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Background

The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on SEA secretariat approached several Regional Sea Convention secretariats in the early autumn to start a process of identification of synergies and possible cooperation. The activity focuses on strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and transboundary EIA to promote awareness, coherence, complementarity and links between the respective treaties and organizations. This Espoo Convention workplan activity is funded by Italy in 2021–2023, potentially covering the Arctic Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the North-East Atlantic marine region.

The activity involves a feasibility study by a consultant, mapping out procedures and activities regarding SEA and transboundary EIA in the marine regions; identifying good practice and possible development areas and topical environmental issues, along with up to three technical meetings among secretariats of the respective conventions/bodies to exchange information and discuss draft reports.

In response to the request, the HELCOM Secretariat expressed an interest in being part of the initiative and answered a brief questionnaire on EIA-related aspects of our Convention and other key strategic documents like the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), Recommendations and holistic assessments. The first technical meeting was held online on 19 November 2021 and was attended by the HELCOM, OSPAR, UNEP/MAP (Barcelona Convention) and Tehran Convention secretariats, with some ECE Member States (Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden), the European Commission, the Espoo Convention secretariat and its consultant.

In the initial assessment phase these themes have been identified by the RCS secretariats and the consultant as possible cooperation activities between the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA in marine regions for consideration: EIA/SEA in maritime spatial planning, EIA/SEA related pollution prevention efforts and EIA/SEA for climate change mitigation actions and also general guidance/exchange of experience on procedures and institutional arrangements for transboundary EIA and SEA.

The process continues with giving feedback and additional suggestions to the initial phase findings, further work of the consultant, with looking into priorities, coherence and proposed work and a list of transboundary EIA cases, along with a possible second technical meeting in the summer of 2022.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the identification of synergies and the cooperation process with the Espoo Convention and the Regional Seas Conventions.