the DG BSAP segment teams on aiming for a more inspirational and aspirational focus. The Meeting invited the Secretariat to highlight for HODs the need to consider what the focus of the introductory text should be and provide guidance to DG BSAP accordingly, and, should a change in focus be supported, consider how work on identifying strategic decisions and aspirations could be taken forward under the DG BSAP. The Meeting highlighted that utilizing a lead country approach for the segments could be useful in this regard.

4.13 The Meeting took note of the overarching preamble for the updated BSAP (**document 4-8**).

4.14 The Meeting took note of comments that the overarching preamble could also include a paragraph on climate change mitigation and on recognizing the socio-economic benefits of implementing the measures and actions included in the updated BSAP.

MSP in BSAP and the new Regional MSP Roadmap

4.15 The Meeting took note that HOD 58-2020 requested the HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG to submit a draft MSP Roadmap for consideration of relevant HELCOM Working Groups e.g. GEAR Group.

4.16 The Meeting took note that the draft MSP Roadmap was not ready for consideration to this Meeting but that it will be considered at the upcoming 21st Meeting of the joint HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group meeting (12-13 November 2020).

Progress on Sufficiency of Measures Analysis

4.17 The Meeting took note of the preliminary results of the SOM analysis (**document 4-4, Presentation 3**).

4.18 The Meeting took note of the presentation of the results of the SOM analysis (**document 4-6**).

4.19 The Meeting took note that there is need for topic-specific expert input to finalize the topic reports. The Meeting noted that especially for marine mammals and birds it would be beneficial if national experts could be encouraged to review the report, since there are no topic teams for these topics. The Meeting acknowledged that, while it has not originally been included in the planned process, where not topic teams are available relevant expert groups could be invited to review and comment on the reports.

4.20 The Meeting acknowledged that the uncertainties in the results have been sufficiently described.

4.21 The Meeting provided the following comments regarding the presentation of SOM results:

- it would be valuable to have clear conclusions that would answer to the questions: whether GES can be achieved, which are the most important pressures, which activities cause these pressures, which activities are not sufficiently addressed today and which measures are especially important to fully implement. Ranking of pressures and activities could be useful. Answers to some of these questions are already included in the topic reports. It is also helpful to inform if these questions cannot be answered and explain the reason for this;
- an overview table could be compiled that includes answers to these questions for all topics;
- if there has been a minimum of three experts contributing to the estimate/result component the results could be included;
- the summary for the topic report on hazardous substances should clearly state that there were only four substance groups included in the SOM analysis and give a reflection on what this means for the use of the results as regards hazardous substances in BSAP. The topic report should include information on how the supplementary activities were included in the analysis.

4.22 The Meeting invited the Contracting Parties to send comments to document 4-6 to the Secretariat as soon as possible (Ms. Heini Ahtiainen, Heini.Ahtiainen@helcom.fi). The Meeting took note that the results of the SOM analysis will be submitted to HOD 59-2020 and invited the Contracting Parties to submit possible comments to HOD 59-2020 **by 20 November 2020**, noting that major changes might not be possible to implement anymore due to the strict timeline.

4.23 The Meeting took note of the validation of input data to the SOM analysis.

4.24 The Meeting took note of the methodology and progress of the cost-effectiveness analysis (**document 4-5, Presentation 4**).

4.25 The Meeting took note that the results of the cost-effectiveness analysis are delayed and regretted that the results will not be available by the decision document deadline for HOD 59-2020. The Meeting took note that the process to draft the actions will continue in spring and the results might be used in the further drafting process for the actions that are yet not agreed in principle in HOD 59-2020.

4.26 The Meeting recalled that the ACTION project ends by the end of 2020 and thus all work on the SOM analysis needs to be finalized by the end of the year.

Actions and measures for the updated BSAP

4.27 The Meeting took note of the information on the process of finalizing existing actions of relevance for GEAR (**document 4-2**).

4.28 The Meeting was of the view that with the formulation presented in the document the actions would be challenging to accomplish. The Meeting agreed that the actions could be rephrased to be more general. The Meeting suggested that the focus should be on conducting an analysis on harmful subsidies and forming a joint understanding within HELCOM. The Meeting pointed out that the actions should be aligned with the EU Biodiversity Strategy and CBD targets.

