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Background

The 25th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (GEAR 25-2021) was held online on 8-10 November 2021. The Meeting was attended by Delegations from all Contracting Parties (CPs) except Lithuania and Russia. The Baltic Sea Advisory Council and the Leibniz Institute of Urban and Regional Development took part in the Meeting as observers. Invited guest from the HELCOM BLUES project also participated. The Meeting was chaired by the Chair of the Gear Working Group Andrea Weiss, Germany.

This document contains the Outcome of GEAR 25-2021. The complete Outcome including all Annexes can be found [here](#).

Please note that all issues related to the third HELCOM holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea environment (HOLAS III) will be discussed under Agenda Item 5 (Preparatory work for HOLAS III assessment).

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the Outcome of GEAR 25-2021 in general and consider it as appropriate.



Outcome of the 25th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (HELCOM GEAR 25-2021)

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Outcome of the 25th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (HELCOM GEAR 25-2021)

Introduction

0.1 In accordance with the outcomes of GEAR 24-2021 (Paragraph 6.16) and HOD 60-2021 (Paragraph 5.1), the 25th Meeting of the Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (GEAR 25-2021) was held on 8-10 November 2021 as an online Meeting. An informal session on informal exchange of Contracting Parties' national experiences in EU MSFD implementation took place on the first day as part of the Meeting.

0.2 The Meeting was attended by Delegations from all Contracting Parties (CPs) except Lithuania and Russia. The Baltic Sea Advisory Council and the Leibniz Institute of Urban and Regional Development attended the Meeting as observers. Invited guest from the HELCOM BLUES project also attended the Meeting. 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, HELCOM Professional Secretary and Mr. Florent Nicolas, 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 Rev.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**). The Meeting also took note that in the future, the Secretariat will return to prepare a PowerPoint presentation to present a summary of such relevant information for the GEAR Group.

2.2 The Meeting took note of the information that HOD 59-2020 agreed that the work plans of the HELCOM Working Groups will be reviewed to take into account the implementation of the newly updated BSAP. The Meeting also took note of the information from Secretariat that a document outlining proposals for ways forward to facilitate the implementation of the 2021 BSAP will be submitted to HOD 61-2021.

2.3 The Meeting took note of the following information on the processes under HELCOM of potential strategic importance (paras 2.4-2.7). A workshop on OECMs will be held on 1-3 February 2022 and a [preparatory webinar](#) will be held on 23 November 2021. This webinar is divided into two sessions, with the first session being open and focusing on providing context and information on the OECM concept, and a closed session dedicated to the STATE & CONSERVATION Working Group representatives to further prepare the workshop to be held in February. The Meeting took note of the recommendation that the participants who wish to join the workshop also attend the preparatory webinar.

2.4 The Meeting took note of the information on the MPA LIFE project application jointly developed with STATE & CONSERVATION Working Group.

2.5 The Meeting took note of the information on the HELCOM Workshop on Blue Carbon Potential in the Baltic Sea region to be held online on 17-18 November 2021. The results of the Workshop will be presented to the joint HELCOM/Baltic Earth Stakeholder Conference on Climate Change in March 2022, where further discussion and feedback on the outcomes of this Workshop are expected, among other topics.

2.6 The Meeting took note of the information that the updated BSAP and the HELCOM Science Agenda were presented at the 13th Baltic Sea Science Congress on 21 October 2021 and were well received by the audience.

Agenda Item 3 Regionally coordinated implementation of MSFD

3.1 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 20-2019 agreed to establish a Correspondence Group on MSFD (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.

National timetables

3.2 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 and highlighted the relevance of updating this document (**document 3-1 Rev.1**).

3.3 The Meeting agreed that a tour de table on the timetable will take place during GEAR 26-2022.

Article 13 - Programmes of measures and Article 14 – Application of excerpts

3.4 The meeting agreed to postpone exchange of information on planned additional national measures and cross-border cooperation on implementation and on approaches to Article 14 and 15 MSFD to GEAR 26-2022.

