Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Fifth Meeting of the Working Group on Reduction of
Pressures from the Baltic Sea Catchment Area
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Background

Operational since PRESSURE 2-2015 (Outcome of PRESSURE 2-2015, para. 4.27), the call for establishing the HELCOM Expert Network on Underwater Noise (HELCOM EN-Noise) has been raised through the need to develop a roadmap for the HELCOM work on underwater noise with the understanding that it is to build a knowledge base towards a regional action plan on underwater noise. HELCOM 37-2016 adopted the Regional Baltic Underwater Noise Roadmap 2015-2017 (Outcome of HELCOM 37-2016, para. 4.10). The HELCOM EN-Noise aims to facilitate the implementation of the Roadmap within the scope of work as described in its Terms of Reference.

This document contains a proposal for the Terms of Reference for the HELCOM EN-Noise for the period 2017-2018.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to consider and agree on the proposed Terms of Reference for the HELCOM EN-Noise.

HELCOM Expert Network on Underwater Noise - Terms of Reference (ToR)

The call for establishing the network has been raised through the need to develop a roadmap for the HELCOM work on underwater noise with the understanding that it is to build a knowledge base towards a regional action plan on underwater noise. Based on a work plan adopted by HOD 48-2015, the network of experts on underwater noise was established. HELCOM 37-2016 adopted the Regional Baltic Underwater Noise Roadmap 2015-2017 (Outcome of HELCOM 37-2016, para. 4.10) and the main focus of. T the HELCOM Expert Network on Underwater Noise (hereinafter – HELCOM EN-Noise) has been aims to facilitate the implementation of the Roadmap within the scope of work as described below.

The expert network functions as a joint network of Pressure WG and State and Conservation WG receiving guidance from both HELCOM working groups according to their mandates (Pressure WG as lead of the work on underwater noise, including evaluating inputs of noise to the marine environment with the view to developing regional action on underwater noise as far as necessary; State and Conservation indicators, monitoring and assessment) as well as from Maritime WG (on IMO related issues) and providing support to other groups, in particular HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG, as may be requested.

These ToR aim to further specify duties of the expert network based on the progress in the implementation of the Roadmap asre detailed in the following sections to be fulfilled in the period 2017-2018. HELCOM working group Pressure will regularly revisit the progress of the work according to these ToR and will consider, together with State and Conservation working group and Maritime working group, possible arrangements for further work beyond 2018.

The duties of the expert network are to:

A. Provide expert input to HELCOM work related to underwater noise, in particular the HELCOM roadmap on underwater noise;

B. Coordinate developments of GES with OSPAR and also take into consideration the work of EU TG Noise;

B.C. Provide expert input on relevant measures to reduce the sources and impacts of underwater noise in the HELCOM area;

C.D.   Support future HELCOM work on development of an action plan on underwater noise as may be decided within HELCOM;

D.E. Act as a platform for discussion and review of HELCOM indicators on underwater noise being developed by Lead Countries and appointed experts;

E.F. Update the core indicator reports at regular intervals as decided in HELCOM;

G. Ensure timely and quality assured delivery of indicator based assessments of underwater noise.

F.H. Cooperate in updating the CMS family guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities in ASCOBANS.

To fulfill these duties the expert network will in the period 2017-2018:

- Map the identified human activities that are the [main] sources of anthropogenic noise in the Baltic Sea;
- Investigate and assess the significance of the sources of anthropogenic noise in the Baltic Sea from e.g. shipping, recreational vessels, ice-breaker vessels, low-frequency sonar, acoustic devices, acoustic experiments, as well as offshore construction, sand and gravel extraction, drilling, intense low or mid-frequency (Naval) sonar, underwater explosions, seismic surveys. For instance the registry mapping the impulsive noise events and the soundscape maps from BIAS mapping the shipping activities would be a step forward;
- Review the available knowledge on impact of anthropogenic noise in the Baltic Sea, following a study on noise sensitivity of animals in the Baltic Sea finalized in 2016;
- Based on the compilation of information on impacts of noise (study on noise sensitivity of animals in the Baltic Sea):
    o investigate the possibility to use species specific tolerance to define Good Environmental Status/ develop environmental targets based on common principles [proposal for common principles to be finalized in 2016]; and

- o propose actions to protect noise sensitive species in the Baltic Sea, also based on mapping of anthropogenic noise;
- Support Lead Countries in the further development of the pre-core indicator 'Continuous low frequency anthropogenic sound' towards its operationalization, namely:
  - propose a concept for a regional monitoring network and propose HELCOM common monitoring guidelines based on the BIAS standards
  - develop the assessment protocol based on experiences and information available;
  - develop a concept for the GES-boundary based on the available data; with the aim of adoption by the end of 2016 at the latest.
  - propose regional solutions for management of low frequency data (an arrangement needed after the BIAS project has been finalized).
- Support the Lead Countries in the further development of the candidate indicator 'Distribution in time and place of loud low and mid frequency anthropogenic impulsive sounds' towards its operationalization, namely:
  - cooperate with OSPAR and ICES on the improvement of the joint regional registry of impulsive sound;
  - reporting of impulsive events to the registry;
  - propose a concept for determining sustainable levels of impulsive sound, with the aim of adoption by the end of 2016 at the latest.
- Update the core indicator reports on underwater noise by April 2017 and further update the reports as relevant by mid-2018, or as otherwise agreed in the HOLAS II project;
- Provide the expert input needed in order to deliver the thematic assessment on underwater noise within the framework of the HOLAS II project by mid-2017 and to the further update of the assessment following the planned national consultation period leading up to the updated assessment to be delivered mid-2018.
- Cooperate in updating the CMS family guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities in ASCOBANS

The network consists of experts nominated by Contracting Parties and is open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures.

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The mode of work for the expert network will be mainly via correspondence and tele-meetings, with physical meetings being organized as needed. A Chair for the network will be elected. The products will be handled at HELCOM Meeting Portal workspaces dedicated to this use. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the network.