4.29 The Meeting proposed the following alternative wording for the actions for consideration by HOD 59-2020:

- By [2025] HELCOM to identify subsidies or incentives which are harmful for the marine environment and, by [2030] work, in cooperation with relevant international organizations, on phasing out such subsidies or incentives.
- By [2025] identify incentives to reduce pressures on the marine environment, including public and private economic and regulatory incentives, and by [2030] increase the use of incentives and fill possible gaps.

4.30 The Meeting welcomed the offer by Denmark and Sweden to fill in the relevant information for these actions to the annex of the BSAP by the **end of February 2021**. The Meeting agreed that the draft annex texts will be sent for review to EN ESA prior to submission of the annex to GEAR 24-2021 and finalized in GEAR 24-2021.

Proposed new actions and measures for the updated BSAP

4.31 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 22-2020 was informed of the review process of the synopses on potential new HELCOM actions for the updated BSAP ([Outcome of GEAR 22-2020](#), para. 4.39-4.46).

4.32 The Meeting took note of the HELCOM BSAP UP workshops for the consideration of proposed new actions on: (i) maritime activities, including underwater noise, non-indigenous species and response actions ([HELCOM BSAP UP WS-SEA 2020](#)); (ii) biodiversity, including extraction of species and spatial measures ([HELCOM BSAP UP WS-BIO 2020](#)); (iii) eutrophication ([HELCOM BSAP UP WS-EUTRO 2020](#)); and (iv) hazardous substances and litter ([HELCOM BSAP UP WS-HZ 2020](#)).

4.33 The Meeting took note that Denmark will not be able to have a final position on the proposed new actions in HOD 59-2020, but the Meeting also noted that the final approval of actions is only planned for HOD 60-2020.

4.34 The Meeting took note of the clarification with regards to new actions and the synopses they originated from that the operative section of the BSAP will include the actions, in their final formulation, and will thus not include any of the background information provided in the synopsis template. For the sake of the further process, the titles of the synopses are used to represent the action. However, the Meeting noted that some of the titles of the synopses are yet not formulated as actions and will be redrafted in spring 2021 by the DG BSAP segment teams.

4.35 The Meeting acknowledged that at HOD 59-2020 Contracting Parties are invited to provisionally approve the action contained in each synopsis (represented by the title), as opposed to the current formulation of the title, thus indicating which actions should be taken forward and reformulated under DG BSAP in spring 2021.

4.36 The Meeting furthermore noted that the background information included in the synopses can be used as the basis for filling in the annex to the updated BSAP, e.g. explaining the rationale, effect and indicator for achievement for the actions or some of the information could be included in the HELCOM Explorer.

Agenda Item 5 Activities of relevant HELCOM projects or processes

HELCOM ACTION project

5.1 The Meeting took note of the update on the status of work of the ACTION project (**document 5-12**).

Planning for HOLAS III and associated processes

5.2 The Meeting took note of an overarching presentation on the HOLAS III planning and processes (**Presentation 5**).

5.3 The Meeting noted the requirement of Commission Decision 2017/848 for EU Member States to agree at regional level, or in some cases EU level, integration rules for expressing whether GES has been achieved or not in a coherent manner. The Meeting noted also that EU MSFD CIS work (e.g. TG Noise, TG Litter, TG Seabed, D1 Expert Network) is expected to deliver contributions to integration rules by spring 2021. The Meeting agreed to include a request in the review of the thematic assessment tools (BEAT, HEAT, CHASE) that MSFD requirements and the results from EU MSFD CIS work are taken into account. This has to happen within the scope and financial provisions of already set up project work (MetDev, BLUES application, joint OSPAR-HELCOM request to ICES on CHASE) and within the HOLAS timelines, which require that HELCOM thematic assessment methods are ready by end of 2021.

5.4 The Meeting considered the proposed setup of the HOLAS III assessment working structure (**document 5-7**).

5.5 The Meeting provided comments to the draft 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.

5.6 The Meeting discussed whether there is a need for overarching strategic steer 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 steer be considered to be relevant, either GEAR or the proposed expert platform could be considered as appropriate for this task.

5.7 The Meeting took note of the clarification that under the current plan the aim is to have agreement on several of the topics which require policy steer (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.

