



Document title	Revision of HELCOM indicator template and website
Code	4-1
Category	CMNT
Agenda Item	4 – overview of plans related to updated indicator template
Submission date	3.6.2021
Submitted by	Secretariat
Reference	

Background

Supported by the HELCOM BLUES project the Secretariat will review and further develop the HELCOM indicator template and the HELCOM indicator website. The aim is not to revise the concept of the indicators, but to focus on modernizing the visual and functional side of the indicators to make them more presentable (e.g. aligning them with the recently developed HELCOM visual identity), to make the online template and website more user friendly, to develop aspects within the template that can support HELCOM Contracting Parties in their reporting requirements (e.g. those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States), and to revise the template either for the purposes of clarity or where new aspects of considerations may need to be included.

For many of the practical aspects the Secretariat aims to also support the indicator leads, for example by transferring the existing text and information into the newly developed template once available.

The current indicator web page can be viewed at this link: <https://helcom.fi/baltic-sea-trends/indicators/>.

Since the document comes only a few days in advance of the meeting and since the meeting is only short it is proposed that a commenting period till 13 August 2021 is applied for this document (and its attachments).

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- take note of the plans presented,
- address the specific questions raised under relevant sections,
- provide guidance for the planned development work,
- provide comments by 13 August 2021.

Revision of HELCOM indicator template and website

This document contains a broad range of information relating to the structure and content of the HELCOM indicator reports and a series of questions related to specific sections within the reports. These questions are posed at this stage to the indicator leads to seek guidance prior to initiating work on revising the HELCOM indicator website and template. The work to carry out this revision will take place supported by the HELCOM BLUES project.

Section 1: Current HELCOM indicator structure

The headings set out below in this section represent the current structure of the HELCOM indicators. Please consider the information provided in this section together with that provided in section 2, below.

HELCOM core indicator report
[MONTH YEAR of publishing]

Indicator name

Key Message



Relevance of the core indicator

[Text]

Policy relevance of the core indicator

	BSAP Segment and Objectives	MSFD Descriptors and Criteria
Primary link	E.g. Biodiversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viable populations of species • 	e.g. D1 Biodiversity 1.2 Population size (abundance, biomass)
Secondary link	•	
Other relevant legislation:		

Cite this indicator

[Citation]

Download full indicator report

[Hyperlink]

Results and Confidence

[Text]

Confidence of the indicator status evaluation

[Text]

Thresholds and Status evaluation

[Text]

Assessment Protocol

[Text]

Assessment units

[Text]

Relevance of the Indicator

[Text]

Biodiversity assessment

[Text]

Policy relevance

[Text]

Role of [indicator ecosystem component] in the ecosystem

[Text]

Human pressures linked to the indicator

General	MSFD Annex III, Table 2a
Strong link	
Weak link	

Monitoring Requirements

[Text]

Monitoring methodology

[Text]

Current monitoring

[Text]

Description of optimal monitoring

[Text]

Data and updating

[Text]

Access and use

[Text]

Metadata

[Text]

Contributors and references

Contributors

[List]

Archive

[Hyperlink]

References

[List]

Additional relevant publications

[List]

HELCOM core indicator report, ISSN 2343-2543

Section 2: Proposed new HELCOM indicator structure

The headings set out below in this section represent the proposed new structure of the HELCOM indicators. In essence the general information provided is the same as that from the current template, though a few new additions have been made and some components have been reordered.

For example, to aid comprehension of the results the section defining threshold values has been moved up, the repetition of information related to relevance has been removed, a specific section addressing pressures, activities and drivers has been included, and a section related to climate change and other relevant factors has also been included. For the section related to pressures, activities and drivers additional support or reference material may become available via the MetDev project (see also [HELCOM MetDev Meeting on Driver Indicators Development](#), meeting to take place on 14 June 2021). For the section related to climate change and other factors (e.g. natural lags in recovery) the aim is that work carried out by EN CLIME to develop climate change fact sheets would be provided to indicator leads and that a short text of relevance would be derived from the extensive reviews carried out under EN CLIME (see [document 5-3 to HELCOM 42-2021](#) – Please note these are latest versions and are currently undergoing revision and approval). In addition work under the [HELCOM ACTION project work package 5](#) may offer support for describing natural lags in recovery and the causes of these for certain topics.

Specific question: The meeting is invited to comment on the planned revision of the template addressed under sections 1 and 2 of this document.

Please see below for headings and order.

