



Document title	Draft Terms of Reference for the Zooplankton Expert Group
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Agenda Item	6 - Matters arising from the HELCOM Groups
Submission date	16.11.2021
Submitted by	Executive Secretary
Reference	Outcome of STATE&CONSERVATION 15-2021 (paragraph 3J.45)

Background

The HELCOM Zooplankton Expert Network (ZEN) works on promoting zooplankton-based indicators to keep track of the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and to support the international Baltic regional zooplankton monitoring. The Network provides a forum for experts involved in Baltic Sea zooplankton monitoring to share information on methodological aspects of collecting and analyzing samples, data storage, statistical treatment, quality assurance and taxonomical aspects of zooplankton research. ZEN consists of nominated members from Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden.

The group works on the overall quality, evaluation and reporting of the national marine zooplankton monitoring data and has promoted the use of long-term data for environmental assessment in the Baltic Sea and to improve the efficiency of the monitoring data use. The group started developing indicators in 2010 within the CORESET I project using zooplankton monitoring data from the Baltic Sea and oversees development of the Zooplankton mean size and total stock (MSTS) indicator, which is currently being further developed under the HELCOM BLUES project. The group has previously completed two projects: ZEN-QAI, the Quality Assurance and Integration of Zooplankton Monitoring in the Baltic Sea (2011-2014) and ZEN-ZIIM, the Zooplankton Indicator Integration to Monitoring in the Baltic Sea (2015-2017).

The group contributes to HELCOM work by providing guidance on topics related to zooplankton in HELCOM processes and projects related to pelagic habitats and food webs. Since the end of the last project the group has been dormant. As zooplankton is an integral component of HELCOM assessment work, especially with relation to pelagic habitats and food webs, the upcoming HOLAS III assessment phase and the implementation of the 2021 BSAP. STATE & CONSERVATION 14-2021 supported reviving the platform as an Expert Group. The meeting invited the Secretariat to provide a first draft of the terms of reference for the group and invited the Contracting Parties to review the draft document and to provide comments to the Secretariat in order to finalize the ToRs to be considered by STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021.

STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 in principle approved the final ToR for the Zooplankton Expert Group for adoption at HOD 61-2021, noting the changes proposed by Germany. The meeting agreed to review the changes proposed by Germany intersessionally, after which the ToR can be considered approved.

This document contains the updated terms of reference which have been intersessionally approved by State&Conservation. A workplan will be prepared by the EG, for approval by State&Conservation WG, once the ToRs are adopted.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to adopt the draft Terms of reference for the HELCOM Zooplankton Expert Group (ZEG).

Terms of Reference for HELCOM Expert Group on Zooplankton (ZEG)

Background

Zooplankton is a major link in aquatic ecosystems and integral to food web dynamics, ecosystem productivity, and nutrient and carbon cycling. Given its key position linking phytoplankton to higher trophic levels, an improved understanding of zooplankton as a part of pelagic environments, is a prerequisite for an ecosystem approach to management, a cornerstone to HELCOM, Baltic Sea Action Plan, Marine Strategy Framework Directive and EU Common Fisheries Policy.

The HELCOM Zooplankton Network started developing indicators in 2010 within the CORESET I project using zooplankton monitoring data from the Baltic Sea. It oversees development of the Zooplankton mean size and total stock (MSTS) indicator, which is currently being further developed under the HELCOM BLUES project. The Network has previously completed two projects: ZEN-QAI, the Quality Assurance and Integration of Zooplankton Monitoring in the Baltic Sea (2011-2014) and ZEN-ZIIM, the Zooplankton Indicator Integration to Monitoring in the Baltic Sea (2015-2017).

Main aims and focus of the group

The HELCOM Zooplankton Expert Group (ZEG) works on developing zooplankton-based indicators to follow-up the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and supports the Joint Baltic Sea zooplankton monitoring and status assessments within HELCOM. The Group contributes to the core indicator reports and data products regarding use of zooplankton in environmental status assessment, including the State of the Baltic Sea Assessment (HOLAS). The Group further provides a forum for experts involved in the Baltic Sea zooplankton monitoring to share information on methodological aspects of collecting and analyzing samples, data storage, statistical treatment, quality assurance and taxonomical aspects of zooplankton research.

The Group focuses on the overall quality, evaluation and reporting of the national marine zooplankton monitoring data, on developing the use of long-term data for environmental assessment in the Baltic Sea as well as improving the efficiency of the monitoring data use and developing pelagic habitat assessments and their viability for use in HOLAS with respect to e.g., indicator aggregation.

In addition to the work on zooplankton indicators, the Group's work focuses on zooplankton as a part of pelagic habitats and food webs and providing guidance on these topics in HELCOM processes and projects.

Tasks:

- Update core indicator reports and participate in assessments of pelagic habitats at intervals as decided in HELCOM, including regular review of the data and assessment products.
- Work towards the harmonization of the zooplankton monitoring guidelines.
- Intercalibrations to keep the high standard of zooplankton monitoring in the Baltic Sea, to assure the comparability of results.
- Initiate and maintain regular training courses on taxonomy and other issues relevant for zooplankton work (e.g. sampling, biomass determination).

- Establish a common procedure to maintain a joint list of Baltic zooplankton species for all subregions.
- Oversee recommendations on data reporting formats for HELCOMs database (including those hosted by ICES) and other relevant related databases (e.g., WoRMS, AquaNIS etc).
- Revise recommendations for zooplankton biomass assessment as necessary.
- Further development of the pelagic habitat and food webs assessment methodologies in HELCOM as concerning zooplankton as well as zooplankton indicators, including regular scientific review of the agreed GES boundaries and integration of indicators.
- Cooperate with all Contact Points and interested HELCOM observers.
- Contribute to HELCOM assessments (such as HOLAS III).
- Provide annual progress reports to HELCOM State and Conservation WG.

Reporting

The Chair(s) of the Group will report to State and Conservation WG once a year on the Group's activities. A template for the reporting will be provided by the Secretariat.

Membership

The Group will consist of experts nominated by Contracting Parties, including those experts already involved in the ZEG project group and will be open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures.

Work plan:

A work plan for 202X-20XX, aligned with the review period of the ToRs, will be prepared for and elaborated at the first meeting of the Group, after which the workplan will be reviewed and updated in the ZEG meetings prior to the end date of the workplan, to be presented for approval by State and Conservation WG.

Validity of ToR

The work of the group is open ended. The Terms of Reference are subject to review and, as appropriate, revision by the expert Group and approval by the HELCOM State and Conservation Working Group.

Organization of work

The expert Group will function under and receive guidance from the HELCOM State and Conservation Working Group and will collaborate with and support the work of other HELCOM groups, particularly the Phytoplankton Expert Group (PEG) and the HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food webs (CG Foodwebs) and the OSPAR/HELCOM Joint Working Group on Non-Indigenous Species.

The Group can request input from the State and Conservation WG as appropriate.

The mode of work for the expert group will include correspondence and 1-2 online meetings per year, with the option of physical workshops to tackle specific issues, facilitated by the HELCOM Secretariat. Subgroups may be defined in order to work more thematically. Chair(s) will be elected by the members of ZEG. The products will be handled at HELCOM Meeting Portal workspaces dedicated to this purpose. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the Group.