- 5.8 The Meeting took note that Denmark does not support the establishment of any new expert groups for the HOLAS III process.
- 5.9 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.
- 5.10 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.
- 5.11 The Meeting invited the Secretariat to, should the ad hoc groups be favoured also by HOD 59-2020, draft ToRs for the two ad hoc groups in spring 2021 to support the further discussion on tasks, mandate and structure.
- 5.12 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.

MSFD call 2020

- 5.13 The Meeting took note and welcomed with appreciation the HELCOM Blues project application sent to the EMFF/MSFD call to "Support the preparation of the next 6-year cycle of MSFD implementation through the marine strategies" (**document 5-8**).

HOLAS III Associated Processes

- 5.14 The Meeting took note that HOD 58-2020 approved the way forward for filling gaps in expertise for the HOLAS III assessment, as proposed by STATE&CONSERVATION 12-2020.
- 5.15 The Meeting took note of the progress regarding implementing the agreed approach for commercial fish (**document 5-9**), foodwebs (**document 5-10**) and pelagic habitats (**document 5-11**).
- 5.16 The Meeting encouraged national nomination of experts to populate the groups and the planned workshops (including nomination of experts for core group to support the preparatory work required in advance of them) and inform the Secretariat accordingly (Owen.Rowe@helcom.fi) by **27 November 2020**.

HELCOM indicators project

- 5.17 The Meeting took note of the progress and the current status on the development of HELCOM indicators for HOLAS III (**document 5-6**).

HELCOM Indicator Manual

- 5.18 The Meeting took note of the draft HELCOM Indicator Manual Version 1.0 (**document 5-1 and 5-1 Rev. 1**).
- 5.19 The Meeting took note of the views by Denmark that indicator development should be prioritised based on the criteria identified by GEAR, i.e. working on primary EU MSFD criteria before secondary criteria etc.
- 5.20 The Meeting agreed on the suggestion by Finland to add a reference to the work conducted as part of the CORESET projects and invited the Secretariat to include a brief paragraph outlining the background of HELCOM indicator development.
- 5.21 The Meeting agreed to remove the 1.0 from the cover and title of the document.
- 5.22 The Meeting endorsed the draft "HELCOM Indicator Manual" for submission to HOD 59-2020 for approval.

HELCOM Data Flow Project (DataFlow)

5.23 The Meeting took note of the summary of actualized data reporting events, availability of data and challenges in providing 2021 data for end of May 2022 as informed by data reporters and/or expert networks (**document 5-3**). The Meeting took note that the situation for how many years of data are included in the assessment will likely not differ much from that under HOLAS II, and that the Secretariat is exploring if it is possible to assess the impact of including the data year 2021 on the assessment, as this means a wider spread and greater patchwork of assessment years with potential to bias the assessments.

5.24 The Meeting noted that Germany will not be able to contribute data for the year 2021 for most data calls for to HOLAS III.

5.25 The Meeting noted that Poland will provide updated input to document 5-3.

5.26 The Meeting took note of the draft data call for HOLAS III and that the prioritization of which BSII/BSPI layers are to be updated via the data call has progressed under STATE&CONSERVATION 13B-2020 (**document 5-4**).

5.27 The Meeting took note of the clarification by the Secretariat that the current data call covers data foreseen to be needed in relation to existing assessments, however, in case more indicators are operational by HOLAS III, there will be a need to make specific data calls.

5.28 The Meeting discussed the draft data call, took note that Denmark and Poland will provide written comments to the Secretariat (joni.kaitaranta@helcom.fi) in relation to the foreseen input of the national data by **13 November 2020 midday** at the latest, and endorsed the document for submission to HOD 59-2020 for approval.

HELCOM Holistic Assessment Methodology Development Project (MetDev)

5.29 The Meeting took note of the updated project plan for MetDev (**document 5-5**).

5.30 The Meeting took note that it is proposed to remove the Work Package 3 in the project as the tasks originally planned to be included under this Work Package (WP) have all been included as part of other processes or applications.

5.31 The Meeting took note of the information that resources have been secured for the resource needs outlined under Work Packages 1 and 2.

5.32 The Meeting took note of the comments by Sweden that should there still be a need to prioritise the work within WP2 the economical presentation on the maritime sectors, and cost of degradation analysis could be considered more as updating rather than development. Sweden proposed that regarding the sub-task D on drivers, this should be formulated as a scoping exercise to define ways in which the topic could be introduced in HOLASIII. Sweden sees a potential in looking into e.g. methods for identifying the actors and their respective driving forces which result in load to the sea, as a basis for identifying effective measures. However, the Meeting did not support extending/reformulating the task D in MetDev The Meeting invited Sweden and the Secretariat to explore the work on drivers further at the beginning of the project.