Indicator name (full)

Key message

- Key message status map
- Short text and bullet points
- Indicator citation (permanent URL or DOI)

Relevance of the indicator

- Ecological
- Policy
- Application in integrated assessments

Threshold values

- Value(s) applied
- Setting the threshold values (method/reference/logic)

Results and discussion

- Status assessment
- Trends
- Discussion text

Confidence

- Overall – ideally per assessed assessment unit and covering threshold value, method and data aspects (e.g. spatio-temporal factors).

Pressures, activities and drivers

- Information or links to pressure, activity or driver information

Climate change and other factors

- Summary and link to work of EN CLIME and other relevant factors

Conclusions

- Clear conclusions (e.g. summarising above)
- Future work or improvements needed.

Methodology

- Scale of assessment
- Methodology applied
- Assumptions applied
- Monitoring and reporting requirements

Data

- Data sources and links

Other relevant resources

- Links or annexes to relevant information, for example regionally agreed species lists.

Contributors

- List of persons and groups contributing

Archive

- Previous versions of the indicator

References

Section 3: Policy relevance table

The policy relevance table of the existing indicator template applies the terms primary and secondary and since these are terms with specific meaning within the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), a policy to which the HELCOM indicators have direct relevance (i.e. they can also be applied to the MSFD by HELCOM Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States). Moreover, the table addresses multiple policy initiatives including the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) and the MSFD. It appears to create some confusion in the existing form on how this table should be completed and thus there may be different approaches taken to completing the table between the different indicators, resulting in potential inconsistencies.

Table 1. Existing table for policy relevance from current HELCOM indicator template.

	BSAP Segment and Objectives	MSFD Descriptors and Criteria
Primary link	E.g. Biodiversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viable populations of species • 	e.g. D1 Biodiversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.2 Population size (abundance, biomass)
Secondary link	•	
Other relevant legislation:		

Thus, it is considered important to review the table and to establish some common rules to complete the table. Proposed revision would include specifically revising the terms used in the table and secondly expanding the current guidance for filling the table.

Table 2. Revised table for policy relevance for new HELCOM indicator template.

	Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP)	Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)
Principal link Dominant link Essential link Major link Fundamental link	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identify the BSAP Segment, aims and Objective(s) relevant. • For example: Biodiversity - Favourable status of Baltic Sea biodiversity. Viable populations of species. • Select the information most directly and specifically related to the indicator in question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identify the specific MSFD Descriptor and Criteria which the indicator (in its current form) directly addresses (i.e. where it would be utilised by HELCOM Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States). • The information should be provided in text and numeric form. • For example, Descriptor 8 ‘Contaminants’ – Criteria 1 ‘Concentrations of contaminants’ (D8C1).
Additional link Auxiliary link Complementary link	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other relevant BSAP information with relevance, but to which the indicator itself may not specifically be developed to address. • For example, other BSAP segments, aims and objectives may have relevance, or more recent issues for example documented under Ministerial Declarations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify other relevant MSFD Descriptors and Criteria to which the indicator may offer relevant information (though in its current form does not directly address) or which may be relevant to the indicator in question. • For example, an indicator addressing fish may also have relevance to food webs (though in the current form may not directly address the issue) or concentrations of hazardous substances may be relevant to the assessment of fish populations.
Other relevant legislation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of other relevant policies (e.g. UN SDGs and WFD) • Clear definition of relevant components with links where possible (e.g. to specific annexes, documents or webpages) 	

Specific question: The meeting is invited to comment on the planned revision of table and guide the most appropriate rules for filling the table. In particular on the choice of term in the table (i.e. to replace primary and secondary) and on the guidance provided in the table.

Section 4: Restructuring of HELCOM indicator website

In addition to revising the HELCOM indicator website to improve the visual and functional aspects, the aim is to also improve the online template to support practical use of the information and making the online template more user-friendly for the leads and/or Secretariat to include information.

Specific question: The meeting is invited comment on the following issues and guide what is most appropriate.

- a) Is the application of 'short names' acceptable, for online presentation purposes?**
- b) Should indicators be presented on the website 'top level' under topics or with all indicators visible?**
- c) Should indicators be presented on a species/substance basis or by 'topic'? Should seals be divided into separate indicators per species? Should a single species indicator address a single component only, or multiple components?**
- d) Is the general website overview viable?**

Short names:

For example (for issue a), could indicators be presented with short names online and then the full titles be presented once the specific topic was opened in the indicator report/template. Examples might include:

- Population trends and abundance of seals (Short name: Seal abundance).
- Abundance of waterbirds in the breeding season (Short name: Waterbirds breeding).
- Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gear (Short name: Bycatch).