Joint Documentation

3.5 The Meeting took note that the Contracting Parties which are also EU Member States reviewed the structure and the contents of the draft Joint Documentation (**document 3-3 and Att.1-9**) in light of the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, adopted at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting on 20 October 2021. The structure was adjusted to avoid duplication with and better align with the results of the BSAP. As a result the tables in document 3-3 Att.1-9 were abandoned and their contents, as far as not available in other documentation, summarised in an Annex to the Joint Documentation. The structure and contents of the document were further revised to re-focus on documenting the regional coordination processes and work done in HELCOM with respect to national update of the Programmes of Measures, achievements and challenges as well as a self-evaluation and to provide an outlook on future needs to improve the regional coordination in HELCOM. Contracting Parties which are also EU Member States developed key messages for inclusion in the Joint Documentation and agreed arrangements, including share of drafting, for finalising the Joint Documentation. Contracting Parties contributing to the drafting are invited to submit their contributions to CG MSFD at the latest by 26 November 2021.

3.6 The Meeting endorsed the planning of finalising and approving the Joint Documentation, which involves:

- a first full draft to be circulated by 29 November 2021 to CG MSFD for written exchange with a deadline of 17 December 2021;
- a consolidated version will be sent to CG MSFD on 21 January 2022 for final review by 4 February 2022;
- a finalised version will be submitted by 11 February 2022 to GEAR for written approval by 4 March 2022;
- finalisation of the document by CG MSFD based on any additional feedback from GEAR and publication by 22 March 2022.

3.7 The Meeting agreed that a URL for the Joint Documentation should be made available to HELCOM EU Member States as soon as possible to allow EU Member States to include it in the preparation of their EU reports ahead of the reporting deadline.

3.8 The Meeting noted that information on regional cooperation was covered by the Article 13 MSFD reporting sheet and provided in the planned supporting Joint Documentation so that there was neither a need nor an expectation for EU Member States to submit updated 4geo.xml reporting sheets alongside Article 13 reporting schema. The Meeting took note of information by the EU Commission that the Article 4 reporting schema was under review in the context of updating the Article 8, 9 and 10 MSFD reporting and was initially intended for use in the context of the latter Article-reports.

MSFD Assessment

3.9 The Meeting recalled the discussions at GEAR 24-2021 on linking regional assessment with national EU-reporting under Article 8 MSFD and on regional efforts to prefill reporting sheets for 2024 (cf. [Outcome](#) of GEAR 24-2021, paras 3.2-3.28).

3.10 The Meeting took note of the information from the European Commission (EC) on the state-of-play regarding the update of EU CIS reporting arrangements for Article 8, 9 and 10 MSFD. The meeting noted that discussions on those aspects are still continuing at DIKE and that no consensus could be reached so far which method to use for each Descriptor to link regional assessments with national EU-reporting. The meeting noted that there were no new developments at EU level since GEAR 24-2021, which would allow re-evaluating regional arrangements.

3.11 The Meeting took note of the comment by the Secretariat that regional assessors are not perceived to have the capacity to prepare regional prefills of reporting sheets on top of their workload and that such a decentralised prefill would likely not be useful to yield a consistent set of reporting prefills. A centralised prefill by the Secretariat, preferably in 2023, could be possible, if Contracting Parties which are also EU Member States so wished and secured the necessary resources for it. The Meeting took note that HELCOM Contracting Parties who are also EU Member States reiterated that, for 2024 reporting, they considered the indicator assessments an important contribution to EU-reporting which should be facilitated through appropriate regional documentation (see discussion under agenda item 5, document 5-1). In the discussion, there was varied interest in the use of thematic assessments depending on the assessment topic (e.g. interest of several CPs to report regional eutrophication assessments) and confounded by uncertainties as to the maturity of regional assessment frameworks and national GES specialities which may impact aggregated assessment results.

3.12 The Meeting noted that CG MSFD 11-2021 exchanged information on the development of EU CIS Art. 8 MSFD Assessment Guidance, which is delayed. CG MSFD noted the planned process in HELCOM for aligning HOLAS III assessments in spring 2022 with the EU guidance, as far as possible.

3.13 The Meeting took note of the initial draft list of criteria elements for species related descriptors and noted that, as agreed by STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 (cf. [Outcome](#), paras 3J.193), the work will continue with a drafting meeting between Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Estonia and the Secretariat. The aim of this meeting will be to delineate the methodology for selecting or excluding species from the list based on Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848 and other relevant policy documents (**document 3-2**). The Meeting also took note of the information that the Secretariat is planning to cross-check the draft list with existing HELCOM indicators to add further information on which species are covered by HELCOM indicators.

