



Document title	Draft updated Terms of Reference of the Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Submerged Objects 2022-2030
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Agenda Item	6 - Matters arising from the HELCOM Groups
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Submitted by	Executive Secretary
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Background

RESPONSE 29-2021 approved the draft Terms of Reference for the Expert Network on Environmental Risks of Submerged Objects (EN SUBMERGED) with the view to their subsequent adoption by HOD 61-2021.

In light of the efforts to harmonize the names of the various HELCOM sub-groups (c.f. document 7-1), it is proposed that the Group is renamed Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Submerged Objects (EG SUBMERGED).

This document contains the draft Terms of Reference of the HELCOM Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Submerged Objects (EG SUBMERGED) for 2022-2030, as approved by RESPONSE 29-2021, and as amended by the Secretariat to reflect the proposed name of the Group.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to adopt the draft Terms of Reference of the HELCOM Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Submerged Objects (EG SUBMERGED) for 2022-2030.

Draft Terms of Reference of the HELCOM Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Submerged Objects (EG SUBMERGED) 2022-2030

Rationale

Within the framework of the work of the previous HELCOM Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Hazardous Submerged Objects (SUBMERGED), considerable progress was made in the subject area of submerged munitions and other submerged hazardous objects. This is reflected not least in the work on developing a HELCOM Thematic Assessment on Hazardous Submerged Objects in the Baltic Sea (Submerged Assessment).

At the same time, it became clear during the work that further efforts and cooperation are necessary in order to continue to work together especially on the data situation in the Baltic Sea region and thus to consolidate the common operational picture of munitions and other submerged hazardous objects in the Baltic Sea. The measures for dealing with the potential challenges posed by dumped munitions and other submerged hazardous objects are not yet coordinated and harmonized. A coordinated approach is crucial for a healthy Baltic Sea. At the same time, suggestions can be derived for other marine regions.

Overall aims and tasks

The overall aim of EG SUBEMERGED is to contribute to the development of an action plan and regionally coordinated actions on submerged munitions and explosives of concern as well as other submerged hazardous objects, aiming, in the long-term, at addressing potential adverse effects of such objects and their constituents on the marine environment of the Baltic Sea. The Expert Group shall on one hand act as a knowledge hub for all Contracting Parties to provide the recent information on munitions and other submerged hazardous objects in the Baltic Sea. On the other hand, the Expert Group should also accompany the coordination of regional activities that addresses the potential challenges posed by munitions and other submerged hazardous objects. Finally, the Expert Group appears helpful to achieve the tasks of the updated HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), referring to munitions and other submerged hazardous objects in the Baltic Sea.

The Expert Group will in the period of 2022 – 2030:

- Finalize the HELCOM Thematic Assessment on Hazardous Submerged Objects in the Baltic Sea (Submerged Assessment) for publication.
- Act as platform for discussions about further needed actions tackling the potential challenges posed by dumped munitions and other submerged hazardous objects.
- Contribute to a common operational picture about the distribution of munitions and explosives of concern in the whole Baltic Sea region.
- Based on the picture and a common understanding of distribution processes of munition constituents it will support Contracting Parties to identifying hot spot areas, perform site-specific risk assessments and discuss a possible prioritization of affected areas for further coordinated actions in addition to existing national ambitions for comprehensive risk managements.
- Seek cooperation with OSPAR relating to such objects close to the HELCOM area which could affect the convention area, especially in the Skagerrak.
- Continuously assess, support and consult with specific research or scientific projects to keep previously issued recommendations up to date or to add recommendations as deemed necessary

- Acting as specific stakeholder and actively convey time-sensitive information on recent findings
- Develop and maintain, as well as monitor, application of a HELCOM toolbox for assessment of site-specific environmental risks related to potential abandonment, relocation and intended recovery or clean-up of dumped munitions and contaminated wrecks;
- Update previously issued guidelines or develop new guidelines for all potentially affected groups, as deemed necessary, taking into account existing national guidelines and contingency plans;
- Develop and maintain procedures for training of crews of response vessels that can be engaged in emergency response actions involving dumped munitions;
- Develop and maintain a knowledge collection of best available technologies on dealing with dumped munitions and other submerged hazardous objects.

Participants

The EG SUBMERGED will consist of experts nominated by the Contracting Parties and will be open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures. Additional experts and representatives of organizations can be invited to the meetings. The Expert Group will cater for cross-sectorial expertise to carry out the tasks as needed.

Working procedures

The EG SUBMERGED works under the supervision of, reports to and receives guidance by the HELCOM Response Working Group according to its mandate. Additionally, the Expert Group will provide consultations and support to other HELCOM working groups as the potential challenges posed by dumped munitions and other submerged hazardous objects are of cross-sectional concerns.

The mode of work for the Expert Group will be mainly via correspondence and online meetings, with physical meetings being organized as needed. Co-Chairs for the Expert group will be elected at the first meeting after approval of the Terms of Reference. The products will be handled at HELCOM Meeting Portal workspaces dedicated to this use. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the Expert group. Prolongation of the mandate for the Expert Group should be considered at the end of the working period based on identified needs.