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Background

Adoption of the updated HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and dissemination of information to stakeholder organisations.

The BSAC Management Team held a meeting on 25th October 2021. It decided to hold a joint HELCOM, BALTFISH and BSAC meeting to discuss the relevant actions from the adopted HELCOM BSAP.

The BSAC has informally suggested to this to the HELCOM Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries (Fish Group) with the request to liaise with BALTFISH and the BSAC to hold a joint meeting to present the BSAP, to go through the relevant actions and to suggest potential joint work.

A suggested time for such a meeting is January 2022, online. The BSAC Secretariat will arrange a meeting by Zoom.

The justification of this is the importance for HELCOM to disseminate and develop cooperation on with stakeholder groups that are not always able to participate in HELCOM working groups and processes.

The BSAC also takes note of BSAP Action S41 Further elaborate cooperation between the Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum (BALTFISH) and relevant HELCOM working groups by 2023 to facilitate a wide range of actions to achieve good environmental status.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the invitation by the Baltic Sea Advisory Council to have a joint HELCOM, BALTFISH and BSAC meeting to inform the BSAC about the new Baltic Sea Action Plan, the relevant actions relating to fisheries management and their timelines.

This note has been compiled by the BSAC Secretariat.

Title: HELCOM updated Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) with respect to fisheries

Background

The updated BSAP was adopted on 20th October 2021.¹

The work to update the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan was presented to the BSAC at its Ecosystem Based Management Working Group on 18th -19th September 2019. Members discussed and agreed on a list of measures, research or monitoring that should be addressed by and inserted into a new HELCOM BSAP. These were:

- undertaking further upstream efforts to allow migration of fish to the spawning grounds (river connectivity);
- supporting joint work on the food web dynamics in the Baltic Sea in HELCOM;
- monitoring invasive species, including the participation of fishermen and the facility to develop new gears, and research into how the invasive species could be commercialised;
- establishing a threshold value for cormorants (GES);
- marine litter, in particular derelict fishing gears: “no special fee system”, recycling, uniform approach to port reception facilities;
- gravel extraction;
- MPAs;
- investigating the effectiveness of spawning closures;
- keep underlining the importance of tackling eutrophication and pollutants.

The BSAC Executive Committee was informed and noted that BSAC representatives would refer to the above list of points at a HELCOM Workshop 4th-6th November 2019 which dealt with an analysis of Sufficiency of Measures (SOM) for Fish, preparing the way for the update of the BSAP.

The updated HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan contains concrete actions to tackle the pressures the Baltic is facing today, and also addresses climate change, marine litter, pharmaceuticals, underwater noise, and seabed disturbance.² There are the following segments:

Biodiversity segment Actions listed B1 – B35

Eutrophication segment Actions E1 – E36

Hazardous substances and litter segment Actions HL1 – HL32

Sea-based activities segment Actions S1-S68

Horizontal topics Actions HT1-HT28

¹ <https://helcom.fi/helcom-adopts-the-updated-baltic-sea-action-plan-charting-a-way-forward-for-a-healthy-baltic-sea/>

² <https://helcom.fi/media/publications/Baltic-Sea-Action-Plan-2021-update.pdf>

This is where we see the measures proposed by the BSAC:

- **Undertaking further upstream efforts to allow migration of fish to the spawning grounds (river connectivity)**

Biodiversity segment

Theme: Conservation of species

Topic: Conservation of fish

B16 Starting from 2023, in line with relevant international commitments, iteratively review and prioritize effective mitigation measures in the identified rivers and/or dams, including removal of dams and migration barriers where relevant and possible, especially in small waterways.

Develop and implement habitat restoration plans of spawning sites for anadromous species in relevant rivers by 2025.

- **Supporting joint work on the food web dynamics in the Baltic Sea in HELCOM**

Biodiversity segment

Theme: Conservation of species

Topic: Indicators

B34 Develop core indicators, and threshold values to evaluate the status of food webs by 2026, where applicable, and implement a holistic assessment of food webs no later than 2030.

- **Monitoring invasive species, including the participation of fishermen and the facility to develop new gears, and research into how the invasive species could be commercialised;**

Sea-based activities segment

Theme Maritime activities

Topic: Non-indigenous species

S7 Establish by 2024 and subsequently implement the early warning system in case of the introduction of invasive species in ports.

S8 Work for the harmonized implementation of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Biofouling Guidelines and Guidance, taking into account e.g. the proposed Biofouling Management Roadmap, and further contribute to the work carried out in the IMO.

Cross-reference to actions in other segments

S9 Promote the development and use of effective, environmentally sustainable biofouling management techniques and antifouling systems on ships and recreational craft, including biocide-free alternatives to prevent biofouling by supporting related research and development activities in the Baltic Sea region.

Cross-reference to actions in other segments

- **Establishing a threshold value for cormorants (GES)**

Nothing explicit on cormorants.