3.14 The Meeting discussed that the list of species relevant under MSFD D3 (i.e. commercial fish) is currently held under a different process (cf. [ComFish WS 1-2021](#) and [STATE & CONSERVATION 15A-2021](#)).

3.15 The Meeting took note of the information that the timing of the drafting meeting on further work on the guidance for the criteria element list is not yet agreed, as the CPs and the Secretariat are currently planning several workshops to prepare HOLAS III.

3.16 The Meeting acknowledged that the criteria element list are foreseen to be needed also under other MSFD descriptors and invited the Expert Group HAZ to include the work on identifying criteria elements and preparing a regional criteria element list for Descriptor 8 in the updated ToRs and Workplan of the group.

General MSFD regional coordination and planning upcoming work related to the MSFD

3.17 The Meeting agreed to postpone the exchange on linkages between MSFD and other legislation to GEAR 26-2022.

3.18 The Meeting discussed the further consideration of the role of the HELCOM Secretariat in the MSFD CIS process and the revision of the MSFD. The Meeting agreed that the Secretariat could represent the view of HELCOM as a Regional Sea Convention, but not the national positions of its Contracting Parties.

3.19 The Meeting agreed on preparation of materials and topics on EU MSFD CIS matters in need of regional coordination for GEAR 26-2022. The Meeting agreed on the following MSFD related topics for CG MSFD to facilitate discussion at, or prior to, GEAR 26-2022:

- Article 8, 9 and 10 MSFD: How are Contracting Parties approaching the third MSFD implementation round? Article 8, 9 and 10 MSFD planning and lessons learnt?
- Programmes of measures (Article 13 MSFD): Explore potential to coordinate implementation of measures from national programmes of measures (bi- or multilaterally, regionally)
- Exchange on environmental targets (Article 10 MSFD)
- EU CIS Article 8 MSFD Assessment Guidance: follow-up
- Exchange on linkages of MSFD and other legislation (topic lead required)
- Exchange on the review and revision of MSFD
- Identification and preparation of exchange on EU MSFD CIS matters in need of regional coordination

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

BSAP Update

4.1 The Meeting took note of the information from the Secretariat on the updated BSAP and its adoption by the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2021, held in Lübeck on 20 October 2021 (**presentation 1**). The Meeting also took note of the information on the upcoming update of the HELCOM Explorer to track the progress of the updated BSAP implementation.

4.2 The Meeting noted the differences between “measures” and “supporting actions” and highlighted the importance of keeping measures and supporting actions separated from the information on the level of implementation when presenting the updated BSAP.

4.3 The Meeting welcomed the information from the Secretariat that an info package will be sent to relevant HELCOM contacts, containing communication materials on the updated BSAP.

4.4 The Meeting took note of the introductory information the BSAP implementation and its potential linkages with the GEAR Group (i.e. Terms of Reference (ToRs)) and the Roadmap on the implementation of the ecosystem approach (**presentation 2**).

4.5 The Meeting reviewed the actions under the BSAP which are relevant for GEAR Group as well as additional actions (**document 4-1**). The Meeting agreed that it would be useful to consider and identify GEARS role in relation to each of the actions relevant for the group, i.e. is GEAR directly involved in the implementation or should GEAR follow the implementation process. The Meeting concluded that all of the actions where GEAR has been identified in document 4-1 are relevant for GEAR. The Meeting agreed on an intersessional commenting process for reviewing the remaining BSAP Actions for relevance and invited Contracting Parties to submit a list of additional actions of relevance for GEAR, including the indication of whether the Action represents a process where GEAR should be directly involved in implementation or a process which GEAR should follow, to the Secretariat (susanna.kaasinen@helcom.fi) by **15 December 2021**.

4.6 The Meeting considered the functionality of the current HELCOM structure with respect to the implementation of the BSAP and acknowledged that improvements could be made.

4.7 The Meeting further considered the role of GEAR in the implementation of the 2021 BSAP in broader terms. The Meeting emphasized that GEARS role should be developed to ensure added value to the implementation process, i.e. fill gaps identified under the 2007 BSAP process. The Meeting recognized that the implementation of the individual segments is most appropriately tracked and facilitated through the work of the relevant Working Groups and Expert Groups and thus supported that GEARS role should be more horizontal in nature, spanning the full BSAP. The focus of GEARS work should be on solving implementation

related challenges as well as on providing guidance to, and assisting, other groups in identifying and overcoming barriers and challenges related to implementation, under the remit of the ecosystem approach and ecosystem-based management.