Website presentation:

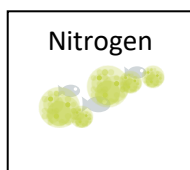
For example (for issue b), could indicators on the website 'top level' be presented under topics through which the individual indicators were clustered (i.e. a summary name would open a new page through which multiple related indicators were accessed). Examples might include:

- Nitrogen (top level) – Total Nitrogen and Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (at the second page).
- Seals (top level) – Distribution, Abundance, Reproductive, Nutritional (at the second page).
- Coastal fish (top level) – Functional Groups, Key species, Size structure (at the second page).

See below for diagram of an example.

Nitrogen ('top level') – Total Nitrogen and Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (at the second page).

The main indicator page would contain an icon for nitrogen (design to be added at later stage).



Clicking on this 'top level' icon would open a page containing the separate indicators, for example:

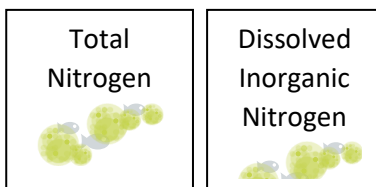


Figure 1. Possible options to display indicators on the website.

This approach could be applied for all indicator that order under a broader topic, for example categories to apply may be: coastal fish, commercial fish, migratory fish, waterbirds, underwater noise, marine litter, metals, persistent organic pollutants, seals, harbour porpoise, etc.

The alternative approach would be to place all the separate indicators at this 'top level' on the website, as is set out in Figure 2.

Note that the classification of the indicators to the BSAP segments (Biodiversity, Eutrophication, Hazardous Substances, and Maritime Activities) would be handled via a separate route to maintain the comparability to the system currently applied, see below for further details.

Species/substance or topic basis:

For example (for issue c), could seal indicators be presented on a species basis, or should they be maintained as a single indicator addressing a topic (e.g. abundance or distribution) that then covers multiple species?

Another example would be the HELCOM Metals indicator. This indicator will be divided into three separate indicators to address Cadmium, Mercury and Lead separately as they are acknowledged to have different behaviours in the marine environment and also different sources.

For the seal indicator example there could be three options to present the relevant indicators:

1. As they are now:
 - a. Distribution of Baltic seals
 - b. Population trends and abundance of seals
 - c. Nutritional status of marine mammals
 - d. Reproductive status of marine mammals
2. Per species:
 - a. Grey seal – Distribution component, abundance component, nutritional component, reproductive component.
 - b. Harbour seal – Distribution component, abundance component, nutritional component, reproductive component.
 - c. Ringed seal – Distribution component, abundance component, nutritional component, reproductive component.
3. Per species and per topic:
 - a. Distribution of Baltic Grey seals
 - b. Population trends and abundance of Grey seals
 - c. Nutritional status of Grey seals
 - d. Reproductive status of Grey seals
 - e. Distribution of Baltic Harbour seals
 - f. Population trends and abundance of Harbour seals
 - g. Nutritional status of Harbour seals

- h. Reproductive status of Harbour seals
- i. Distribution of Baltic Ringed seals
- j. Population trends and abundance of Ringed seals
- k. Nutritional status of Ringed seals
- l. Reproductive status of Ringed seals

The example selected here is just for descriptive purposes, and the same issue may be relevant for other indicators addressing a single species. Other indicators that address species groups or trophic guilds are likely not relevant for this approach.

[Generalised overview of proposed new indicator webpage:](#)

The information summarised in Figure 2, below, aims to provide a general overview of how the new indicator web page may be structured. The issues raised above would also have clear implications for the overview provided below.

The information section would contain the indicator manual and a table of threshold values and where they have been approved.

The overview of indicators provided in the table below is based on the overview of indicators expected to be available for HOLAS III, as presented to State and Conservation 14-2021 (document 4J-16 Rev.1). A slightly revised version of this document is provided as Attachment 1 to this document (document 4-1 Att.1).

The overall aim is to provide, divided into clear categories, all full core or operational indicators and an overview of the ongoing development work in HELCOM that is at an advanced stage and would have potential relevance (i.e. need to be referenced) in HOLAS III. This generalised structure would be build into the revised website.