Although on birds:

Biodiversity segment

Actions on biodiversity

Theme: Conservation of species

Topic: Conservation of birds

Bycatch of birds

S43 development of fisheries management including technical measures to minimize unwanted by-catch of fish, **birds** and marine mammals and achieve the close to zero target for by-catch rates of relevant species by 2024, especially the Baltic proper population of harbour porpoise by 2022.

Cross-reference to actions in other segments

S48 Develop and implement an effective data collection for more reliable data on incidental by-caught **birds** and mammals and fishing effort consistent and fully in line with the data needs identified by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). Relevant sources of data are e.g. EU basic control Regulation and additional national or regional coordinated data collection programmes or projects for filling data-gaps outlined in the HELCOM Roadmap on fisheries data.

S49 Maintain, develop and extend regulatory or voluntary schemes to protect key seabird areas and seasons by establishing appropriate fisheries measures in line with conservation objectives and to monitor incidental catches of **seabirds** by 2025. Extend and develop outreach programmes for the fisheries sector concerning their possible impacts on seabird populations

- **Marine litter, in particular derelict fishing gears: “no special fee system”, recycling, uniform approach to port reception facilities**

Hazardous substances and litter segment

Theme marine litter

HL31 Improve the evidence base on the impact of marine litter on the Baltic Sea region in order to develop and agree on new measures by 2025.

HL32 Agree on core indicators and harmonised monitoring methods to evaluate quantities, composition, distribution and sources (including riverine input), of marine litter, including microlitter, by 2022, where applicable and for the rest no later than 2026. Work should be done in close coordination with work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora, such as the Technical Group on marine litter under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Sea-based activities segment

Theme maritime activities

Topic: Pollution from ships

S 20 Ensure the no-special-fee system for marine litter applies to all passively fished waste by 2024.

Please note: The HELCOM Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter is the main regional tool for achieving the marine litter ecological and management objectives.

- **Gravel extraction**

Sea-based activities segment

Theme: Seabed loss and disturbance

S64 Enforce and implement by 2025, in line with the update of the marine protected area (MPA) management guidelines, effective management plans and/or conservation measures to not allow destructive and exploitative activities related to the seabed that may compromise the conservation objectives of MPAs.

S 65 By 2026 implement a common approach to address and where possible minimize the loss of and disturbance to seabed habitats caused by human activities

S 66 Regularly update and improve the HELCOM Recommendation and Guideline for handling dredged material at sea using the best available knowledge to minimize environmental impact of these activities further developing Best Environmental Practice (BEP) and Best Available Technique (BAT) for dredging and depositing operations

S67 Define the characteristics of benthic habitats, develop core indicators and undertake an integrated assessment of the status of benthic habitats, including their structure, function, distribution and extent of loss, no later than 2023, leading to the identification of measures to reduce adverse effects where needed. Work should be done in close cooperation with work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora, taking into account activities in EU Technical Group on seabed habitats and sea-floor integrity (TG Seabed), and considering the ICES advice on a sea-floor assessment process

S68 Develop a map service for lost and disturbed habitats under HELCOM Map and Data Service by 2024

- **MPAs**

Biodiversity segment

Theme: spatial conservation measures

Topic: Spatial conservation management

B3 By 2023 update, and by 2025, apply HELCOM MPA management guidelines with focus on:

- a. Assessments and evaluation methodology and structures for management effectiveness;
- b. Setting quantitative conservation objectives;
- c. Effective conservation measures that reduce pressures;
- d. Establishment of indicators to monitor management performance and status of conservation features;
- e. Establishment of a common monitoring strategy and evaluation of conservation features and pressures;
- f. Adaptive management.

Cross-reference to actions in other segments

S42 S47 S54 S57 S64

B4 By 2026 nationally ensure that marine protected area (MPA) management plans and/or measures are legally binding and ensure appropriate structures are in place to enforce compliance in order to achieve their conservation objectives.

B5 Develop, implement and share information on effective management measures, including measures to ensure compliance/control measures, to reduce the impact of fisheries inside marine protected areas (MPAs) in order to contribute to achieve their conservation objectives.

Cross-reference to actions in other segments

S42 S47 S54

Topic: Coherence of the marine protected area (MPA) network – lots of points

And

Theme: Spatial conservation measures

Topic: Coherence of the marine protected area (MPA) network

B6 The coherence of the marine protected area (MPA) network will be periodically assessed at least every ten years, with the next such assessment to be carried out by 2025. By 2027 the results from the coherence assessment are to be used to take appropriate actions to ensure conservation and resilience of biodiversity, and to identify possible spatial conservation expansion needs to improve coherence.