4.8 GEAR should also assist HOD through the preparation of material and information to progress implementation. The Meeting concluded that GEAR can also provide concrete support to the processes on tracking the level of implementation of the BSAP, e.g. the analysis and summarizing of Explorer reporting.

4.9 The Meeting took note of the information that to limit the need to establish new structures and processes the intention is to use the Work Plans of the Working Groups and Expert Groups as concrete tools to plan and track the implementation of the BSAP actions. The Meeting emphasized that to optimize the processes the review and update of the Working Groups workplans should be aligned across all groups. The Meeting agreed to further consider establishing a Work Plan also for GEAR, once any amendments to the ToRs have been implemented.

4.10 The Meeting supported the suggestion of arranging cross-topical seminars to share information progress of implementation (or lack thereof) and that such events should be aligned with the review and update of the Working Groups workplans, to capitalize on existing work done by the groups and to not add to the reporting workload.

4.11 The Meeting noted that the output from the discussion on GEARs role in implementing the BSAP is relevant to update the ToRs of the GEAR Group.

4.12 The Meeting noted that preliminary proposals on how to implement the BSAP will be submitted to HOD 61-2021 to initiate discussion .

HELCOM Science Agenda

4.13 The Meeting took note of the information on the last developments on the [HELCOM Science Agenda](#), more specifically on its Annexes which are relevant for several stakeholders to understand the needs of science within the HELCOM framework and other international agreements.

Agenda Item 5 Activities of relevant HELCOM projects or processes

Expert Groups

HELCOM Expert Group on Social and Economic Analyses (EN ESA)

5.1 The Meeting took note of the information on the overview of the activities of the HELCOM Expert Network on Social and Economic Analyses (EN ESA) (**document 5-13**).

5.2 The Meeting took note of the concern by Finland that, where development work in HELCOM is heavily driven by projects, there is a need to ensure sufficient possibilities for national experts not part of the project consortium to contribute to the content work. The Meeting took note that, especially in externally funded projects, this type of involvement often needs to be established as part of the project application and invited Contracting Parties to communicate such interest during to application phase so that it can be included in the project plan.

5.3 The Meeting considered the EN ESA requests to GEAR related to the issue of having the right expertise on ecosystem services as well as on the integration of Economic and Social Analyses into HOLAS III (**document 5-17**).

5.4 The Meeting acknowledged that lack of expertise needs to be approach differently depending on if such expertise could potentially be found within the HELCOM framework or not. If the relevant expertise could be sourced from one or several HELCOM Expert Groups, then this avenue should be explored first. In the cases where the needed expertise cannot be found within the HELCOM structure the Meeting invited EN ESA to approach GEAR directly and invited GEAR representatives to explore, and strive to secure, the relevant expertise nationally.

5.5 The Meeting recognised that communication across social and natural sciences can, on occasion, be challenging and emphasised the need to ensure clear and targeted questions are presented to the respective Working Groups and Expert Groups where guidance or input is required, as well as that ensuring representatives of EN ESA take part in the relevant Working Groups or Expert Groups meetings to enable direct communication.

5.6 The Meeting discussed the integration of ESA into HOLAS III, took note of the planned approach, both conceptual (through the DAPSIM conceptual framework) and concrete (direct inclusion of ESA information in each topical Summary report chapter), to strengthen the integration of ESA across HOLAS III topics. The Meeting emphasised that, for the purposes of HOLAS III, integration can be descriptive and refer to the narrative used when presenting ESA information in relation to each topic. The Meeting invited the Secretariat to prepare some example questions for EN ESA to give an indication of what type of information might be needed for HOLAS III under various topics.

5.7 The Meeting took note of the information from the Secretariat of a planned session during the next EN ESA meeting (EN ESA 16-2022) to further work on this issue. EN ESA 16-2022 will be held at the beginning of 2022, date not decided yet.

5.8 The Meeting took note of the information from Finland that the Finnish national representative in EN ESA will be updated at the beginning of 2022. The Meeting noted that Finland will communicate to the Secretariat (luke.dodd@helcom.fi) the new nominated representative in due time.