5.33 The Meeting noted that, aside from EN ESA's role to guide and contribute to the work under WP2, the role of EN ESA specifically in relation to the development of driver indicator and driver analysis is not fully clear and as part of the work EN ESA could be directly involved e.g. to identify how the work under this task could be used in the broader context also outside of HOLAS III, e.g. to support BAU analysis.

5.34 The Meeting took note of the clarification by the Secretariat that the ESA Roadmap has been used to guide the drafting of the tasks under WP 2, but that the tasks have also evolved as part of the process, including the shifting of tasks between the MetDev and BLUES project proposals.

5.35 The Meeting endorsed the updated project plan for MetDev for submission to HOD 59-2020 for approval, thus enabling the work to begin in early 2021.

5.36 The Meeting took note that changes, stemming from the technical CIA workshop, as well as from the BLUES project, should it not be successful, will need to be made to the proposal.

MetDev Cumulative Impacts Assessment work package

5.37 The Meeting took note of the outcome of the Cumulative Impact Scoping Meeting (CIA Scoping 1-2020) (**document 5-2**).

5.38 The Meeting took note of the outcome the technical meeting on cumulative impact assessment held online on 3-4 November 2020 ([Technical CIA WS 1-2020](#)) and the ongoing process to finalize Work Package 1 for the MetDev project proposal using the CIA process outcomes as a basis.

5.39 The Meeting took note of the information that in the technical meeting it was supported to no longer use the term “cumulative impact assessment” but instead to use the term “spatial pressures and impacts assessment” to better represent that the aim is to identify the spatial distribution of pressures and impacts, and how these relate to the status.

Agenda Item 6 **Future work and meetings**

6.1 The Meeting took note of the Roadmap on HELCOM activities on ecosystem approach (**document 6-1**), considered the need to update it and agreed to align the update with the BSAP update, so as to ensure that the actions of relevance stemming from the updated BSAP can be included.

6.2 The Meeting agreed to work on an updated Roadmap at GEAR 24-2021 with the aim of finalizing the update at GEAR 25-2021 (9-11 November 2021) and submit the updated roadmap to HOD 61-2021 for approval.

6.3 The Meeting was of the view that the document has been useful in relation to reporting on HELCOM work in relation to SDGs.

6.4 The Meeting took note of the suggestion by Germany to consider whether action 3 is to be implemented at EU or regional level.

6.5 The Meeting suggested that the document could also include, in its next version, areas of actions which are of high priority for implementing the ecosystem approach, but which lack of a process and/or resources, thus facilitating identifying gaps in implementation.

6.6 The Meeting discussed the benefit of considering HELCOM work in relation to the principles of the ecosystem approach (the Malawi principles) and assess to what degree HELCOM work fulfils the principles and identify possible areas for improvement. The Meeting welcomed the offer by Finland and Sweden to prepare a document on the topic for GEAR 24-2021 for further consideration.

Next meeting of GEAR

6.7 The Meeting noted that the next meeting of the GEAR WG will take place on 18-20 May 2021.

6.8 The Meeting agreed to hold GEAR 26-2022 on 24-26 May 2022.

6.9 The Meeting agreed to at future meetings agree on dates one meeting further than already agreed (as opposed to two).

6.10 The Meeting agreed to, for meetings taking place online, aim to hold the meetings in the interval 10:00-17:00h EET, to accommodate for the time difference across the region as well as to include shorter but more frequent breaks.

Any other business

6.11 The Meeting invited countries to check and update the List of Contact Addresses and Observers of HELCOM GEAR and inform the Secretariat (marta.ruiz@helcom.fi) by **18 November 2020 (document 6-2)**.

Agenda Item 7 **Outcome of the Meeting**

7.1 Meeting participants were provided with the draft Outcome of the Meeting by **11 November 2020**. Meeting participants were invited to provide comments to the draft Outcome by **12 November 2020**

C.O.B. The Secretariat circulated an updated Outcome by close of business **13 November 2020** for tacit approval by noon **16 November 2020**.

7.2 The final adopted Outcome of the Meeting was made available in the HELCOM Meeting Portal.