B7 Ensure that by 2030 the HELCOM marine protected area (MPA) network amongst other things provides specific protection to species and biotopes listed as regionally threatened or near threatened in the HELCOM Red Lists

- **Investigating the effectiveness of spawning closures**

Hard to find a direct reference.

Biodiversity segment

Theme: Spatial conservation measures

Topic: Spatial conservation management

B3 By 2023 update, and by 2025, apply HELCOM MPA management guidelines with focus on:

- Assessments and evaluation methodology and structures for management effectiveness;
- Setting quantitative conservation objectives;
- Effective conservation measures that reduce pressures;
- Establishment of indicators to monitor management performance and status of conservation features;
- Establishment of a common monitoring strategy and evaluation of conservation features and pressures;
- Adaptive management.

Cross-reference to actions in other segments

S42 S47 S54 S57 S64

Topic fish stock management S53

S53 Implement measures to restore coastal fish communities, including establishment of no-take areas, seasonal closures and catch regulations, as appropriate by 2026 for the specific coastal area.

Cross-reference to actions in other segments

B15

- **Keep underlining the importance of tackling eutrophication and pollutants**

Eutrophication segment, with the following Themes:

Follow-up of the implementation of nutrient input targets

Agriculture

Atmospheric nitrogen emissions

Wastewater sector

Nutrient recycling

See also segment on hazardous substances and litter with Themes:

Hazardous substances

Legacy pollutants

Contaminants of emerging concern

Marine litter

XXXXXXXX

Then we've gone through three segments to point out what's relevant for fisheries

Biodiversity Segment: The Baltic Sea ecosystem is healthy and resilient

It lists 35 actions aiming to reach the goal

There are 4 themes: spatial conservation measures, conservation of species, conservation of habitats and biotopes, and enabling ecosystem-based management

1. Spatial conservation measures [7 actions] - directly/indirectly relate to fisheries

B5 Develop, implement and share information on effective management measures, including measures to ensure compliance/control measures, to reduce the impact of fisheries inside marine protected areas (MPAs) in order to contribute to achieve their conservation objectives.

2. Conservation of species [17 actions]

See the **Topic: Conservation of fish of which there are 4 actions, of which 3 here:**

B15 Develop and coordinate monitoring and assessment methods, where ecologically relevant, for specified representative coastal fish species, populations and communities, by 2023. Based on these assessment methods, to regularly assess the state of the coastal fish community through selected coastal fish species and groups, including threatened species, by at latest 2023. Based on the results of the assessment, develop and implement management measures with the ambition to maintain or improve the status of coastal fish species, including migratory species by 2027.

B16 To strengthen native strains and to reinstate migratory fish species:

By 2023 identify rivers where management measures for migratory fish species, including eel, would have the greatest positive impact.

Starting from 2023, in line with relevant international commitments, iteratively review and prioritize effective mitigation measures in the identified rivers and/or dams, including removal of dams and migration barriers where relevant and possible, especially in small waterways.

Develop and implement habitat restoration plans of spawning sites for anadromous species in relevant rivers by 2025.

B17 With the aim to protect and restore eel population, determine which measures set out in the Convention on the Conservation Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), EU Eel Regulation and other relevant instruments would benefit from regional cooperation on a Baltic-wide level. Finalize by 2024 and implement by 2025 a Baltic coordinated programme of such measures.

3. Conservation of habitats and biotopes [6 actions]

B25 Map ecosystem services and the present and potential spatial distribution of key ecosystem components, including habitat forming species such as bladder wrack, eelgrass, blue mussel and stoneworts Baltic-wide, by 2025.

B26 Protect key ecosystem components including habitat forming species by 2030, by: assessing the state of, and threats to these key ecosystem components by 2023; implement effective and relevant threat mitigation measures based on the threat and state assessments; including restricting human activities associated with causing physical loss or disturbance, by 2030 identifying suitable measures and types of habitats, biotopes and key ecosystem components for passive or active restoration by 2025 and implementing programmes for restoration as outlined in the HELCOM Restoration Action plan by 2030.

B27 By 2025 develop and by 2026 start implementing a HELCOM Action Plan for habitat and biotope restoration, including qualitative and quantitative regional targets, a prioritized list of actions, and an associated implementation toolbox outlining best practices and methods for restoration in the Baltic Sea region.

B29 Update the HELCOM Red List Assessments by 2024, including identifying the main individual and cumulative pressures and underlying human activities affecting the red listed biotopes and habitats.

B29 By 2025 develop, and by 2027 implement, and ensure compliance with, ecologically relevant conservation plans or other relevant programmes or measures, limiting direct and indirect pressures stemming from human activities for threatened and declining biotopes and habitats.

B30 Develop tools for, and regularly assess, the effectiveness of other conservation measures for habitats and biotopes, besides marine protected areas (MPAs), the first assessment to be done by 2025 as well as assess effect on biotopes and habitats through risk- and status assessments by 2029.