Projects

HOLAS III and associated processes

HOLAS III preparatory phase work

5.9 The Meeting took note of the information on the overview of HOLAS III events in the interim between GEAR 24-2021 and GEAR 25-2021 (**document 5-10**).

HOLAS III indicators related work

5.10 The Meeting took note of the information on the summary of indicator development following STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 held online from 4 to 8 October 2021 (**document 5-14**).

5.11 The Meeting took note of the information on the proposal for the revised indicator template and website and that it had been discussed at the information event for HELCOM indicator leads ([IND INF 1-2021](#)) held on 10 June 2021 (**presentation 3, document 5-1**). The Meeting also took note that the Secretariat continues to work on the template based on input from STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 (cf. [Outcome](#), para 3J.82) and towards exploring the potential technical solutions to achieve the proposed developments.

5.12 The Meeting discussed the terminology “raw data” (section 10 of document 5-1) and took note of the clarifications from the Secretariat that this data is part of a package of data which is used for indicators, and for the purposes of transparency the underlying monitoring data entering an assessment (raw data) as well as the data representing the results (and subsequent result maps) should all be made available. The data will be publicly available via the indicator reports and/or on the [HELCOM Map and Data Service](#), typically in two datasets per indicator:

- Indicator result map: Results per assessment unit,
- Indicator data: Underlying dataset (snapshot) used for deriving indicator results.

5.13 The Meeting discussed the compatibility of the indicator template and the e-reporting for MSFD Article 8. The Meeting took note of the clarification from the Secretariat that the aim with ongoing technical developments, if possible to achieve, is that relevant information from the indicator template and indicator result dataset can be extracted for the Article 8 reporting. The sections proposed for extraction to support MSFD reporting under Article 8 (if technically achievable and resources allow) were mapped against document 3-5 submitted to GEAR 24-2021 with the aim of identifying key components that support Contracting Parties. The Meeting took note that external review to confirm the correct sections have been

identified would be welcomed. The Meeting took note that input from the CPs on the indicator template can be sent to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi).

5.14 The Meeting discussed potential technical issues associated with transferring the information from the HELCOM indicator template to the e-reporting Article 8 MSFD and the need for compatibility with relevant processes. The Meeting welcomed that a meeting involving the European Environment Agency (EEA), the HELCOM and OSPAR Secretariats and the EU will be held to ensure that indicator data products feed the Article 8 reporting guidance required fields, as well as other potential technical issues. The Meeting noted the provisional timeline for HELCOM developments (i.e. initiating a tendering process in early 2022) and the willingness of the EU to aim to hold the relevant meeting at the earliest suitable opportunity to ensure further work is fully harmonized.

5.15 The Meeting took note that indicator report structure has not changed significantly from that used under HOLAS II so should be compatible to the CIS common indicator structure and the Meeting invited the Secretariat to cross reference the new indicator report structure with the common indicator structure.

5.16 The Meeting supported that trend information included in the indicator reports should address both long-term trends and comparisons between the current and prior assessment periods, and noted that there is an effort ongoing towards harmonizing the confidence evaluation across indicators (e.g. spatial, temporal and methodological confidence aspects per assessment unit), though it is anticipated to be a longer-term process than HOLAS III.

5.17 The Meeting discussed the level of details for indicators related to climate change and took note of the information from the Secretariat that information on linkages will be extracted from the [HELCOM Climate Change Fact Sheet](#) to be included in the prefilled indicator reports, for further review and elaboration by the indicator lead(s), where sufficient information exists. The Meeting acknowledged that the level of detail will vary between indicator reports based on both the amount of available information and the knowledge on the strength of linkages between climate change factors and the specific indicator.

5.18 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 24-2021 emphasized that the GEAR Group should be informed on project meetings and the further progress on driver indicators (cf. [Outcome](#), para 5.38).

5.19 The Meeting took note of the information on the development of driver indicators for HOLAS III and the outcome of the recent workshop on driver indicators development held on 4 November 2021 (**document 5-11**).

5.20 The Meeting noted the comment from Finland on the importance of determining basis (eg. defining what we mean by drivers, how we use driver indicators in HOLAS) for this new topic, not only in towards HOLAS III, but paving the way for future assessments. It is important to involve both Working Groups and projects expertise while making these determinations.