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

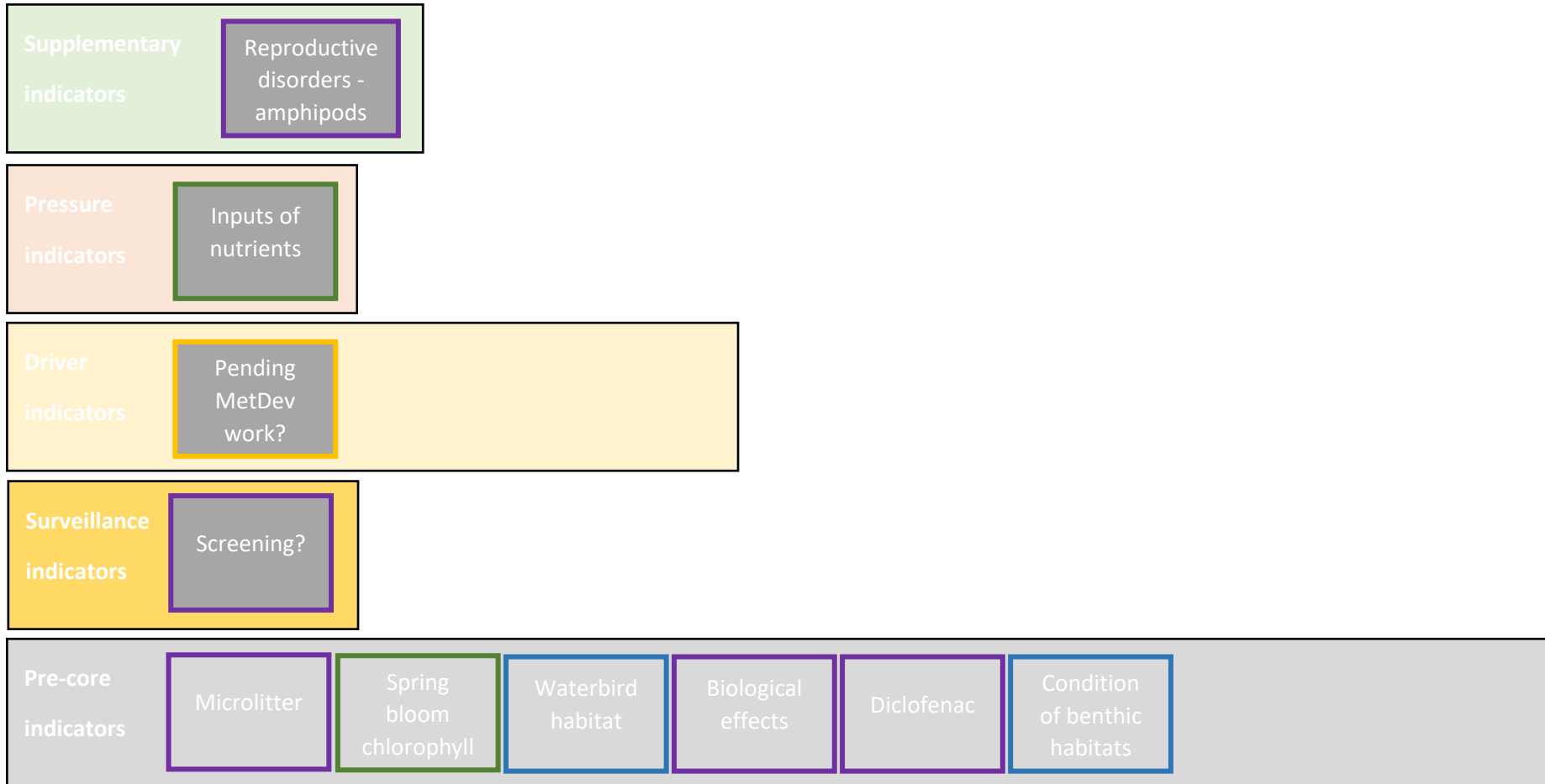
Information event for HELCOM indicator leads

IND-INF 1-2021

Online, 10 June 2021 – 10.00-13.00 **EEST**

Figure 2. A general overview of the website front page. Note that this would change depending on above components and also pending design and visual identity.