4. Enabling ecosystem-based management - has one specific action on fish:

B35 By 2024 operationalize a set of indicators for the assessment of fish population health, including size and age distribution, where applicable, and, by 2029, for any remaining relevant species.

Sea-based activities: Environmentally sustainable sea-based activities

1. Maritime activities [29 actions]

Includes actions on maritime safety, non-indigenous species, recreational boating, pollution from ships

2. Response [8 actions]

3. Fisheries management [4 actions]

S39 Develop guidance by 2026 in cooperation with the Regional Coordination Groups within the EU Data Collection Framework and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) on how to improve data collected on recreational fisheries in a cost-effective way, with a view to evaluate the impacts of recreational fisheries on the marine environment, where there is a need.

S40 Identify by 2024 fish species for which there is a need for better data for identified purposes, such as setting threshold levels. Utilise dedicated programmes and projects to facilitate recording and reporting of data for these species by 2025 to support the identification and implementation of measures to achieve good environmental status.

S41 Further elaborate cooperation between the Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum (BALTFISH) and relevant HELCOM working groups by 2023 to facilitate a wide range of actions to achieve good environmental status.

S42 Update and harmonize by 2024 the 2016 BALTFIMPA³ decision-support tool approach with ongoing initiatives e.g. in the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) on a seafloor assessment framework for the Baltic Sea. This tool should also provide options on how to reduce the possible negative impact of fisheries on conservation values in the most cost-effective way, including in marine protected areas (MPAs).

4. Bycatch [7 actions] of which the first mentions fish:

S43 Reduce the negative impacts of fishing activities on the marine ecosystem and to this end, support the development of fisheries management including technical measures to minimize unwanted by-catch of fish, birds and marine mammals and achieve the close to zero target for by-catch rates of relevant species by 2024, especially the Baltic proper population of harbour porpoise by 2022.

5. Fish stock management [5 actions]

S50 Competent authorities to jointly further develop protective measures for Baltic Sea salmon to support the development of a new regional salmon management plan, and nationally establish salmon management

³ <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/baltfimpa/>

plans by 2023, where appropriate. These management plans should be implemented by 2025 to achieve the set targets, including but not limited to smolt production, genetic diversity and distribution throughout the river habitat. In addition, nationally ensure that granting permits for activities in and near rivers does not compromise the ability to reach set river specific fish population targets.

Cross reference to B16

S51 Competent authorities to improve data related to sea trout stocks and to improve populations of sea trout stocks by implementing national measures at the latest by 2025 with the view to achieve good ecological condition in sea trout streams.

Cross reference to B16

S52 Define necessary complementary measures by 2024 in relevant policy (fisheries, environment etc.) areas to improve the size/age structure for fish stocks, including cod.

Cross reference to B27

S53 Implement measures to restore coastal fish communities, including establishment of no-take areas, seasonal closures and catch regulations, as appropriate by 2026 for the specific coastal area.

Cross reference to B15

S54 Share information among Contracting Parties, the Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum (BALTFISH) and Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) on non-lethal mitigation measures or other ways to manage seals-fisheries interactions and implement those measures by 2025, as appropriate.

Cross reference to B3, B5

6. Underwater noise [9 actions] – directly/indirectly related to fish

7. Seabed loss and disturbance [5 actions] – all relevant

S64 Enforce and implement by 2025, in line with the update of the marine protected area (MPA) management guidelines, effective management plans and/or conservation measures to not allow destructive and exploitative activities related to the seabed that may compromise the conservation objectives of MPAs.

Cross reference to B3

S65 By 2026 implement a common approach to address and where possible minimize the loss of and disturbance to seabed habitats caused by human activities.

S66 Regularly update and improve the HELCOM Recommendation and Guideline for handling dredged material at sea using the best available knowledge to minimize environmental impact of these activities further developing Best Environmental Practice (BEP) and Best Available Technique (BAT) for dredging and depositing operations.

S67 Define the characteristics of benthic habitats, develop core indicators and undertake an integrated assessment of the status of benthic habitats, including their structure, function, distribution and extent of loss, no later than 2023, leading to the identification of measures to reduce adverse effects where needed. Work should be done in close cooperation with work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora, taking into account activities in EU Technical Group on seabed habitats and sea-floor integrity (TG Seabed), and considering the ICES advice on a sea-floor assessment process.

S68 Develop a map service for lost and disturbed habitats under HELCOM Map and Data Service by 2024.

Finally, there are Horizontal issues

Here there's with monitoring, maritime spatial planning, economic and social analysis, hot-spots, and knowledge exchange and awareness. See, for example:

H22 By 2025 HELCOM should 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.

H27 Increase knowledge exchange and awareness raising to promote public and stakeholder support and interest in understanding the state of the Baltic Sea and threats to its environment as well as promote opportunities for the general public to participate in citizen science.