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Background

This document provides an overview of HELCOM activities to tackle marine litter pollution in the Baltic Sea, from monitoring activities to regional actions to minimize its presence in the area. In particular, it points out those sea-based actions within the Regional Action Plan for Marine Litter in the Baltic Sea (adopted in 2015) which would benefit from the contribution of the Maritime Group. The aim of the document is to provide the needed background for Maritime to initiate the discussion on this issue.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- take note of the information;
- consider possible contribution to the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter, in particular with regard to the following actions:
 - RS2 on the development of best practice in relation to inspections for MARPOL Annex V, including harmonized management of data;
 - RS3 on further work on implementation and harmonization of the no-special-fee system in Baltic Sea ports, addressing gaps in existing regulations, enforcement and practices concerning shipping, PRF auditing to assess adequacy of garbage collection and fair waste burden sharing between ports; and
 - RS4 on the implementation of the ISO standard (ISO 201070:2013) in relation to PRF;
- agree to share the outcome of the discussion on this issue with the upcoming Third Workshop on the Implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter to be held on 9 October 2018, back to back with PRESSURE 9-2018.

HELCOM activities to tackle marine litter pollution

This document provides a summary of on-going activities to tackle marine litter in the Baltic Sea area conducted in the frame of HELCOM work. In particular, it points out those sea-based actions within the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter which would benefit from the contribution of the Maritime Group.

Marine litter monitoring

The monitoring of litter covers amount and composition of marine litter. Currently no coordinated monitoring of marine litter exists in the region. National monitoring programmes concern macroscopic litter on the beaches, water surface, on the seafloor and in biota, and microlitter in the surface water and sediments, depending on the Contracting Party. Available national monitoring data has been compiled as part of the respective indicator reports (see below).

Further information on the Sub-programme “Microlitter particle abundance and characteristics” within the HELCOM Monitoring Programme can be found [here](#).

Further information on the Sub-programme “Macrolitter characteristics and abundance/volume” within the HELCOM Monitoring Programme can be found [here](#).

Although there are currently no HELCOM core indicators on litter, there are three indicators under development within the EN-Marine Litter following a Lead country approach: **HELCOM pre-core indicators on beach litter and litter on the seafloor, and HELCOM candidate indicator on microlitter in the water column**. Work on indicators is taken forward through the lead country approach:

- [HELCOM pre-core indicator on beach litter](#): and [Annex](#). Lead country Poland, with Denmark and Sweden as co-lead countries;
- [HELCOM pre-core indicator on litter on the seafloor](#). Co-lead countries Denmark and Sweden;
- [HELCOM candidate indicator on microlitter in the water column](#). Lead country Finland, with Denmark and Germany as co-lead countries.

There has not been specific work on these indicators since 2016; however work has focussed on the development of **monitoring guidelines for marine litter on beaches** which have been recently endorsed ([document 3MA-3](#) and [Outcome of STATE&CONSERVATION 8-2018](#), para. 3MA.22).

Recently, HELCOM countries in their [Ministerial Declaration 2018](#) committed “to strengthening regional research and developing harmonised monitoring methods on the sources, distribution, amounts and impacts of marine litter including micro-plastics, in coherence with similar work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora, and to improving assessment of the effectiveness of measures;”. Thus, the need to continue working on monitoring marine litter with a regional perspective is recognised.

Assessment of marine litter in the Baltic Sea

The 'Second HELCOM Holistic Assessment of Ecosystem Health in the Baltic Sea' that was carried out by HELCOM through the HELCOM [HOLAS II](#) project reflects the environmental situation in the Baltic Sea for the period 2011–2015. The assessment covers the whole Baltic Sea marine region and provides information on the overall environmental status of and pressures on the Baltic Sea as well as social and economic aspects that are linked to the status of the Sea and the human activities impacting upon it. In June last year the assessment was published ('State of the Baltic Sea report, June 2017'), containing a descriptive section on marine litter since there is no core marine litter indicator. The [section on marine litter](#) was updated as part of the update of the report conducted in June 2018 ('[State of the Baltic Sea – Second HELCOM holistic assessment 2011-2016](#)'), to mainly include information on: (i) the ten most frequent litter items at Baltic Sea level at different types of beaches, categorized into urban, peri-urban and rural beaches; and (ii) the proportion of marine litter material categories in bottom trawl hauls for sub-basins covered by the Baltic International Trawl Survey coordinated by ICES.