5.21 The Meeting took note that the next workshop on driver indicators is planned for 4th week of January 2022. The Meeting noted that the document on driver indicators will be updated for HOD 61-2021 in line with the recommendations from the driver indicators workshop.

5.22 The Meeting discussed the need to present a rational and definition of what is meant by drivers and driver indicators for HOLAS III documentation and highlighted the need of joint discussion between STATE & CONSERVATION Working Group and GEAR Group to further discuss a common understanding on the definition. The Meeting supported that such discussion could be held at the next STATE & CONSERVATION meeting (16-2022) in Spring 2022 (9-13 May 2022).

5.23 The Meeting took note of the information on the plan for cross referencing of integrated assessments HEAT, BEAT and CHASE and Art.8 MSFD reporting (**document 5-2**). The Meeting also took note of the clarification from the Secretariat on the further work carried on the confidence level assessment on BEAT assessment tool, with the support of the Baltic Data Flows project.

5.24 The Meeting supported the proposal to arrange Targeted Assessment Methodology workshops in spring 2022 to target remaining open issues in relation to assessment methodology, e.g. integration, in

light of the indicator related decision process from HOD 61-2021 and any updated guidance on Art.8 reporting.

5.25 The Meeting took note of the update of the HELCOM Assessment units towards HOLAS III and the potential impact of the new open sea divisions on the HELCOM indicators (**document 5-12**).

5.26 The Meeting recognized that the previous eutrophication assessment clearly showed that such change would be relevant for HOLAS III as eutrophication status in the Bornholm Basin and The Gulf of Finland was clearly impacted by gradients within those assessment units (e.g. river inflow and spatial gradients) and that on this basis there was a clear rationale behind the application of the new assessment units for the eutrophication indicators and assessment (in HOLAS III and beyond).

5.27 The Meeting welcomed the initiation of this process and recognized the value in having harmonized assessment units but discussed the need for further work to establish the ecological relevance of the new division of assessment units for non-eutrophication indicators and evaluate the potential impact before implementing them across all HELCOM assessment scales, indicators and evaluations (e.g. via ongoing review in relevant Expert Groups towards HOLAS III).

5.28 The Meeting agreed that, if shown to be ecologically relevant, the new assessment units should be tested for those indicators most directly linked to the eutrophication indicators, i.e. the phytoplankton and zooplankton indicators and the State of the soft-bottom macrofauna community.

5.29 The Meeting invited relevant Expert Groups and indicator leads on phytoplankton, zooplankton and State of the soft-bottom macrofauna community to evaluate the ecological relevance of the proposed division of assessment units for their topic and recommend what division to use to STATE&CONSERVATION 16-2022, and to evaluate whether the required resource is available when following the new assessment units. The expert groups and indicator leads are invited estimate whether the work for certifying ecological relevance can be done in time for HOLAS III. It is not planned to establish new threshold values (TVs) for the new divisions for the purposes of HOLASIII but to use the same TVs which would be used for the area priori to division. If the development of new TVs for the divisions is seen as ecologically relevant, it can be postponed to beyond HOLAS III. The Meeting invited the HELCOM Secretariat to communicate this matter to the relevant expert groups and indicator leads.

Economic and social Analysis

5.30 The Meeting took note of the information of the study reservation from Germany on all the ESA assessment related documents during STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021. STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 in principle endorsed the work, noting the study reservation by Germany until GEAR 25-2021. The Meeting noted that Germany can lift its study reservation on all the ESA related documents.

5.31 The Meeting noted the comment from Poland that due to ongoing national consultation Poland will confirm its position in relation to the proposed ESA assessments at HOD 61-2021.

5.32 The Meeting took note of the information on the assessment for Marine Ecosystem Accounting approach for HOLAS III (**document 5-4**).

5.33 The Meeting noted that the upcoming amendments to relevant EU regulation should be considered in the marine ecosystem accounting development process.

5.34 The Meeting discussed the importance of data availability for such an assessment and noted the clarifications from the Secretariat that available high-resolution data for relevant ecosystem components is limited. The Meeting noted internal data filtration effort by Secretariat using recently available bathymetry information. The Meeting also discussed the added value of marine ecosystem accounting and highlighted that such added value should be defined by the CPs to provide further guidance for this assessment topic.

5.35 The Meeting noted that the use of both observation and modelling data for ecosystem components can result in challenges such as overestimation.