Information	Indicator manual	Threshold values							
Status indicators	Seal distribution	Seal abundance	Seal nutrition	Seal reproduction	Harbour porpoise abundance	Harbour porpoise distribution	Waterbirds wintering season	Waterbirds breeding season	Waterbirds breeding productivity
	Bycatch	Coastal fish - key species	Coastal fish - key groups	Coastal fish - size structure	Migratory fish - trout	Migratory fish - salmon	Commercial Fish	Zoo-plankton	Phyto-plankton
	Impact on benthic habitats	Soft-bottom macrofauna	Total nitrogen	Dissolved inorganic nitrogen	Total phosphorus	Dissolved inorganic phosphorus	Water transparency	Oxygen debt	Shallow water oxygen
	Chlorophyll	Cyano-bacterial blooms	HBCDD	PBDEs	PFOS	PCBs, dioxins and furans	PAHs and metabolites	Cadmium	Lead
	Mercury	TBT and imposex	Sea eagle	Radioactive substances	Copper	Beach litter	Seafloor litter	Continuous noise	Impulsive noise
	Oil spills	Non-indigenous specis							





Section 5: Possibilities to improve indicator application for HELCOM Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States

At the GEAR 24-2021 meeting a number of documents were presented by the EU related to supporting the utilisation of regional assessments (e.g. HELCOM indicators and assessments) in MSFD reporting. [Document 3-5 to GEAR 24-2021](#) addressed specific components that are required under MSFD reporting and could potentially be extracted from HELCOM indicators.

The Secretariat has carried out an initial review of these components and the potential implications (see document 4-1 Att.2). In a large number of cases it appears that the information required could be extracted directly from the HELCOM indicators, though some aspects would require an element of revision (e.g. providing a section/table into which the specific assessment values were provided per assessment unit) and other aspects would likely require some additional expert evaluation (e.g. describing the assessment outcomes and evaluating trends).

The workload involved in such processes is also highly dependent in the scale at which the indicator assessment is implemented (e.g. HELCOM assessment units scale 1-4, or aggregations of those). This aspect is highlighted in the revised list of HELCOM indicators expected to be available by HOLAS III that was presented to State and Conservation 14-2021. This document is provided as 4-1 Att.1 and the revisions since its presentation at State and Conservation 14-2021 include the addition of two new columns: AUs and 'MRUs'. The column AU's represents the HELCOM assessment units scale applied and the column 'MRUs' (or Marine Reporting Units) represents the number or possible range of units that would need to be addressed under such a process.

A test case of the approach is applied for the Zooplankton Mean Size and Total Stock HELCOM indicator in document 4-1 Att.2.

Should it be viable to apply such an approach across the HELCOM indicators it may be possible to explore opportunities under the revision of the indicator template and website to produce a system that generates / makes available a summary of the relevant information in a structured text file / other specified format. This would be based on establishing set sections within the indicator template from which the information can be collected and summarised in a short 'MSFD version'. The details of such an approach remain to be discussed with developers, once the technical side of the information and reporting guidance and documentation has been discussed at this (and other relevant) meeting(s).

Specific question: The meeting is invited to comment on initial review and evaluation carried out related to this issue (see document 4-1 Att.2 in particular) and guide further developments.

Section 6: Final summary: Indicator template and website reworking

Please note that all design aspects (i.e. icons and implementation of the HELCOM visual identity – examples of which can be seen in the HELCOM Indicator Manual or the Climate Change Fact Sheets) will be completed at a later stage. The main purpose of this document is to seek guidance on how the indicator template and website should be structured to enhance its usefulness (i.e. for the leads and Secretariat to use it and also for Contracting Parties for downstream uses such as reporting under the MSFD, for those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States).

The function to filter indicators based on the BSAP segments and objectives, and the MSFD would also be maintained in the revised web page. This would be linked directly to the information provided in the policy relevance table (above) and would only focus on the 'principal link' (primary link). There may also be a need to revise the current details after 2021 to reflect the ongoing update of the BSAP.

The overall idea being discussed at the Secretariat, though this is dependent on the possibilities to apply all aspects from a technical and resource perspective, is as follows. The list of changes represents the optimal solutions envisaged.

- Following the guidance above the specifics of the design will be implemented (including pre-filling new templates for indicator leads).
- The indicator template will be revised and built into an online template into which the Secretariat and indicator leads can directly add text and information, either via copying in text or direct addition (actual publishing of updates will remain the role of the Secretariat).
- The template will be linked to filter tools (e.g. via the policy relevance table) and also specific sections of text identified in the template. This should allow automatic updates to take place if the text in the indicator document is altered. In addition, the specific section identified in the report could then also be extracted into a short indicator report that would address the specific sections required by HELCOM Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States in their MSFD reporting.
- The template would try to offer some guidance/support on the presentation of graphics/figures in an attempt to harmonise the indicators.
- The design and visual identity aspects would be implemented both in the static and online structures.

Specific question: What has been overlooked? Please guide on any specific issues or considerations that should be taken onboard when overhauling the template and website.

Note that the guidance from this meeting will be used as the basis of development work but the final decisions will also be reliant on approval of implemented changes/upgrades via relevant HELCOM Working Groups.