HELCOM Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter and its implementation

The process to develop the regional action plan for marine litter, as agreed on in the [2013 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting](#), started in 2014. Following decisions taken during the Annual Meeting in 2014 ([HELCOM 35-2014](#)), two regional expert workshops and one meeting at a governmental level were conducted enabling the development of successively improved drafts of the Action Plan.

The 48th Meeting of HELCOM Heads of Delegation endorsed the concrete regional actions and voluntary national actions to reduce the input and presence of marine litter in the Baltic Sea ([Annex 2 of the Outcome of HOD 48-2015](#)) as part of the Action Plan previously adopted as [HELCOM Recommendation 36/1](#) by the 36th HELCOM Annual Meeting ([Annex 2 of the Outcome of HELCOM 36-2015](#)).

The Action Plan should enable concrete measures for prevention and reduction of marine litter from its main sources; develop common indicators and associated targets related to quantities, composition, sources and pathways of marine litter; and to identify the socio-economic and biological impacts of marine litter. The plan aims to significantly reduce marine litter by 2025, compared to 2015, and to prevent harm to the coastal and marine environment.

The Action Plan contains thirty regional actions addressing sea-based and land based sources of marine litter as well as education and outreach actions (see Figure 1). The regional actions are those, requiring a joint approach by Contracting Parties and of a large-scale, widespread and transboundary character. The Plan also compiles twenty seven voluntary national actions addressing these themes. These actions are primarily of national concern and responsibility of the Contracting Parties. They are presented in the format of a pick list for the Contracting Parties to voluntarily select for their implementation according to national relevance.



Figure 1. Scheme of the regional actions within the Action Plan grouped by thematic categories.

The Action Plan is implemented through a Lead Country approach on the regional actions with the contribution of the [HELCOM Experts Network on Marine Litter](#). The status of the leadership of the regional actions is included in Figure 2, where it is worth mentioning that there are thirteen actions which lack of leadership.

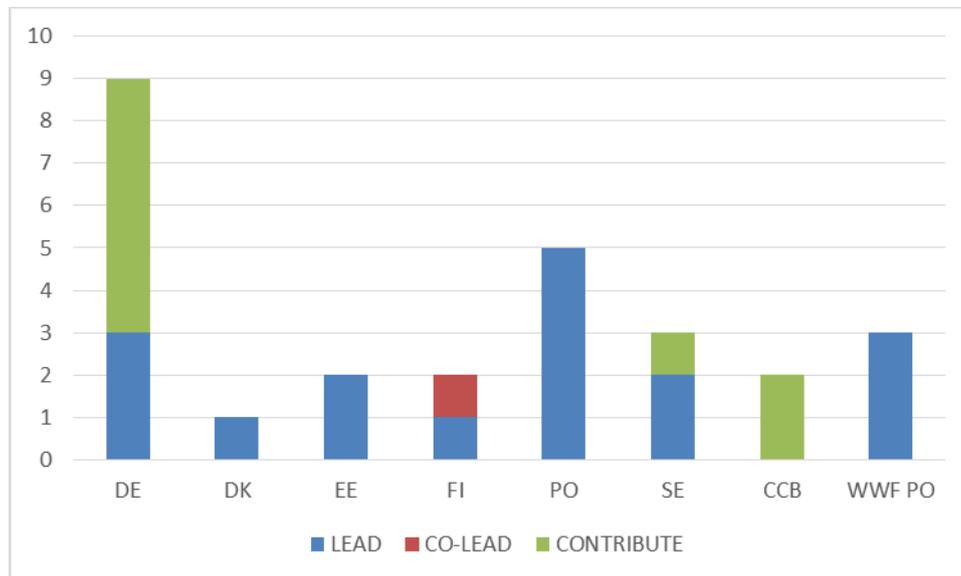


Figure 2. Status of the leadership of the regional actions in the Action Plan.