- 5.36 The Meeting endorsed the approach for assessing marine ecosystem accounting for the HOLAS III assessment to be submitted to HOD 61-2021 for approval, noting that Poland will confirm its position at HOD 61-2021.
- 5.37 The Meeting took note of updated information on assessment for Ecosystem Service Approach in HOLAS III (**presentation 4, document 5-5**).
- 5.38 The Meeting acknowledged that in its current format some double counting for ecosystem services cannot be avoided, as this would require that either all layers where information on more than one ecosystem component are included would need to be excluded from the analyses, or detailed information on the data used for the modelling would need to be accessible and in the timeframe of HOLAS III this is not possible. However, the Meeting discussed the presented data prioritization strategy using the most relevant layers to minimize the impact double counting of ecosystem components and expressed support for this approach as a tool to address the issue for HOLAS III. The Meeting also discussed that additional data can be used to increase the reliability of this work.
- 5.39 The Meeting noted that new spatial data is expected to be available through the HOLAS III data call, and the most updated spatial data is planned to be used in ecosystem service assessment during HOLAS III.
- 5.40 The Meeting took note of the information from the Secretariat that the **document 5-5** submitted to this Meeting will be separated into two documents for submission to HOD 61-2021: an ecosystem services supply potential document focusing on a practical methodology for HOLAS III to be authored by MetDev project and an overarching ecosystem service approach document laying out a general assessment framework to be jointly authored by MetDev and HELCOM BLUES projects.
- 5.41 The Meeting considered and endorsed the approach for assessing ecosystem services for the HOLAS III assessment to be submitted to HOD 61-2021 for approval.
- 5.42 The Meeting discussed different approaches regarding where to place the element “impact” in the DAPSIM which functions as the conceptual framework for the holistic assessments in HELCOM (as presented in e.g. figure 2 of **document 5-7**). The Meeting acknowledged that both the placement and type of impact to be considered differs depending on the perspective of the user of the framework. The Meeting further acknowledged the need to, for the purposes of HOLAS III, differentiate between environmental impacts and societal impacts and noted the comment of Finland that in the present interpretation of DAPSIM, as presented in the HELCOM indicator manual, impacts have been interpreted by Finland as "impacts on welfare", following the DAPSI(W)R(M) -version of the framework. However the Meeting agreed to, at this stage, not restructure DAPSIM by moving the impact step as this would have consequences for the planned HOLAS III structure.
- 5.43 The Meeting took note of the information that the placement of assessment work strands presented in Figure 2 is highly provisional and stems from the initial mapping done on 2020, primarily to identify if information for each DAPSIM step might be available for HOLAS III. The Meeting took note that a more thorough and detailed division is planned for spring 2022 as part of the planning and preparation of the HOLAS III templates.
- 5.44 The Meeting considered and endorsed the proposed approach for cost of degradation analysis (**document 5-6**).
- 5.45 The Meeting considered and endorsed the proposed approach for cost-benefit analysis of measures (**document 5-7**).
- 5.46 The Meeting considered and endorsed the proposed approach for use of marine waters analysis (**document 5-8**).
- 5.47 The Meeting considered and endorsed the proposed approach for sufficiency and effectiveness of measure analysis (**document 5-9 and Att.1**).

HOLAS III assessment phase

5.48 The Meeting took note of the information on the HOLAS III data call and data collection process and on the helpdesk session for data reporting (**document 5-15**). These events are planned to be held during Q1 of 2021 and the invitation will be shared among relevant HELCOM Contacts in December 2021. The Meeting noted that STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 welcomed the information and reiterated the request to the CPs to nominate experts to join the session by informing the Secretariat (jeni.kaitaranta@helcom.fi) by 1 December 2021 (cf. [Outcome](#), paras 31.71-72).

5.49 The Meeting took note and welcomed the information on the initial proposal to facilitate the approval processes under HOLAS III (**document 5-3**). The Meeting urged Contracting Parties to nominate their representatives for CG HOLAS III at their earliest convenience. The Meeting noted the information from Germany that the nomination(s) of national representative(s) for CG HOLAS III will be communicated to the Secretariat by HOD 61-2021 (8-9 December 2021).

5.50 Meeting took note that an updated timetable and workplan for HOLAS III will be submitted by the Secretariat to HOD 61-2021.