The regional implementation of the Action Plan is led within HELCOM by the Pressure Group, which is to coordinate it with relevant subsidiary bodies to enable their substantial contribution. The status of implementation of the Plan is summarized in a table which is updated regularly during Pressure meetings. The latest follow up implementation table, from May 2018, can be found [here](#).

Recently, HELCOM countries in their [Ministerial Declaration 2018](#) declared inter alia as follows:

“31. WE RE-COMMMIT to preventing and reducing marine litter from land and sea-based sources and to achieving a significant quantitative reduction by 2025. To that end WE COMMIT to regional work on developing baselines and threshold values for maximum levels of marine litter in the Baltic Sea, in close coordination with work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora. If additional efforts are needed to achieve those levels, WE COMMIT to developing ambitious, regionally coordinated, quantitative targets to reduce input of litter;”

33. WE SUPPORT measures aimed at preventing plastics, including micro-plastics, from contaminating the marine and coastal environment, at addressing the entire lifecycle of products, and at examining efficient and cost-effective options to reduce plastic and micro-plastic releases from products and processes into the environment;

34. WE DECIDE to develop appropriate measures to address micro-plastics in riverine inputs, urban waste water effluents as well as storm water based on an increased knowledge on the scale of the problem.”

These commitments confirm the roadmap of the work on HELCOM countries on measures tackling marine litter in the following years.

HELCOM Maritime and the Action Plan

The [follow up table of implementation of the Action Plan](#) also identifies those actions where a potential contribution from HELCOM subsidiary bodies is envisaged. Actions where input from the Maritime Group is foreseen are listed below:

- RL11 - Cooperate on the establishment and/or further development of deposit refund systems for bottles, containers and cans (e.g. glass, plastics and aluminium) in the HELCOM Contracting Parties in accordance with national law as appropriate. Investigate and strive for bilateral and multilateral solutions between the countries for establishment of such systems in relation to passenger ships;
- RS1 - Development of best practice on the disposal of old pleasure boats (i.e. intentional disposal of the boats at the ending of their lifetime in the sea and on shore);
- **RS2 - Develop best practice in relation to inspections for MARPOL Annex V, including harmonized management of data. Support regional coordination of IMO regulations in accordance with EU requirements for those HELCOM countries which are EU members;**
- **RS3 - Further work on implementation and harmonization of the no-special-fee system in ports of the Baltic Sea countries, addressing:**
 - * gaps in existing regulations,
 - * enforcement and practices concerning shipping,
 - * port reception facilities auditing to assess adequacy of garbage collection,
 - * fair waste burden sharing between ports.
- **RS4 - Implementation of the ISO standard (ISO 201070:2013) in relation to port reception facilities. Differentiate according to the size of the port. Promote the development of regional statistics on waste collected in ports based on existing information as far as possible.**
- RS5 - Promote and disseminate best practice in relation to all relevant aspects of waste management within the fishing sector (including e.g. waste management on board, waste management at harbors and operational losses/net cuttings);
- RS10 - Mapping of snagging sites or historic dumping grounds and a risk assessment for identifying where accumulation of ghost nets pose a threat to the environment and should be removed;
- RS11 - Based on the risk assessment conducted in RS10 and identification of accumulation areas, initiate removal of ghost nets and their safe management on land;
- RS12 - Enter into the partnership with international and regional organizations (e.g. KIMO, NABU, OSPAR Commission) as well as port authorities, to encourage implementation of passive Fishing for Litter schemes, to collect litter caught in fishing nets during normal fishing activities;
- **RE1 - To prepare information sheets to assist Contracting Parties in developing material for education programs, especially for professional seafarers including fishermen, highlighting the marine litter problem and including codes of practice in cooperation with relevant organisations including IMO.**

Actions RS2, RS3 and RS4 are proposed to be initially considered for the discussion due to their major link to the work of HELCOM Maritime. In addition, the Maritime Group may also wish to discuss proposals for how to commence the work with action RE1 which currently lacks a lead country.