5.51 The Meeting took note of the information on the Baltic Health Index (BHI) (**presentation 5, document 5-16**). The Meeting discussed how the BHI could support HOLAS III and noted that the BHI could be an opportunity to involve experts from outside the HELCOM framework in HOLAS III.

5.52 The Meeting acknowledged that while the BHI as a whole might not be a good fit for the HOLAS III system at this point in time some elements from the BHI could be complimentary on topics related to ESA and that there could be useful links with the work under the HELCOM MetDev Project (i.e. Spatial impact and pressure assessment (SPIA)). The Meeting invited the EN ESA as well as the MetDev project to review the BHI and where relevant exchange knowledge with the BHI team to further define potential collaboration for HOLAS III and/or beyond.

Agenda Item 6 Future work and any other business

Ecosystem Approach and Ecosystem-Based Management

6.1 The Meeting took note of the information that the proposal from GEAR 24-2021 on having an external review of how HELCOM has progressed in implementing the EA and EBM did not find support at HOD 60-2021.

6.2 The Meeting took note of the information from the Secretariat on a HORIZON 2020 call related to governance in the context of Ecosystem Approach (EA) and Ecosystem Based-Management (EBM) and recalled that such projects are EU-wide (**Presentation 6**).

6.3 The Meeting took note of the information from Sweden that local projects are trying to comprehend how to put in practise the EBM, which is already a complex topic at local scales.

6.4 The Meeting discussed the scoping and the relevance of this call and acknowledged that this project should focus on bringing added value on how the EA and EBM has been tackled and could be tackled in the future within the HELCOM framework, with particular focus on management.

6.5 The Meeting noted the tight schedule for this call and the current workload to develop such a project application and invited the CPs to send their national position as well as general comments and input on the project outline to the Secretariat (luke.dodd@helcom.fi) by **Friday 19 November 2021**. Based on the input from the CPs, and to ensure the efficiency of drafting an application, an online intersessional meeting of GEAR will be arranged during the last week of November 2021 to plan the next steps on a possible application, including delineating the scope, identifying sectors to function as possible proof of concept examples, and approaching possible project partners.

6.6 The Meeting took note of the current ToRs of the GEAR Group and recalled the previous discussions held during this Meeting (cf. para 4.11) (**document 6-2**).

6.7 The Meeting agreed that the ToRs of GEAR could be more defined. The Meeting emphasized the importance of GEARs role and mandate being clearly delineated both with regards to HOD and the Working Groups.

6.8 The Meeting welcomed the offer from the Secretariat to prepare the first draft of amended ToRs for GEAR Group. The Meeting agreed to arrange an intersessional online meeting of the GEAR group to further discuss the ToRs and the proposed mandate of GEAR in relation to the implementation of the BSAP in spring 2022.

6.9 The Meeting also took note of the suggestion from the co-Chair of STATE & CONSERVATION on increasing the involvement of the Chairs and co-Chairs of relevant HELCOM Working Groups in the work of the GEAR Group.

Next meeting of GEAR

6.10 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 24-2021 agreed not to plan two meeting ahead. The Meeting also recalled that GEAR 24-2021 noted that GEAR 26-2022 will be held on 24-26 May 2022 and agreed to organize to have, if possible, a physical meeting. The Meeting noted that Sweden is currently checking options to host GEAR 26-2022. The Meeting welcomed the offer from Poland to host GEAR 26-2022 if Sweden cannot host the meeting.

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 (susanna.kaasinen@helcom.fi) by **Friday 19 November 2021 (document 6-1)**. The Meeting noted that such update can also be communicated to the Secretariat internationally.

Agenda Item 7 Outcome of the Meeting

7.1 The Meeting participants were provided with the draft Outcome of the Meeting by Thursday 11 November 2021. Meeting participants were invited to provide comments to the draft Outcome by **Friday 12 November 2021 16:30 EET / 15:30 CET**. The Meeting agreed that if the comments from the CPs are only editorial and not on the substance of the Outcome, the Outcome will be automatically adopted. If CPs are contributing with substantial editorials, the Secretariat will circulate an updated Outcome by closure of business **Monday 15 November 2021** for tacit approval by **closure of business on Tuesday 16 November 2021**.

7.2 The Meeting adopted Outcome, with the Meeting documents and presentations are made publicly available in the HELCOM Meeting Portal.